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Wittgenstein and Nietzsche on the Role of Philosophy: Description, Creativity, Naturalism, and Possibility

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Wittgenstein and Nietzsche on the Role of Philosophy:

Description, Creativity, Naturalism, and Possibility

by

Michael Ch. Rodgers

Claremont Graduate University

2012

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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Michael Ch. Rodgers as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Ph.D. in Religion.

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Abstract

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This dissertation places Wittgenstein and Nietzsche alongside one another in an attempt to deal with the question: “what is the role of the philosophy?” On the one hand Wittgenstein promotes a descriptive approach to philosophy, which insists that the philosopher should not meddle with practices but rather seek clarity and understanding as ends in themselves. On the other hand Nietzsche promotes a destructive and creative approach to philosophy, where the philosopher both dismantles values and offers a revaluation of values in their place. This work begins with a survey of remarks by the two philosophers and prominent interpretations of them on how best to conceive of and understand the philosopher and philosophy. In addition, the recent view of Nietzsche as a naturalist is responded to at length. If Nietzsche turns out to be offering substantive, naturalistic positions on human morality, the origins of religion, and so on, then he cannot be advocating a creative, spontaneous orientation towards perspectives. This work argues that while Nietzsche offers naturalized accounts of human practices, he does

not mean these to be considered scientific hypothesis. After responding to this position, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein are looked at together, and what emerges is a shared goal: the creating and/or revealing of missed possibilities of human life. These existential possibilities are on the one hand always right in front of us, and yet they are seemingly out of reach and all too often passed over. Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, in their various ways, (re)open these possibilities. Finally, given this “hermeneutics of possibility,” the final chapter argues that the way Wittgenstein and Nietzsche differ with respect to Christianity and religion is not primarily about their style of philosophy nor even about Wittgenstein’s descriptive approach, but about the existential possibility that each has in mind to promote.

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Introduction

I am writing this Introduction while sitting in my room in the Nietzsche-haus, the very house in Sils Maria where Nietzsche spent so many summers. What was his room is across the hall from mine. On the one hand it is fitting that I am here and not, for instance, in Skjolden or Vienna. I say this because the dissertation, at least on the surface, appears to be more about Nietzsche than Wittgenstein. On the other hand the orientation and question of the dissertation comes from the latter. The final product, as always, looks different than what exactly the author set out to do. But in the end it deals with the same question that I began with several years ago. Namely, what is the role of the philosopher? This is a question, certainly, which Nietzsche deals with extensively. The question could have arisen through reading his material no less than Wittgenstein. But in my case, the question arose in the following way. Given a great deal of sympathy with and to the descriptive, contemplative view of philosophy, I wanted to see if I could find a way to look beyond contemplative philosophy without at the same time succumbing to the temptations and logical confusions that Wittgenstein, Phillips, Rhees, et al. warn us against. In the form of a question this means, is there a way of thinking about philosophy which honors the insights of Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians that does not also or necessarily limit itself to description alone? By way of trying to get in to this question, I chose to pair Wittgenstein with Nietzsche, since it seems to

me, and others, that Wittgenstein and Nietzsche do share many philosophical features and assumptions, especially with an eye towards what philosophy is not. Yet there are also striking differences between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, the former who speaks of coolness and finding a temple for the passions, the latter who describes himself as a dynasty and burning flame who destroys anything on which he seizes. Despite this clear difference in style, however, Wittgenstein also shows contempt and disgust for his peers and contemporaries. It is the question of how these two styles differ and then, perhaps, come together in the opening up of new possibilities that this dissertation seeks to explore.

Chapter One sets the stage by introducing Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy, with emphasis on the descriptive and therapeutic aspects. And, given the overall project of comparing cool, descriptive philosophy with passionate, hot philosophy, there is a lengthy discussion of D.Z. Phillips, Rush Rhees, and to a lesser extent Peter Winch. Phillips and Rhees represent the strongest form of "contemplative" philosophy, which I take, tentatively and as a starting point, to be the most different from the kind of philosophy we find in Nietzsche. On the other hand, there are other Wittgensteinians whom I have loosely united together as "Existential Wittgensteinians." These Wittgensteinians argue that what Wittgenstein was after was not primarily clarity for clarity's sake, if we take clarity to be about practices, objects, or anything else external to the self. When Wittgenstein says that he seeks clarity as an end in

itself, in this reading this means *existential* clarity. It is, as he says, a working on oneself.

Nietzsche has issues with speaking about the “self” in such a casual way, but the existential reading of Wittgenstein shares certain similarities with a central aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy; namely, his repeated metaphor of perspectivalism. Chapter two is a discussion on Nietzsche’s idea that philosophy should in many ways resemble art, but without understanding Nietzsche’s perspectivalism, his emphasis on art can be misleading. Thus we begin with a lengthy discussion of the various “stages” of perspectivalism, before moving on to an overview of Nietzsche’s thoughts on art. As we shall see, for Nietzsche art provides us with the “good will to deception.” It is an example or metaphor for one way to think about perspectives. The artist is creative and playful, intentionally bringing her own will to the way she portrays her subject. But this does not mean that she is free to disregard the subject altogether; perspectivalism begins not as a radical relativism but as an attempt to faithfully represent the world while at the same time recognizing that all attempts must be perspectival. Nietzsche’s final position seems to be that we need both an artistic science and a scientific art; philosophy at its best takes up both of these roles into itself.

In the third chapter I answer the current “naturalistic” reading of Nietzsche. According to Brian Leiter and a number of other prominent Nietzsche scholars, Nietzsche is best understood not as a proto-postmodernist, but as a 19th century naturalist who has most in

common with thinkers like Hume and Freud. There may be some justification for this claim, but, I argue, not in the way that Leiter et al. think. The naturalist reading of Nietzsche claims that what he is at root doing is providing a robustly natural account of human morality and other practices and concepts, which is meant to be taken scientifically and “accurately.” In other words, they ask, “Does Nietzsche get it right?” And, it turns out, they argue he does. I think this sells Nietzsche’s position short. Nietzsche *does* provide naturalized accounts of morality, etc., but not in a way which depends on their accuracy. In this way I take his “naturalism” to, in fact, be similar to Freud’s, but only if we accept Wittgenstein’s account of what Freud is up to. This, I take it, Leiter would not do. On the other hand, chapter three also explores some of Nietzsche’s comments on science. The results are ambiguous until we separate the method of science – namely experimentation – from any particular result of science. Nietzsche celebrates the playful, adventurous experimentation of science while always remaining skeptical with respect to any particular “discovery.”

