

Article

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and Language — Part I

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The main title of this essay is taken from the first subdivision of Book Three of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*. *The Will to Power* presents the most comprehensive account of Nietzsche's views on epistemology and language, and I have found it useful to quote from this book at length. Recognizing, however, that *The Will to Power* is not a finished product but merely a collection of Nietzsche's notes compiled posthumously by a group of editors, I have attempted whenever possible to correlate ideas in *The Will to Power* with material contained in Nietzsche's published works. These correlations are based on a reading of nearly the entire corpus of Nietzsche's writings and are fairly comprehensive, although by no means exhaustive.

When reading Nietzsche one must be especially careful not to take statements out of context; his aphoristic style makes it difficult for one to develop a comprehensive understanding of any given topic, epistemology included. The task at hand is to provide as nearly as possible a systematic treatment of a subject that Nietzsche himself never treated systematically. Nietzsche, as shall be seen, had an aversion to writing systematic expositories on any topic. Consequently, Nietzsche expected his readers to take much of the responsibility for synthesizing his various ideas and attitudes into meaningful patterns. The duty, however, is one that is almost impossible to fulfill completely since one immediately begins to encounter discrepancies and apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche has been criticized most effectively on the ground that by avoiding any attempt to render his ideas in a coherent and consistent fashion, he failed

to see the many problems he created rather than solved.

In spite of the fact that Nietzsche never condensed his views on epistemology and language into a single, cohesive account, his many fragments and aphorisms on the subject, scattered throughout his books, offer a good number of constructive insights into the nature of knowledge which seem at times to be presentiments of the course that epistemology has taken in the last several decades, particularly by poststructuralists and neo-pragmatists. My goal in this paper is primarily exegetical rather than interpretative, however. That is, this paper is more concerned with simply pulling together Nietzsche's various remarks on language and epistemology in some coherent form than it is with assessing their usefulness or validity.

This paper is published in three parts. Part I, presented here, contains the following sections: (1) Nietzsche's Moral Foundation; (2) The Will to Power and Epistemological Motivations; (3) Metaphysical Need; and (4) Perspectivism and the Text Analogy. Part II, published separately, contains the following sections: (5) Evaluating Interpretations; and (6) The Assumptions of Logic. Part III, also published separately, contains the following sections: (7) Language; (8) Systems and the Historical Approach; and (9) Beyond Scepticism. Part III also includes a full bibliography. Section numbers and references are numbered consecutively throughout the entire series.

(1) Nietzsche's Moral Foundation

Nietzsche thought of himself primarily as a moral philosopher rather than as an epistemologist. Traditionally philosophers have begun their inquiries by first establishing certain epistemological principles which can serve as a foundation for their musings in other areas of philosophy such as metaphysics or ethics. For Nietzsche, however, one must begin not with epistemology, but rather with morality.

In the first place, Nietzsche would undoubtedly contend that no epistemology can be established *a priori* or with any degree of certainty, because to approve of one epistemological starting point over all others necessarily involves making a value judgment. Since all epistemologies contain certain

presuppositions, Nietzsche is primarily interested in the motives behind the decision to work with whatever set of presuppositions the philosopher chooses. Nietzsche's approach, therefore, tends to be more psychological rather than purely philosophical.

Moreover, Nietzsche sees that the motives behind much of that which is regarded as epistemology have much deeper roots in the general problem of morality. Not only does epistemology reflect certain value judgments made by the philosopher, but it also can lend support to the philosopher's own moral bias.¹ Kant, for example, could limit through his epistemology the sphere of pure reason and thus "make room" for faith and morality.² Nietzsche reverses this tendency by grounding epistemology in values, or more broadly, morality. What Nietzsche objects to is the dishonesty or naivety of philosophers who claim that their epistemological foundations are "objective," unbiased, or devoid of ulterior motives.

For Nietzsche morality is central and epistemology is more a diversion or a side issue. It is interesting in this connection to note that Nietzsche's brutal attack on Christianity was not centered on refuting the classical proofs for the existence of God, denying the historicity of the gospels (in spite of the fact that Nietzsche had read David Strauss and written essays on him), or pointing out contradictions in the theologies and theodicies of Christendom. Rather, Nietzsche thought that the question of Christian values was of primary significance, and considered the poverty of Christian morality to be the best refutation of Christianity as a whole.³ Here again, morality and not epistemology forms the basis of Nietzsche's approach in solving what others may regard as strictly a problem of "knowing." It is impossible, then, to consider Nietzsche's remarks on epistemology apart from his general views on morality.

One question which weaves its way throughout nearly all of Nietzsche's writings on epistemology is whether knowledge is possible, or even desirable, in a world that is constantly changing and in which nothing, including knowledge, remains permanent. The tension between knowledge and change also forces one to make a value judgment in regard to the relative importance of knowledge itself. Morality must be considered again, and knowledge must be considered first and foremost as an expression of the

will to power.

(2) **The Will to Power and Epistemological Motivations**

Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is complex and easily misunderstood. First, Nietzsche formulated the concept of the will to power as an explanation of all human behavior and motivation. Individuals have as their primary goal in life, according to Nietzsche, the acquisition of as much power as they are capable of obtaining. If persons fail to gain power over others, they may transform their failure into a different kind of power by claiming that the other persons are dispensable to them and must therefore submit to their rejection. The "sour grapes" attitude is but an expression of the will to power.

A striking example is found in one of Nietzsche's aphorisms on gratitude. In giving a gift to someone, the giver expresses his power over the recipient. It is as if the giver says, "You are in need of me and my gift; you could not get along as well without me; I am your benefactor." But the recipient of the gift can get in the last word and express an even greater power over the giver by merely thanking him. In doing so the recipient says in effect, "No, I am not in need of you; you exist merely to satisfy my wants and are not in any way indispensable to me."⁴ The supreme individuals, however, are those who have such complete power that they do not need to compensate for their failures by willing inferior forms of power.

Although the will to power is presented as a single concept in Nietzsche's philosophy, one can distinguish between various degrees and types of power. The ability to make such distinctions enables Nietzsche to develop a criterion of judgment with which he can evaluate various human ideas and motivations. Since Nietzsche saw life as being governed exclusively by the will to power, he needed to differentiate between those types of power which affirm the highest and noblest type of life and those which tend to negate the robust life in favor of a withdrawal from the pains and suffering which life necessarily involves.

Nietzsche was extremely critical of the ascetic ideal because, although he recognized that by withdrawing from the world one could in a sense

adjust to life, Nietzsche felt that to experience life fully one must confront it head-on with all its problems and contradictions. In other words, the ascetic's will to power involves an escape from the vagaries of life in order to conquer it. For Nietzsche, however, the supreme expression of the will to power was to be found in persons who are able to conquer life without having to withdraw from it.

When Nietzsche speaks of asceticism as being a denial of life, this does not contradict his general principle that life is still essentially a striving after power; asceticism is a sublimated, rather than an overt, will to power. The ascetic can only participate in life by denying life — and in doing so he wins the respect and admiration of other, less “virtuous” souls. The apparent contradiction here can only be avoided if one recognizes that life for the ascetic is, in Nietzsche's eyes, an inferior type of life which negates not life itself, but rather its fullness.

Nietzsche believed that Western philosophy and epistemology had both been heavily influenced by the ascetic ideal as disseminated through the teachings of Christianity. Consequently, Nietzsche was continually suspicious of epistemologies which claim that knowledge is possible of a world above and beyond the world of phenomena. For Nietzsche, it is this life which one must reconcile oneself to and this world which one has to live in.

It is natural, then, that Nietzsche should place supreme value on ideas, actions, or motivations which tend to be life-affirming rather than life-denying. The value of truth and falsehood is thus determined not by the degree to which any claim can be confirmed, but rather by the degree to which any claim is found to be affirmative of life. It is not surprising, in this light, to see Nietzsche write,

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment. . . . The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating.⁵

Nietzsche regarded many of the so-called “truths” of traditional philosophy as ultimately false, but still useful in giving philosophers and their readers a type of life — though not necessarily the highest type — which

they could live. In evaluating Kant's concept of a *priori* synthetic judgments, for example, Nietzsche remarks that

. . . such judgments must be *believed* to be true, for the sake of the preservation of creatures like ourselves; though they might, of course, be *false* judgments for all that!⁶