In the fourth and fifth chapters we finally look in depth at Nietzsche and Wittgenstein together. In chapter four I argue that both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein share a common goal, which is the opening up of existential possibilities. This means doing two things at once. On the one hand the philosopher must expose that which is currently blocking new or missed possibilities for us. Some possibilities negate or block others, and when this is the case this

must be exposed before the reader or recipient can move on. As Wittgenstein says (perhaps following Kierkegaard), “one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place.”¹ Yet on the other hand, exposing that which blocks the way to new possibilities is not enough if something else isn't offered in its place. This does not mean erecting a new idol in the place of the old one, but showing and offering possibilities which themselves can only be held tentatively and precariously. In the final chapter I turn to the way each of the two philosophers deals with religion. For Nietzsche, “religion” isn't the main topic, but Christianity, and in the latter he sees a degenerative form of life which blocks the way to human greatness. As such, the possibility of life offered by Christianity must be destroyed to make way for his new, revalued vision of life. With Wittgenstein we find a different orientation to religion, which includes “primitive” religion as well as Christianity. Wittgenstein sees in religion an alternative to the dominant, sleep inducing influence of science and positivism. But both are responding to religion not as though it were a set of propositions about the world, but as a form of life, one possible way of orienting oneself toward the self and the world.

Sils-Maria, Upper Engadine

July 2012

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,” *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 119.

Chapter 1: Wittgenstein, Description, and Contemplative Philosophy

Thirty years after the last of Wittgenstein's remarks and notes were collected and published, there is still little consensus on exactly what it is Wittgenstein was after. In the last few decades, a renewed interest in the so-called 'contemplative' nature of Wittgenstein's work has (re)surfaced, promoted in large part by D.Z. Phillips and others of the so-called Swansea School. According to this reading of Wittgenstein's work, the philosopher is expected to provide a 'cool', contemplative account of any given practice. This account should be one which does justice to the practice in question itself, with careful attention given to the grammar that is internal to it. But what is the point of this contemplative account? Is clarity for its own sake Wittgenstein's goal, or does he have something else in mind? And does Wittgenstein actually promote such a dispassionate, cool role for the philosopher? This chapter will look first at some of Wittgenstein's own remarks about clarity and description and show that Wittgenstein does indeed lend himself to the contemplative project. After looking at Wittgenstein himself, however, we will look at the way that Wittgenstein's remarks get used by Phillips and Rhee. The goal is not to give an exhaustive account of Wittgenstein and description, nor a catalog of the varieties of Wittgensteinians. Instead, we look at Wittgenstein, Phillips and Rhee to launch into the larger question of the book as a whole: what is the role of

the philosopher, and how ought we (if we are philosophers) go about achieving this? Must we limit ourselves to the contemplative proposal in order to achieve it, or is it one tool among others? These questions will be developed further in the following chapters, when we turn to Nietzsche and then Nietzsche and Wittgenstein together. But first we must see what the contemplative proposal is all about.

1.1 Wittgenstein and Description

In the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein tells us that this work can perhaps only be understood in light of and set against his first, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. While he does not go on to specify there exactly the distinction he has in mind, the following remarks indicate a clear move away from anything that approaches a calculus or an explanation, in favor of “descriptions” and “reminders.” Wittgenstein supplies the reader not with a systematic account of language, reality, the self, and so on, but with examples that describe, rather than explain, the philosophical issue. Or, perhaps better, they describe a variety of practices and language games which cumulatively serve to reveal something to the reader.¹ Against explanation and in favor of description, for instance, he writes,

¹Of course, this is a best case scenario. Wittgenstein clearly has reservations about his ability to succeed. Later in the Preface he writes, “I make [these thoughts] public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall

And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in spite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (PI, §109)

Wittgenstein's view of philosophy is one devoid of explanation, hypotheses, and theory of any kind. This is, in part, a commitment to a certain approach to philosophy, but it is also an indication of what Wittgenstein thinks the nature of philosophy is, of what it is capable of doing in a logical sense. He writes elsewhere that there are to be no theses advanced in philosophy, since everyone would agree with them anyway.² That this is so shouldn't be obvious to anyone except someone already steeped in Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Philosophers tend to find plenty to disagree about, not to mention the often incredulous response to philosophical statements displayed by non-philosophers. How can Wittgenstein maintain, then, that philosophical statements are of the kind that no one could disagree with them?

to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely.” PI, vi.

²TS 213, *Philosophical Occasions*, 179, and PI §128: “If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.”

As one possible example of this situation, Wittgenstein points out the famous claim by Augustine, “quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.” (What is time? If someone asks me I know, but as soon as I am asked I know not.) That Augustine’s dilemma with time is related to Wittgenstein’s claim that there are no theses in philosophy may not be readily apparent. There is, after all, no mention of theses here to begin with. But I think the issue here is the same, or at least closely connected. What time is, is something which we take for granted and yet are seemingly unable to give an answer for when asked. The answer that the philosopher can give regarding time, if it can be considered an “answer” at all, is not one which has the role or function of a thesis. It is not a *claim* about time, but a certain kind of description that, hopefully, plays the role of reminding us what we have already known. Wittgenstein contrasts this with the natural sciences, in which it would not make sense to make the sort of statement that Augustine has made. He continues after the quotation from the confessions, “This can not be said about a question of natural science. Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.)”³

If these two points (§109 and §89) are taken together, we can see that for Wittgenstein,

³PI, §89.

the philosopher is someone who feels compelled (either on her own behalf or that of others) to help those who, like Augustine, are trapped in a seemingly paradoxical situation. We think we know something, but upon reflection realize that what we seemed to know now feels distant and hidden from us. Wittgenstein continues this theme much later in the *Investigations* when he finishes the quotation from the *Confessions*: “Manifestissima et usitatissima sunt, et eadem rusus nimis latent, et nova est inventio eorum.” (These are most manifest and common, and yet these same things hide too much, and their discovery is new.) The danger of philosophy, here, is to let these situations and cases convince us that what we are after is in fact something hidden (and not merely felt to be so). Wittgenstein’s second quotation from Augustine follows upon the following remark:

If it is asked: “How do sentences manage to represent?” – the answer might be: “Don’t you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.” For nothing is concealed.

How do sentences do it? – Don’t you know? For nothing is hidden.

But given this answer: “but you know how sentences do it, for nothing is concealed” one would like to retort “Yes, but it all goes by so quick, and I should like to see it as it were laid open to view.” (PI, §435)

The nature of a sentence, like the nature of time, is such that although it is among the most common and everyday experiences of human life, we are tempted and seduced by its very everydayness into thinking that it is something sublime. We want more than *that* sentences “do it” – we want *how* they do it laid open to view. What’s more, we are tempted to

go farther in these situations than we can meaningfully go. We are tempted to give explanations. But it would be a mistake to read Wittgenstein's view as one which simply dismisses these dilemmas as philosophical nonsense. He recognizes, and painstakingly exemplifies, that these are recurring questions that are not easily dismissed. If anything, we may hope to dissolve (and not dismiss) these questions, though this will always be an ongoing activity.⁴ Wittgenstein employs a number of metaphors to communicate the difficulty and goal of this process. In one, we are told that the goal is to "show the fly the way out of the fly bottle." In another, these philosophical questions are likened to knots that must be untied.⁵ The end result may be simple, but the process of untangling the knots must be as complicated and difficult as the knots themselves.

But if philosophy is an ongoing activity that "unties knots" and helps the fly out of the bottle, where do these knots come from, and why is the fly in the bottle in the first place? In one reading of Wittgenstein, it is philosophy itself which is the problem. Philosophers have unfairly and unnecessarily created these knots and dilemmas for we ordinary humans.

Wittgensteinian philosophy in this sense serves as a kind of therapy to cure us of the desire to

⁴In this sense I take Wittgenstein's claim that the real discovery in philosophy is one which would let one stop whenever they wanted to be in one sense ironic (since philosophy has no discoveries to speak of), and in another sense a limit-concept. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133.

⁵"Philosophy unties knots and must be as complex as the knots it unties. But the outcome is simple." Wittgenstein, Zettel (Berkeley: University of California Press), 81 and "TS 213," *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 183.

do “philosophy” itself.⁶ If this is the case, then “Wittgensteinian philosophy” is parasitic on the philosophical mistakes of others. Once these mistakes are cleared away, the Wittgensteinian project is over. We might call this kind of philosophy – the kind that creates knots for Wittgensteinians to come along and untie – “philosophy in the pejorative sense” (PPS). There is certainly textual evidence in Wittgenstein’s work that indicates he does, at times, have PPS in mind. Often PPS is linked to metaphysics. Wittgenstein writes, for instance, that “What we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”⁷ That is, what we philosophers in the non-pejorative sense do is bring words back from the mistaken use they are given by PPS. Elsewhere he writes that, “Metaphysics obliterates the distinction between fact and concept.”⁸ Metaphysicians (PPS) treat concepts as though they stood in need of explanations. *Facts* are the sorts of things which stand in need of explanations (or at least, the sorts of things for which explanations can be offered), and a coherent causal theory can be supplied to make sense of them. But Wittgenstein does not think philosophy is in this sort of business. “Our problem is not a causal but a conceptual one.”⁹ Consider Augustine’s issue with

⁶ The therapeutical reading of Wittgenstein has a long and sometimes dominant history. See for instance *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000). Also see the critique by Ian Proops, “The New Wittgenstein: A Critique,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 9:3 (2011), 375–404.

⁷PI, §116. It is interesting to compare this formulation with the earlier version found in TS 213: “What we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their correct use in language.” That Wittgenstein dropped “correct” and adopted “everyday” is, I think, telling.

⁸Z, 82.

⁹PI, II, 203e.

“time.” To one so perplexed by the concept of “time,” Wittgenstein insists that the response is not to *explain* the nature of time, not to give a causal account of what makes time possible. It is also, for that matter, not a call for a new, clear definition. No, the philosopher’s (in the non-pejorative sense) job in this reading is to remind the PPS of what she already knows.

Philosophy in the pejorative sense is not necessarily limited, however, to metaphysics. He writes in the *Investigations*, “When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from it.”¹⁰ This “we” includes, one can only assume, Wittgenstein himself. It would be incorrect to think, therefore, that there is a clear line between “good philosophers” and PPS for Wittgenstein. There is always the temptation, metaphysics or not, to be seduced into false interpretations and “queer conclusions.” Yet this does not mean that philosophy is to be abandoned. Despite its seductions and temptations, philosophy at its best is not only a response to PPS, but an activity and discussion which helps us deal with questions that arise and continue to as part of our everyday lives. Even its seductions and mistakes are revealing.¹¹ Philosophy in the non-pejorative sense is not something to be finished and left behind once PPS is dispatched with. It continues on, helping us clarify these particular philosophical questions that resurface in our lives. The “philosopher” (as opposed to the

¹⁰PI, §194.

¹¹Z, p82, #460.

activity of philosophy itself) is then someone who assembles examples and reminders, so that when others experience the seductions and temptations of language, they will be reminded of what, in a sense, they already know. What is time? How do sentences communicate? How do we follow rules? What is the nature of the soul? Does God exist? All of these sorts of questions can lead us down avenues that Wittgenstein thinks are, if taken causally or as requests for explanation, nonsense.

Wittgenstein's remarks are descriptions then which serve as reminders of what we (ostensibly) already know. But how and in what sense do "descriptions" serve this purpose and function? It is one thing to offer a description; it is another for that description to carry the kind of weight Wittgenstein seems to think it can. This should indicate to us that Wittgenstein has in mind something more than a "mere" description, in the sense of a list of characteristics. "The tree is ten feet tall, an oak, with leaves the color of..." A description in this sense is helpful if the goal is to find a particular tree among others in a forest, but it does little to remind me of what I already know, or to (dis)solve anything that I would typically think of as a philosophical question. So although "philosophy can only describe language" and must "leave everything as it is," this description does more work than we might guess at first look. Thus Wittgenstein writes,

What we call "*descriptions*" are instruments for particular uses. Think of a machine-drawing, a cross-section, an elevation with measurements, which an engineer has before him. Thinking of a description as

a word-picture of the facts has something misleading about it: one tends to think only of such pictures as hang on our walls: which seem simply to portray how a thing looks, what it is like. (These pictures are as it were idle.) (PI, §291)

Here Wittgenstein is explicit that we should not think of his descriptions as “word-pictures of facts.” They are not like the still-life pictures that hang on our walls, showing us what rotten fruit looks like when left in the basket. There are times when these sorts of pictures are helpful, but they are not the kind of descriptions Wittgenstein has in mind. And I think this is perhaps one source of confusion over Wittgenstein’s work and the command to description. It can seem as if Wittgenstein has turned us all (we philosophers) into parrots. Yet parroting of this sort would be easy; one must merely state what is front of her. Wittgenstein is after something more difficult and perplexing; these descriptions must remind us of what is right in front of us, yet invisible for it. This description is like an instrument or tool. In my language, it “unlocks” the problem (it unties the knot). The examples Wittgenstein gives are examples of schematics which enable the worker to move forward, to continue on. A cross-section does not *explain* how to build a house, but it does show the builder what she needs to do so. Of course, there is something misleading here as well, since the metaphor makes it seem as though we couldn’t function at all without these descriptions. The engineer *cannot* build without a schematic (or if she does, the result is unlikely to serve the purpose it was set out for). Surely we can go on in life without Wittgenstein’s descriptions. What Wittgenstein has in mind,

though, is a something more general. Certainly we get along just fine without Wittgenstein's reminders. But when we get stuck in philosophical labyrinths,¹² the philosopher (on her best days) provides us with examples, descriptions, and reminders that get us out. And, as we will see in chapter 4, although we can go on in life without this philosophical help, we might miss out on the full range of human possibilities.