It is necessary for life, then, that people believe in certain ideas even though these ideas may be incapable of being verified or proven. In one passage Nietzsche seems to suggest that certain elements of the Newtonian worldview, with its "postulating of bodies, lines, surfaces, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content," must be accepted if life is to be possible at all. Nietzsche writes, "Without these articles of faith no one could manage to live at present. But for all that they are still unproved. . . . Error might be among the conditions of life."⁷

In the same passage Nietzsche remarks, "We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live."⁸ Consider the notion of a line, for example. In drawing the blueprints for a house, an architect draws a line which he uses to represent the contour of a wall, even though the wood out of which the wall is constructed may not be as straight as the line which the architect has drawn. The architect's line, while failing to perfectly represent the actual wall which is eventually constructed, is still functional, however, in helping the carpenter to build the house. Plato's argument that the architect's line is merely an imperfect representation of the ideal form of a line is of no value, according to Nietzsche. The world is an *imperfect* world, and people must adjust themselves to this fact. Even if there were such a thing as a perfect line in Plato's sense of the word, it would be inconsequential for people who are perfectly capable of utilizing imperfect lines in their daily lives.

Nietzsche's pragmatic approach seems to echo Kant's "as if" argument, although Nietzsche would insist that all knowledge is regulative in nature and that nothing can be established a priori. In a dialogue in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche refutes the claim, "The basic laws of logic, the law of identity and the law of contradiction, are forms of pure knowledge, because they precede all experience," by remarking, "But these are not

forms of knowledge at all! [T]hey are regulative articles of belief.”⁹ There is a certain type of utilitarianism involved here which is spoken of further in an earlier section:

Trust in reason and its categories, in dialectic, therefore the valuation of logic, proves only their usefulness for life, proved by experience — not that something is true.¹⁰

It would seem that Nietzsche is suggesting that truth becomes whatever is useful, when in fact he is suggesting the exact opposite, namely that people can utilize falsehoods to their own advantage. Since the primary goal of humans is, in Nietzsche’s view, to master life and consequently to master nature, people must turn both truth and falsehood into means toward an end. Nietzsche defines science at one point as the “. . . transformation of nature into concepts for the purpose of mastering nature. . . .”¹¹ These “concepts,” which Nietzsche believes to be essentially untrue, are expressions of nothing less than the human will to power.

In another passage of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche sees error itself as being essential to life and he elevates error to the height of his “Dionysus ideal”:

My Dionysus ideal — The perspective of all organic functions, all the strongest instincts of life: the force in all life that *wills* error; error as the precondition even of thought.”¹²

Nietzsche’s first major book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, discusses at length the distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies. The Dionysian approach to life is characterized most of all by its sheer energy and ability to thrive on error as a form of power. The Apollonian tendency, on the other hand, seeks truth in transcendence out of the world of error into a world based on reason and order.

For Nietzsche, the implicit mysticism in the Apollonian approach involves a negation of life. Dionysian types live not by their tempered reason, but rather by their instincts. Apollonians regard ideas with unquestioning reverence; Dionysians think of them as essentially erroneous and manage their affairs accordingly. Nietzsche’s later conception of the

Dionysian synthesized the tension between his original conception of the Dionysian versus the Apollonian. The new Dionysian ideal blends the force and power of the original Dionysian with the ability of the Apollonian to direct and govern that power.

This later, and more holistic approach, avoids allowing feeling to be swallowed up by reason, and Nietzsche affirms that the illogical is an important part of life:

One of those things that may drive a thinker into despair is the recognition of the fact that the illogical is necessary for man, and that out of the illogical comes much that is good. . . . Even the most rational man has need of nature again from time to time, *i.e.*, his *illogical fundamental attitude* towards all things.¹³

Nietzsche seems to suggest in this and other passages that it is essentially out of the illogical that human logic — which is necessary for life, though false — evolves. But here, only Nietzsche's irrational strain needs to be recognized, along with his explanation as to why the irrational is necessary, namely, because it is a source of life-affirmation.

At this point it should be evident that Nietzsche has completely reversed the conceptions about truth which Western civilization, at least, has cherished for ages. But for Nietzsche such a reversal is the sign of a healthy mind which will ultimately not allow itself to be deceived, but which will still be affirmative in spite of a certain amount of concession to inevitable error. In contrast to the healthy mind is the sick mind, which for Nietzsche is characterized by an unwillingness to admit the deception involved in what is normally called "truth."