It is here that Wittgenstein's promotion of "perspicuous representation" gets its meaning. As he puts it,

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words.

- Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*. // The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?)¹³

Yet as should be becoming clear, a perspicuous representation is not one which makes clear what is "merely" obvious. It is not a list of characteristics, nor is it a word-picture of facts. A perspicuous representation is the form of description that Wittgenstein uses to make clear what is obvious *and yet forgotten*.¹⁴ The job of perspicuous representations is to show

¹²PI §123 "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'."

¹³PI §122.

¹⁴Moreover this is an interest Wittgenstein has both early and late. As Hutto puts it, "The truth-tables operate in this respect as paradigms of perspicuous presentations. In elucidating and clarifying, they show what cannot be said. They tell us nothing new. Rather, they merely, and quite literally, re-present that which is already immanent

connections, and this is done by what Wittgenstein calls “intermediate cases.” And therein is exposed a striking feature of Wittgenstein’s descriptions: what is described is not done so head on, but from the side. Perspicuity is reached not by a mere description in the sense of a list, but by descriptions of similar cases that we (hopefully) are more able to appreciate. The intermediate cases unlock the more difficult one. Given the difficulty of the task, the philosopher must provide more than one example; she must find and invent a plurality of examples, so that her patient may finally come to see the question in a new light.¹⁵

Finally, something must be said about the metaphor of illness and therapy.

Wittgenstein a number of times speaks of philosophical problems as though they are an illness or disease that must be treated. In the *Investigations*, he writes

The substitution of “identical” for “the same” ... That is in question in philosophy only where we have to give a psychologically exact account of the temptation to use a particular kind of expression. What we ‘are tempted to say’ in such a case is, of course, not philosophy; but it is its raw material. Thus, for example, what a mathematician is inclined to say about the objectivity and reality of mathematical facts, is not a philosophy of mathematics, but something for philosophical *treatment*.

in our use of logic. Used as demonstrations in this way they do not tell us anything about the state of the world, but they do succeed in getting us to realign our thinking.” Daniel D. Hutto, *Wittgenstein and the End of Philosophy: Neither Theory nor Therapy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 48.

¹⁵Compare the remark in PI section II, 193e. “I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience “noticing an aspect”. / Its causes are of interest to psychologists. / We are interested in the concept and its place among the concepts of experience.” Wittgenstein says he is interested in the concept of noticing an aspect. I think he is also interested in bringing it about himself.

The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness. (PI, §254–255)

Much later in the same work he adds, “A main cause of philosophical disease – a one-sided diet: one nourishes one’s thinking with only one kind of example.”¹⁶ This metaphor can be used by those who think that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is primarily directed to PPS. That is, when PPS gives us a diseased way of thinking due to its one-sided diet, Wittgenstein’s therapy comes along and cures us of the disease. The philosopher in the non-PPS sense treats the question “like the treatment of an illness.” But this is misleading insofar as it makes us think that the philosophical question is something which, ideally, would never have come up in the first place. Diseases and illnesses are the sorts of things which, given ideal conditions, do not arise. The goal in treating them is, moreover, usually to bring the patient back to the state they were in before the illness took hold. It is here, I think, that the metaphor is at its strongest. It is, as we have already seen, Wittgenstein’s goal to remind us of what we knew beforehand, but somehow forgot in the process of our philosophical thinking and discussion. Yet it is a mistake to take this metaphor too literally. The *treatment* of a philosophical question is like the treatment of an illness; this does not necessarily mean, however, that being in the grip of a philosophical question is like being in the grip of an illness. If this were so, Wittgenstein could not say that metaphysical issues were so important, or that the mistakes of philosophy were as

¹⁶PI §593.

well. If having them were like an illness, the goal would be not only to treat those with these philosophical diseases but to come up with a way of preventing others from contracting them. This does not seem to be Wittgenstein's goal at all – or if it is, he is exceptionally bad at achieving his goal. After all, the *Investigations* are an ongoing example of a philosophical discussion which constantly raises the very philosophical questions that it sets out to “cure.” It would be a morbid doctor indeed who infected her patients with a disease only to demonstrate a new method and cure. A remark by Nietzsche is also helpful here. “Gratitude flows forth incessantly, as if that which was most unexpected had just happened – the gratitude of a convalescent – for recovery was what was most unexpected. ‘Gay Science’: this signifies the saturnalia¹ of a mind that has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure – patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope – and is now all of a sudden attacked by hope, by hope for health, by the intoxication of recovery.”¹⁷ According to him, the person who has been ill but is now convalescent is in a *better* position vis-à-vis the healthy to appreciate health most fully. That is, a healthy person knows only health; the convalescent knows health with respect to sickness. For Nietzsche it is a *good* thing to have been sick, if for no other reason than to now appreciate health all the more.

In the sections that follow, even within the descriptive and contemplative views of

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), preface §1.

Wittgenstein, two differing conceptions of how to understand the role of philosophy and the philosopher emerge. On the one hand the contemplative approach insists that philosophical elucidation and clarity are ends in themselves. On the other hand, it is insisted that philosophy has a particular, distinctive task of elucidating the possibility of intelligibility. I think there is a third possibility as well, one which is promoted by those philosophers who we might call “existential” Wittgensteinians. Here what is elucidated is not only the philosophical question of the possibility of intelligibility, but the existential possibility of living a different life than that found in the “darkness of our time.” Perhaps it is best to see Wittgenstein as wavering between these views, sometimes insisting on clarity and description, and at other times promoting a way of life or living that he felt was missed by his and our civilization (but note: not culture).¹⁸

1.2 D.Z. Phillips, The Swansea Wittgensteinians, and Contemplative Philosophy

One of the most aggressive readings of this plea for description alone comes from D.Z. Phillips and others in the so-called “Swansea-School.”¹⁹ These philosophers, who I will