Nietzsche also sees nihilism, or the type of scepticism which still pursues "truth" even after it has posited the impossibility of truth, as a symptom of a diseased mind. In this latter case, a nihilist or a sceptic may declare that there is no truth and consequently refuse to participate in what Nietzsche believes to be necessary falsehoods. In other words, sceptics are still motivated to pursue and live by only what is true; they, therefore, do not affirm life because there is no ultimate "truth" in life and life itself minimally involves a partial acceptance of untruth.

Since, as Nietzsche writes, “. . . all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error,”¹⁴ the will to power is best expressed in the overcoming of both self-deception born out of ignorance and the refusal to be deceived at any cost. Persons of power are those who can tolerate the greatest amount of unavoidable error and deceit and still maintain their health.

(3) **Metaphysical Need**

Metaphysics was, in Nietzsche’s view, also symptomatic of disease. Here again, Nietzsche made no attempt to refute epistemologically the notion of another, “truer” world other than the world of sense. He attacked the issue rather on the grounds that metaphysical activity tends to take one’s mind off of what is really at stake, namely, one’s present situation in *this* world. Moreover, Nietzsche saw metaphysics not only as an attempt to escape from life, but also as an attempt to deny rather than affirm life.

When Nietzsche speaks against the conception of a “true” world which in some way transcends the world of phenomena, his use of the word “true” is laden with several diverse connotations. On the one hand, Nietzsche is critical not only of Plato’s conception of the “true” world of the Forms, but also of Kant’s attempt to posit a “thing-in-itself” behind mere appearances. The medieval concepts of substance and soul also fall into this category. Furthermore, the Christian notions of God and heaven are included in Nietzsche’s attack on metaphysics. Nietzsche addresses one full chapter of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to those whom he refers to as the “Afterworldsmen,”¹⁵ in which he describes the “other world” as an “inhuman, dehumanized world which is a heavenly Nothing.”¹⁶

Nietzsche saw several important moral reasons for avoiding metaphysics, hinted at in the previous section, but he used even stronger language in discussing the necessity of abolishing completely any notion of a “true” world beyond this one:

It is of cardinal importance that one should abolish the *true* world. It is the great inspirer of doubt and devaluator in respect of the world *we*

are: it has been our most dangerous attempt yet to assassinate life.¹⁷

Nietzsche's criticism of metaphysics follows a completely different approach from that of a logical positivist. The positivist would argue that metaphysics is invalid because metaphysical statements are incapable of being verified, but Nietzsche proceeds again on moral grounds (the last thing a logical positivist would do!). Nietzsche sees metaphysics as fulfilling a need in the weaker type of persons who cannot reconcile themselves with the world of change and who seek a haven in the absolute immutability of the world. One may think here of Coleridge, whose unhappy home life among other things, pushed him deeper and deeper into abstract metaphysical thought for relief; the result was an overall loss of creativity and imagination in his poetry.

It is important at this point to note that for Nietzsche the notions of metaphysics, which inherently involve a belief in the changelessness of truth, do not correspond in any way to the ever-changing world of appearances in which people actually live. This type of truth is, in Nietzsche's words, "... inertia; that hypothesis which gives rise to contentment; smallest expenditure of spiritual force, etc."¹⁸ Nietzsche vigorously opposed any point of view which attempted to take humans outside of the world of change and "appearance." He inverted the usual bias on the part of philosophers against the temporal and changing to a bias against that which is supposedly permanent and immutable.

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes,

Formerly, alteration, change, any becoming at all, were taken as proof of mere appearance, as an indication that there must be something which led us astray. Today, conversely, precisely insofar as the prejudice of reason forces us to posit unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being, we see ourselves somehow caught in error, compelled into error.¹⁹

The only ancient Greek philosopher Nietzsche admired on this point was Heraclitus, of whom Nietzsche writes,

... Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being

is an empty fiction. The “apparent” world is the only one: the “true” world is merely added by a lie.²⁰

Nietzsche, who is extremely consistent in regard to his attitude towards the senses, accepts unquestioningly their testimony that the world is continually in a state of flux. The fact that the senses also perceive much which can be called permanent and changeless does not seem to occur to him. He also fails to note the contradiction of calling Heraclitus’s views on constant change “eternally right.” Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s essential worldview in regard to change is undoubtedly Heraclitean.