¹⁸ “Perhaps someday a culture will arise out of this civilization” (C&V p. 64/73, [1947]). For an excellent discussion on Wittgenstein’s distinction between culture and civilization, see James C. Klagge, *Wittgenstein in Exile* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Although there are interesting differences in the figures included in the “Swansea-School,” it is there basic

sometimes refer to as “contemplatives,” emphasize remarks like the following from Wittgenstein that, “My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.”²⁰ Phillips takes this to the point of titling his book on philosophical method, *Philosophy’s Cool Place*.²¹ There are other ways of taking this ideal than that advanced by Phillips, but the contemplatives insist that philosophy’s task is to stay as close to Wittgenstein’s admonishments against explanation and promotion of description as possible. Similarly, there is an emphasis on those remarks of Wittgenstein’s that argue clarity is an end in itself. In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein writes, “Clarity, transparency, is an end in itself... So I am aiming at something different than are the scientists & my thoughts move differently than do theirs.”²² And again, there is an emphasis on those passages that emphasize description when set against explanation. In *Zettel* Wittgenstein has told us that, “Philosophy can only describe language... Philosophy leaves everything as it is... Philosophy puts everything before us and neither explains nor deduces anything.”²³ Earlier in the same set of remarks, he has written, “All that philosophy can do is destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one – for instance as in ‘absence of an idol’.”²⁴

agreement that is of interest here, as a particular way of reading Wittgenstein.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 4e.

²¹ D.Z. Phillips, *Philosophy’s Cool Place* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999).

²² CV, 7e.

²³ Z, 177.

²⁴ Z, 88.

1.2.1 Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy

The contemplatives, and Phillips chief among them, emphasize the descriptive aspect of philosophy. If there is a particular emphasis within philosophy as description, it is the imperative to “not meddle.” The philosopher, for Phillips, is not only to give no explanations, but is furthermore to not promote any one particular description over another. Or, to put differently, the philosopher is not to promote any particular form of life over another. They are not to be advocates of a position, a form of life, a particular description – of anything. Instead, they are called upon to give perspicuous representations of whatever issue is at hand. Nothing more. One example of Phillips' ideal can be found in the way he discusses literature and the response to literature by critics. In *Through A Darkening Glass*, Phillips tells us that,

The main concern in many of the essays is to try to understand how moral and other perspectives on life may change, be eroded, be found wanting, or become impossible for people. The glass which was once clear darkens for them. How is this phenomenon or, rather, cluster of phenomena to be understood? A conviction running through these essays is that philosophy has a central role to play in answering this question. On the other hand, attempts at philosophical analysis can go either way: they can obscure as well as clarify.²⁵

²⁵D.Z. Phillips, *Through A Darkening Glass* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 1.

Here Phillips is clear: the concern is to understand, but not to advocate. The final sentence of this quotation is a common theme of his. Philosophical analysis itself cannot predict the effect it will have on its listener or reader. And while he puts this in terms of obscurity and clarity here, at other times he makes more of the fact that the moral response from the reader can never be predicted either. In any case, he is insistent that the effect (and affect) on the reader must not be the philosophical goal. The goal and concern is with understanding.

Edith Wharton and her critics provide an illuminating example. In the same work, Phillips notes how the response from her critics shows how shallow many of them are. Wharton's characters are often, to our "modern" sensibilities, hopelessly stuck in outdated and restrictive moralities. When the main characters in novels like *The Age of Innocence* or *The House of Mirth* deny themselves love and happiness for the sake of their values, we are like Dallas, Archer's son in *The Age of Innocence*. Phillips writes, "Despite the fact that Archer's son reveals depths of character in his mother which his father had never appreciated, he can hardly appreciate them. For Dallas, the son, his parents' attitudes are dated, outmoded, eccentric."²⁶ That father and son live in different worlds is perhaps not surprising. Generational differences are certainly nothing new or unusual. Phillips continues, "If one compares the views of Newland Archer's generation with those of his son, can one appeal to a common criterion of

²⁶Ibid., 24.

reasonableness which would bring out the character of the differences between them? It is difficult to see how one could do so in general. What we see is that many of the values of one generation mean little to the other.”²⁷ Phillips praises Wharton for being so effective in showing her readers how these values have their place in the lives of her characters. They make sense insofar as they have a role in people’s lives, but it may not be possible to link the differences together under a common rational. “To call one set of beliefs irrational often obscures what disagreement amounts to in this context; that the disagreement is itself an expression or a product of a moral judgment.”²⁸

What Phillips appreciates in Wharton is not only her ability to show these differences for what they are, but her refusal to go farther and to make judgments herself. Her characters make judgments, but as a novelist she leaves “the rough ground rough” (to modify a Wittgensteinian phrase). It is tempting to think that novelists, philosophers, or critics *must* take a stand. Phillips thinks this is a mistake. “Edith Wharton shows us another possibility, namely, that of refraining from such judgments and being content to observe that whereas people once thought about certain matters in a particular way, we no longer do so.”²⁹ And while it is one thing to find ourselves, as readers, in sympathy with the moral views of some of

²⁷Ibid., 24–25.

²⁸Ibid., 25.

²⁹Ibid., 28.

her characters over those of others, it is another to attempt to provide philosophical justifications for those sympathies. This is, as I have said, his frustration with some of the critics of Wharton's work. He concludes this discussion:

A critic must be able to sympathize with a variety of moral beliefs in order to recognize their seriousness.

A critic's moral beliefs may be such, however, as to rule out certain attitudes as trivial, and a novel which gave serious attention to these would be criticized by him for this very reason. If this happened with too many moral beliefs, however, the critic's narrowness would itself count against his standing as a critic.³⁰

While Phillips speaks directly here of "the critic," in the context of Phillips' work it seems clear he is trying to articulate his vision of philosophy. A philosopher who for personal commitments is unable to appreciate and do justice to moral positions other than her own shows her narrowness. Phillips would likely appropriate Wittgenstein's remark in *Zettel* that a philosopher "is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher." Philosophers in the contemplative sense must see beyond their own interests, commitments, and even experiences. Wittgenstein excoriates Frazer for this very point. According to Wittgenstein, Frazer is far worse off than the "savages" he writes about, in his ability to see religion beyond the country parson.³¹ Returning to Wharton, it needs only to be added that Phillips is not advocating the novelist herself as the prototype for philosophy.

³⁰Ibid., 28.

³¹Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," *Philosophical Occasions*, 125.