An understanding of Nietzsche’s predisposition for a world of flux is essential if one is to grasp the implications which this will have on metaphysical need in the individual. The great majority of humankind — the “herd” in Nietzsche’s terminology — regards happiness and contentment as among the most important goals in life. But happiness, according to Nietzsche, “. . . can be guaranteed only by being; change and happiness exclude one another.”²¹ Nietzsche identified the word “being” with metaphysical inertia and “becoming” with his notions of change and flux. Since the world, in Nietzsche’s view, is one of becoming and not one of being, metaphysics, which is capable only of describing a crystalline world, cannot possibly be valid. On the issue of metaphysics — or at least on the issue of there being a “true” world transcendent to this one — Nietzsche will not compromise by suggesting that metaphysics too may be one of the many “errors” which is necessary for life. Nietzsche’s psychology of metaphysics prohibits him from doing this because he identifies metaphysics with a fear of the brutality and transitoriness of this world and with a hatred of the irrational and accidental. Consequently, Nietzsche notes that all of the elements of life in this world which are unpleasant and hostile have been eliminated from the philosophers’ picture of the “true” world.²²

Metaphysics, says Nietzsche, is capable of making one “. . . feel himself less responsible and at the same time . . . find things more interesting. . . .”²³ But in the same passage in which this quotation is found, Nietzsche expresses his hope that this attitude will be superseded in more mature

minds by an approach which is more scientifically and historically sound. Nietzsche does not exempt science, however, from his criticism that most of that which is motivated by a desire for pleasure is a sign of decadence, because science too, in his opinion, has as its goals, for example, the eventual elimination of disease and the construction, through technology, of numerous comforts and labor-saving devices for the supposed benefit of humankind.

Nietzsche is not necessarily opposed to such progress, but he does see that these benefits may simultaneously involve a loss of health and power. The people of today, Nietzsche might argue, are weaker because they have been *made* weaker by machines. Nietzsche contends that science should realize that every bit of pleasure might possibly need to be bought with an equal amount of pain — strength must be exchanged for comfort, for example.²⁴ Here Nietzsche stood nearly alone against the mainstream of thought in his day, which had an unquenchable, optimistic outlook about the eventual and complete triumph of science and progress against the ills which have always plagued humankind. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche asks, “Is the resolve to be so scientific about everything perhaps a kind of fear of, an escape from, pessimism?”²⁵ This question is as penetrating today as it was in Nietzsche’s time.

Nietzsche was of the opinion that the powerful person would regard metaphysics, and perhaps also the unquestioning optimism of certain tendencies in science, with an unhesitating air of contempt. Nietzsche saw the quest for certainty, whether it be in metaphysics or science, as not only an impossible endeavor, but also as a sign of decadence, as a sign that people have lost their battle with an uncertain world. In *The Joyful Wisdom* Nietzsche writes,

How much *faith* a person requires in order to flourish, how much “fixed opinion” he requires which he does not wish to have shaken, because he *holds* himself thereby — is a measure of his power (or more plainly speaking, of his weakness).²⁶

People who are in need of a good number of firm and unchanging beliefs in order to survive are, in Nietzsche’s view, plainly not among

those who have utilized their will to power to its fullest advantage. The need for metaphysics, science, and religious faith is a need which Nietzsche feels is both unnecessary and potentially damaging if not overcome.

(4) **Perspectivism and the Text Analogy**

Even though Nietzsche had applied a rigorous psychological approach to the problem of metaphysical need, which raised suspicions in every corner, he still held that the mere possibility of there actually being a world above and beyond the senses could not be refuted. Nietzsche insisted, however, that knowledge of such a world would be completely irrelevant to life in this world.²⁷ It is important to see, however, that when Nietzsche speaks of the difficulty in knowing anything absolutely, he is not specifically talking about the difficulty of knowing a world beyond the senses. Nietzsche would also reject the notion that there is a possibility of knowing Kant's "thing-in-itself." Nietzsche's attitude towards "noumena" in general is that it is not of any practical consequence. In his view, people have a difficult time enough merely understanding the world of phenomena.