Rather, literature (can) provide a source of reminders for philosophy. Here Phillips is careful to not call them “examples.” Examples (in this sense) come after the fact; the philosopher articulates a particular moral vision and then looks for examples to support her conclusion.³² “Examples” of this sort are supposed to underwrite, justify, or “prove” the moral position taken by the philosopher. In contrast, “reminders” do both more and less than these “examples.” Reminders do more in calling to attention the great variety of moral perspectives and thereby show us something about the nature of moral perspectives as such, and they do less insofar as they give no foundation or justification for any one moral perspective itself.

The insistence that the philosopher does not take sides, that she is not a member of any community of ideas, is in Phillips most often expressed with respect to religion. In numerous books and articles, Phillips argues that the philosopher of religion does not argue in favor of religion nor does she argue against religion. Likewise, no arguments are proposed that support either the existence of God or the non-existence of God. When it comes to religion, just as we have seen with moral issues in Edith Wharton’s novels, the goal is clarity and understanding. Phillips first philosophical work shows, for instance, the role that prayer plays in the lives of believers.³³ Rather than argue for or against prayer’s efficacy in any physical or causal sense,

³²This is precisely the problem Phillips sees with philosophers like Cavell and Nussbaum. See *Philosophy's Cool Place* chapters 6 and 7.

³³D.Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981).

Phillips' goal is to articulate what prayer amounts to as a practice within religious life. Of course, "religious life" here probably means the lives of faithful churchgoers in the Welsh congregational communities Phillips was most familiar with. But this itself is part of Phillips' method: we do not start with a philosophical concept called "religious life" in any technical sense, but rather (recalling Wittgenstein's emphasis) look at the lives of people who are religious. (If this seems circular – so be it.) Likewise, Phillips insists that what the believer means by "I believe in God" cannot be reduced to "I believe that God exists," where God is taken to be an object among objects that may be meaningfully said to either exist or not exist. Careful philosophical contemplation shows us that the reality of God is not like the reality of an object. Its reality is of a different kind, and if comparable to anything, is most like the reality of physical objects as such (that is, the reality of a physical world). But what can we then expect from this kind of philosophical work? It should by now come as no surprise: the results of philosophical elucidation and the response by people confronted with it, are unpredictable. For Phillips and the contemplatives, philosophy is at its best neither for nor against religion but seeks to clarify the grammar of religious beliefs.³⁴

When Phillips makes these claims to the neutrality of philosophy, it seems to me that he has (at least) two different approaches or reasons for this insistence. In the first, he insists

³⁴See Phillips, "Religious Beliefs and Language Games," *Wittgenstein and Religion*, (Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1993).

that justifications, explanations, and theories (of the sort we have already seen Wittgenstein eschew) actually distort the concept they set out to defend or prove. Again, most of the examples Phillips provides come from religion and morality, although I do not think the philosophical point is limited to them. In the case above, when philosophers debate the existence of God by turning “God” into one object among other objects of the same kind, these philosophers actually change the concept they set out to justify. The atheist philosopher arguing against the existence of God may be untroubled by this turn of events – though Phillips thinks they must at least admit that what they ultimately disprove is not the concept of God anyone believes in anyway. The situation is worse in the case of theistic philosophers, though, who think they are somehow doing something that is itself a part of the Christian tradition. Phillips minces no words when satirizing these philosophers. For instance, Phillips responds to foundationalists like Swinburne when he writes,

What would be a foundationalist reading of the psalm? “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, it is highly probable that thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold it is highly probable that thou art there also?” The following fares no better: “If I ascend up into heaven, it is cumulatively apparent that thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold it is cumulatively apparent that thou art there also.” Surely, in the original the Psalmist testifies to the inescapable reality of God. Inescapable? This seems a far cry from the competing probabilities of

the arguments of animistic philosophical foundationalism.³⁵

The concept of God articulated (or better: shown) so beautifully by the psalmist is one which has no room for probabilities and cumulative evidence. It does not wait on evidence, nor can one imagine the psalmist would see much use for evidence of this kind. If Swinburne or others “prove” the existence of a being to be more probable than not, this has no bearing on the psalmist or the psalmist’s God. *That* God is inescapable; inescapability is part of the internal logic of the psalmist’s prayer and life as a believer in God. In another chapter in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, Phillips describes this as “subliming the logic” of existence.³⁶ In the case of God, God’s necessary existence is tied to the religious life that surrounds the concept. It cannot be divorced from this life and remain the same concept.

Yet simply because Swinburne has “sublimed the logic of existence” in this example does not prove that in all cases of “going beyond” description, the philosopher in question has made a mistake in the logic of her topic. If these philosophers are in fact making logical mistakes, subliming the logic of the concept in question, and distorting the practice, then this has to be shown on a case by case basis. Often this is precisely what Phillips does. His writings are incredibly extensive in no small part because he takes up again and again cases where he thinks some philosopher or other has distorted a concept in her attempt to explain, justify, or

³⁵D.Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 9. See also Idem, *Religion and Friendly Fire* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

³⁶Phillips, “Sublime Existence,” *Wittgenstein and Religion*.

disprove it. Yet he also seems to go beyond this more modest project, and claim that *any* attempt to go beyond description *must* result in a philosophical confusion. While I think he is on shakier ground here, given his narrow view of philosophy this does indeed follow. Recall again the remark by Wittgenstein: “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. - Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. // One might also give the name ‘philosophy’ to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.” (PI §126) To put this in an older terminology, philosophy is an *a priori* business. Perhaps an example will help to clarify what I take here to be both Phillips’ and Wittgenstein’s point. Remember that Phillips has claimed that to argue for or against the existence of God is to confuse the concept of “God” with the concept of a particular physical object among others of the same kind. The same sort of argument can be made for the existence of physical objects as such. To attempt to prove or disprove the existence of physical objects as such (the existence of the physical world) is to confuse the world itself with particular items within the world. Thus, any attempt to do so will not only always fail, but will always distort the concept of the physical world. It is bound to fail, not because of the particular strategy employed by the philosopher (like, for instance, Swinburne and the existence of God), but because the project itself relies on a confusion of concepts. It would not, however, be confused to argue for or against the existence of a

particular object. There is no confusion here, except, Wittgenstein and Phillips think, to believe that in doing so one is doing philosophy. We may argue about the existence of any number of objects in the course of a criminal trial, physical experiment, astronomical hypothesis, and so on. But in none of these cases are the participants philosophers (at least not insofar as they participate in this debate).

Phillips' second approach to neutrality in philosophy is closely related to this last point, though slightly different. To repeat: Phillips' first objection to non-neutral philosophy is that it often or perhaps even inherently commits the philosopher to a distortion of the concept at stake. Yet there are times when Phillips acknowledges particular philosophers who have *not* distorted concepts in their non-neutrality, and his objection still remains. This comes out most clearly when he objects to the philosophical styles of Søren Kierkegaard and Stanley Cavell. What is most interesting about his critique of these two figures is that they are, in many respects, some of the closest to his ideal (fellow Swansea Wittgensteinians aside). Phillips praises Kierkegaard at many points, and although somewhat less enthusiastically, Cavell as well. His criticism of these two is therefore particularly illuminating.

Phillips uses Kierkegaard as an example of what contemplative philosophy is *not* in several of his collections. In an essay entitled, "Authorship and Authenticity: Kierkegaard and

Wittgenstein,”³⁷ Phillips argues that although Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard are both interested in clearing up confusion and introducing new possibilities, they in fact have very different aims and reasons for doing this. Kierkegaard is challenging the “monstrous illusion” of his day and making what he considers to be authentic Christianity possible once more. His elucidations and clarifications are all guided by this one specific aim. In doing so he neglects, Phillips believes, issues of personal philosophic authenticity in his writings. In contrast, Phillips argues that Wittgenstein is interested in more general philosophic questions, questions which are open to all.³⁸ Kierkegaard’s interest is guided not by these general philosophic questions but by a desire to advocate (or perhaps make possible) one specific form of life. These general questions are related to the kind of philosophic problem we discussed above, problems which appear obvious until we are asked to give an account or explanation.

³⁷ Phillips, “Authorship and Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein,” *Wittgenstein and Religion*.

³⁸ Phillips actually puts this a bit differently. This argument comes up for him most often when he is arguing that philosophical questions are not *personal* questions, but of a more general kind. He writes in *Philosophy’s Cool Place*, for instance, “Wittgenstein is referring to difficulties in *doing philosophy*, difficulties in giving the problems the kind of attention philosophy asks of us. And this is missed if one equates the difficulties with *personal* difficulties... the hold these ways of thinking have is not personal, nor is the source of their temptation. They are ways of thinking to which *anyone* can be susceptible, because their power is in the language that we speak” 46. Yet as Mulhall points out, “This is a strange argument. Phillips seems to think that if a problem is one to which any human being is susceptible, it cannot be a personal problem; but by parity of reasoning, since the tendency towards sinful acts is one shared by all human beings, committing a sin is not a personal problem.” Stephen Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple,” *D.Z. Phillips’ Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andy Sanders (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 23. I think Mulhall is right to criticize Phillips’ use of “personal” here, but I also suspect it is simply a poor choice of wording by Phillips. It seems what he has in mind is the distinction between general questions and questions that are limited to particular circumstances, the latter not being philosophical. This being the case, then I think we can also agree with Conant when he argues that philosophical questions are a variety of personal questions: there is no reason that general questions cannot be personal.

What is time?, What are the conditions for the possibility of intelligibility?, and the like serve as examples for philosophical questions in Phillips' sense. Given that Kierkegaard is not after questions of this sort – and when he is, they serve another purpose than elucidation of these questions themselves – he is not properly conceived to be doing contemplative philosophy and therefore, it sometimes appears from Phillips' perspective, not doing philosophy at all. This same line of criticism is continued in Phillips' later work on philosophical methods and value, *Philosophy's Cool Place*.³⁹ Here he again informs us that Kierkegaard is not to be thought of as a contemplative philosopher, since he treats philosophy as a help-mate to religion. Unlike Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard *starts* with religious concerns and uses philosophy to clarify concepts surrounding those concerns. For many, this is a description of Phillips himself, and probably shows why he was so interested in distancing himself from Kierkegaard. Despite the claims of some of his critics, Phillips maintains that his interest in religious concepts and their clarification is secondary to his interest in the possibility of intelligibility. The clarification of religious concepts is for him in service to an elucidation of this possibility, a point about which we will return shortly.

With Cavell we see a similar response from Phillips,⁴⁰ though clearly Cavell does not have Christian themes in mind. Phillips describes Cavell as having a particular form of life in

³⁹ Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, chapter 5.

mind as an ideal when he does philosophy, and that he serves as a kind of advocate for this life. For Cavell, the philosopher is a reappraiser of culture, one whose job it is to show to her culture its mistakes and confusions. This means that the philosopher will have a direct relevance and impact on questions of politics, religion, and values. Of course Phillips recognizes that the philosopher *may* have an impact on all these areas, but for Phillips this impact can never be predicted and cannot be the goal of the philosopher. Moreover, Phillips argues that disagreements in religion and politics do not show the need for philosophical elucidation. These sorts of disagreements are not related to philosophical mistakes or confusions, but are evidence of genuine differences in human life. The reality of disagreement in politics is not a reality to be fixed by elucidation. Elucidation of this situation does not remove the disagreement but shows what kind of disagreement it is that is at stake. Phillips ends his critique of Cavell by noting that it is possible Cavell recognizes the situation he is in, that he is not elucidating the reality of political disagreement but intentionally advocating for a particular form of life. In either case Cavell is advocating a particular form of life, but Phillips points to two different possibilities for this advocacy: in the first, he argues that a philosopher may advocate for a particular way of life *and believe that philosophy underwrites this life*. If this is the case, the philosopher is confused about what philosophy is capable of. But a second possibility shows that the philosopher, here Cavell, recognizes the impossibility of

philosophical underwriting but advocates for a particular form of life nonetheless. And if this is the situation we do in fact find with Cavell, then Phillips merely responds that, “he is no longer doing contemplative philosophy.”

Stephan Mulhall defends these philosophers who go “too far,” the hot, passionate philosophers like Cavell, by arguing that they recognize that philosophy is a human discourse, related to other human discourses – something he apparently thinks Phillips has missed in his criticism.⁴¹ Mulhall believes that philosophy’s particular subject matter can be best understood when dialogue continues with other subjects. Phillips responds with what should be by now a familiar refrain: there may be a kind of internal relation between philosophical questions and personal questions, but that relation is different in different contexts and for different people, and it can never be predicted in advance. Phillips is adamant that philosophy has its own set of questions, namely those related to the possibility of intelligibility (or, what it means to say something) and the nature of reality. Dialogue with other areas and subjects in human life goes on in philosophy, but only insofar as this dialogue illustrates the issues distinctive to philosophy.