It was to this end that one finds in Nietzsche's writings a variety of passages which provide an analogy for what might be considered the only attempt Nietzsche ever made towards the construction of a formal epistemology. Nietzsche's "text analogy" undoubtedly comes from his long years as a philologist, but his first formulation of it is found in the early pages of *Human, All-Too-Human*:

A great deal of understanding is required to apply to Nature the same method of strict interpretation as the philologists have now established for all books with the intentions of clearly understanding what the text means. . . . Just, however, as with regard to books, the bad art of interpretation is by no means overcome, and in the most cultivated society one still constantly comes across the remains of allegorical and mystic interpretation, so it is also with regard to Nature, indeed it is even much worse.²⁸

Not only does Nietzsche make another attack on the metaphysical expla-

nation of the world when he speaks of “allegorical and mystic interpretation” in this passage, but he also introduces a comparison of the world of phenomena with the text which a philologist is attempting to understand. In the same way that a philologist, when dealing with a very old text, can never have the original before him, but only numerous and occasionally conflicting translations and copies which at times have been altered by the views of the translators and copiers with respect to how they feel the text should read in order to be best understood, so too are philosophers when they attempt to understand the nature of the world confounded by the numerous and often conflicting interpretations of the world which have thus far been advanced.

If Nietzsche’s analogy holds true, a variety of problems are incurred by those who insist upon the potential, at least, of the objective human mind. Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, believes that objectivity, in the philosophical and scientific sense of the term, is nothing more than wishful thinking. Philosophers, as much as philologists, have first of all the problem of making themselves immune from the interpretations which others have already posited so that their “objective” inquiry into nature will not be influenced by them. Secondly, philosophers must be on their guard to refrain from allowing their own prejudices and biases to interfere with their attempts to discover what is the “true” nature of that which they are observing.

Nietzsche deals with this problem in a passage from his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which is quoted here at some length because of its importance:

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

absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity” be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this — what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect?²⁹

According to Nietzsche, then, the philosopher can never hope for pure objectivity. As Nietzsche writes in a different book, “. . . All sense perceptions are permeated with *value judgments*. . . .”³⁰ The value judgments people make tell them what is important to notice and what is not worthy of attention; people usually notice only that which is important for themselves and their purposes. Since all knowledge requires interpretation, the philosopher, who can never be a “pure and will-less subject,” must be content with — and even capable of thriving upon — imperfect interpretations.

The question must be raised, however, if it is possible for humans to come closer to the truth, even if they can never fully attain it. It would seem that in modern times — even in Nietzsche’s time — there have been enough scientific advances to warrant saying that humans have begun to understand to some extent the workings of nature. But Nietzsche’s point would again be that science can thrive on proximity to truth and tolerate a good deal of necessary error. Truth, as such, does not even become an issue in this discussion because Nietzsche would argue that humans are capable of arranging the world into a variety of different patterns which can be understood by science — but, he would add, this in itself is no argument in favor of their ultimate validity.

It is this “arranged world” which Nietzsche speaks of when he writes, “The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., it is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is ‘in flux,’ as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for — there is no ‘truth.’”³¹ When Nietzsche says, “There is no ‘truth,’” he attempts to avoid the

criticism which had been leveled against the ancient Greek Sceptics (namely, that if nothing is true, can the statement “Nothing is true” possibly be true?) by pointing out that one’s interpretations of the world will never exactly match the way the world *is*; there will always be discrepancies between the two. Consequently, it does not make sense to give the status of “truth” to any one particular interpretation.

Furthermore, since each person as an interpreting agent can only make a “meager sum of observations,” there could quite possibly be facts in the world which would completely contradict one’s original interpretation. Since no one can know everything, it must be accepted that all interpretations are open to revision. Nietzsche would agree with Peirce’s claim that one is never capable of attaining total truth, but he would disagree with Peirce’s notion that the truth could still be approached asymptotically; for Nietzsche interpretations only become more useful, never more truthful.

Nietzsche would also argue that there are an infinite number of possible interpretations which one can give to the world. Nietzsche writes in *The Joyful Wisdom*, “The World . . . has once more become ‘infinite’ to us: in so far we cannot dismiss the possibility that it *contains infinite interpretations*.”³² In other words, there are as many different interpretations of the world as there are different uses for these interpretations, and when the present sum of interpretations has been exhausted, other interpretations might arise as the occasion requires.

In Nietzsche’s view “explanations” never really *explain* anything at all, but are rather mere extensions of interpretation.³³ Nietzsche speaks of physics, for instance, as “. . . only an interpretation and exegesis of the world . . . not a world explanation.”³⁴ Laws of nature, therefore, do not explain why the world is the way it is, but they are merely convenient devices which scientists use to impose an order on nature which is manageable. In formulating the so-called “laws of nature” scientists were not motivated by utility, as Nietzsche insists that science must now be, but rather by the quest for certainty:

. . . The belief in science . . . cannot have had its origin in . . . a utilitarian calculation, but rather in spite of the fact of the inutility and

dangerousness of the “will to truth,” of “truth at all costs”. . . .³⁵

The “will to truth” here becomes for Nietzsche another manifestation of metaphysical need, and Nietzsche clearly does not want to ground science in that. Rather, Nietzsche suggests that if science is to be of any value at all, it can no longer be regarded as a form of pure knowledge which objectively reveals the structure of the universe. While Nietzsche is not a pragmatist or a utilitarian in the same way that James and Mill might be considered pragmatists and utilitarians respectively, Nietzsche does see the necessity of dealing with scientific claims which are ultimately without support; nonetheless, Nietzsche still insists upon taking them with a grain of salt—especially when they are motivated by moral considerations which Nietzsche finds objectionable.

For example, Nietzsche is quite critical of any attempt on the part of science to find support through the “laws of nature” for democracy and equality, two notions which Nietzsche despised. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Forgive me as an old philologist who cannot desist from the malice of putting his finger on bad modes of interpretation: but “nature’s conformity to law,” of which you physicists talk so proudly, as though — why, it exists only owing to your interpretation and bad philology. . . . That is interpretation, not text; and somebody might come along who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same “nature,” and with regard to the same phenomena, rather the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims to power.³⁶

In this passage one sees not only echoes of Nietzsche’s pronouncement that the variety of plausible interpretations is endless, but one also gets another glimpse of the primacy of moral evaluations for Nietzsche. Nietzsche can be regarded as a utilitarian only to the extent that he believed that whatever is utilized must be supportive of the type of morality which he endorsed. This argument is somewhat circular, but indeed is utilitarianism ever anything more? Part II of this essay will open with a consider-

ation of how interpretations can be evaluated.

References

(Wherever possible section numbers are referred to in parentheses after the page number to facilitate referencing editions which have not been used in this paper.)

- ¹ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 221 (§ 410).
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 145 (§ 251).
- ⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. Helen Zimmern, vol. 6 of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 64 (§ 44).
- ⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 201 (§ 4).
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209 (§ 11).
- ⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* (more commonly known as *The Gay Science*), trans. Thomas Common, vol. 10 of *The Complete Works*, p. 164 (§ 121).
- ⁸ *Ibid.* See also note 44 in Part II of the present series.
- ⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 287–288 (§ 530).
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276 (§ 507).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 328 (§ 610).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 293 (§ 544).
- ¹³ Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 46 (§ 31).
- ¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p. 23 (“Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” § 5).
- ¹⁵ R. J. Hollingdale in a footnote on page 339 of his translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cited immediately below, remarks that the German *Hinterwelter*, which he translates as “Afterworldsmen,” is “a coinage meaning ‘those who believe in an afterlife.’ It gains force from its similarity to the word *Hinterwälder* = backwoodsmen.”)
- ¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), p. 59 (“Of the Afterworldsmen,” Part I).
- ¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 314 (§ 584B).
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 291 (§ 537).
- ¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 482 (“Reason in Philosophy,” § 5).
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 481 (“Reason in Philosophy,” § 2).
- ²¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 317 (§ 585A).
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 309 (§ 576).
- ²³ Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 31 (§ 17).
- ²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, p. 48 (§ 12).
- ²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18 (“Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” § 1).
- ²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, p. 285 (§ 347). See also *The Will to Power*, p. 326

The Will to Power as Knowledge

(§ 600).

- ²⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, pp. 20–21 (§ 9).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20 (§ 8).
- ²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p. 555 (Third Essay, § 12).
- ³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 275 (§ 505). Kaufmann emphasizes the entire phrase, but notes that in the original only the words “value judgments” were emphasized, as has been done here.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 330 (§ 616).
- ³² Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, pp. 340–341 (§ 374). See also *The Will to Power*, p. 326 (§ 600).
- ³³ Cf. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 327 (§ 604).
- ³⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 211 (§ 14).
- ³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, p. 278 (§ 344).
- ³⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 220 (§ 22).