Mulhall’s critique of Phillips is for our purposes particularly helpful, as he addresses both of the “other” types of philosophers we have been discussing. In Mulhall’s view, Phillips

⁴¹Stephen Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple: Three Styles of Philosophic Architecture.” Also see note 38 of this chapter.

wants to distinguish himself both from those that Mulhall describes (following Phillips) as “deficient.” Philosophers who embrace the “deficient” view of philosophy are those who think that philosophy’s role is purely therapeutic. Mulhall puts it this way:

This deficient or cold conception amounts to conceiving of Wittgenstein’s later philosophical method in the terms provided by his early, Tractarian specification of what he called ‘the strictly correct method in philosophy’ – that of saying only what can be said, and demonstrating to those who fail to respect this condition on speech that they have failed to give meaning to some portion of their putative utterance. Expressed in more familiar terminology, the picture is that specifically philosophical or metaphysical utterances amount to violations of grammar, instances of language idling or going on holiday – cases in which words have been unmoored from the contexts of their ordinary use; and the task of the philosopher is to identify these violations or instances of emptiness in speech, and to return the words thus abused to their home in our everyday life with language.⁴²

What is of particular interest here is how seemingly close this is to Phillips’ own position. As we have been describing him, Phillips is interested in a cool, dispassionate account of particular practices and forms of life. He has (seemingly) embraced the side of Wittgenstein that promotes description alone, the giving of perspicuous representations to make clear confusions in our language and ways of thinking. Yet as Mulhall points out that beginning at least with *Philosophy’s Cool Place* Phillips attempts to take a middle way between an overly “cool” philosophy and an overly passionate, hot philosophy. To stick with the metaphor, “cool” does

⁴² Ibid., 14.

not mean “cold.” Mulhall’s criticism of Phillips’ position is helpful both as a critique, but also as a means for understanding the positive aspects of contemplative philosophy. In other words, contemplative philosophy is *not* merely a clearing up of confusions, nor is it the giving of perspicuous representations for their own sake alone. Rather, it has a particular goal in mind, the discussion of the possibility of intelligibility. Here contemplative philosophy follows closely on the heels of Rush Rhees. So much so, that Mulhall believes this “shift” in Phillips thinking is a direct consequence of his editing and compiling Rhees’ *Nachlass*. As Mulhall sees it, Phillips’ early work is best seen as participating in precisely the kind of philosophy that the post-Rhees Phillips finds deficient for its lack of appreciation for philosophy’s distinctive task and positive contribution.⁴³ Mulhall is not alone in this view,⁴⁴ and there does seem to be a substantial shift in Phillips’ work and emphasis following his extensive re-reading of Rhees.

1.2.2 Rush Rhees, Contemplation, and Philosophy

It is no secret among those who knew and studied Phillips that Rhees held an enormous

⁴³ For Mulhall, Phillips’ shift is clearly a result of his working through Rhees. He writes in the same article, “[Phillips’] ever-deeper conviction that such a conception of Wittgensteinian philosophy is ineluctably impoverished is Phillips’ most explicit, and fateful, debt to Rush Rhees.” Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple,” 16.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Hartmut von Sass, *Sprachspiele des Glaubens: Eine Studie zur kontemplativen Religionsphilosophie von Dewi Z. Phillips mit ständiger Rücksicht auf Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 69–76.

influence over his former student and lifelong friend.⁴⁵ It is not surprising, then, that (re)working through Rhees' material would have an effect on Phillips, and a short review of Rhees' conception of philosophy can easily show why Phillips re-evaluated his own work in light of this project.

In perhaps Rhees' most famous article (and one of his earliest), he points out that there is a tension within Wittgenstein himself over how to balance the deficient view with a more robust appreciation for philosophy's distinctive, positive task. In this paper, "Wittgenstein's Builders," Rhees argues that Wittgenstein's example of a primitive language in *Philosophical Investigations* §2 is unintelligible, because it would not in fact be a language at all. That is, a "language" that consisted *only* of one set of orders for one particular purpose would not be a language, whatever else it might be. As he puts it,

I feel there is something wrong here. The trouble is not to imagine a people with a language of such a limited vocabulary. The trouble is to imagine that they spoke the language only to give these special orders on this job and otherwise never spoke at all. I do not think it would be speaking a language.

When Wittgenstein suggests that in this tribe the children might be *taught* these shouts and how to react

⁴⁵ As one story has it, Phillips was accepted into the Ph.D. program in Oxford and planning to pursue the degree. When he mentioned this to Rhees, Rhees replied, "What do you need a Ph.D. for?" Phillips dropped the plan and never spoke of it again. In another, Phillips considered joining the university debate team. Rhees' advice: "Do you want to be a debater or a philosopher?" Phillips did not join the team. I am indebted to Patrick Horn for numerous biographical details about both Phillips and Rhees.

to them, I suppose this means that the adults would be using the expressions in giving the instruction, and this would be different from using them on the actual job. If they belong to a language, this is natural enough, just as it would be natural for the builders to use them in referring to the job when they had gone home. But then using the expressions and understanding the expressions would not be simply part of the building technique. Understanding 'slab' would not be just reacting correctly on the job.⁴⁶

As he puts it later in the essay, language is better thought of as a conversation than a game. Games have rules internal to them but these rules only make sense within a more general context in which we all understand what it is like to play games, to make moves in games, to follow those rules in the games, and so on. Moreover, the "and so on" is important, both for Wittgenstein and especially Rhees, because it points to a more general understanding and appreciation for a life which includes playing games, having conversations, and the like (and there it is again). Language is something that we use in a variety of ways. When we use the word "slab" we sometimes mean it as a command ("bring me the slab!" or "slab!"), sometimes as a description of an item ("it was a slab of marble, about two feet long...", sometimes in describing our day ("I moved 47 slabs today..."), and sometimes we use it ostensively to teach children its meaning ("this is a slab..."). And although not all of these examples depend on being part of a conversation, Rhees believes that they do not make sense apart from the possibility of conversation. He continues,

⁴⁶ Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein's Builders," *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1970), 76–77.

Learning to play a game is not just learning to do exercises either. And when Wittgenstein compared learning to speak with learning a game, one reason was that you generally play a game with other people. But this does not make it like conversation or like speaking. Not all speech is conversation, of course, but I do not think there would be speech or language without it. If there were someone who could not carry on a conversation, who had no idea of asking questions or making any comment, then I do not think we should say he could speak. Now one reason why a conversation is not like playing a game together is that the point of the various moves and counter-moves is within the game. Whereas we may learn from a conversation and from what is said in it. Generally each of us brings something to the conversation too: not as he might bring skill to the game, but just in having something to say.⁴⁷

How does this relate to the “deficient” view of philosophy? Rhees seems to think that focusing on language games isolates various parts of our life, and tempts the philosopher into the impoverished view of philosophy he is distancing himself from. If Wittgenstein’s metaphor of “language-games” is basically right (and complete), then so is the deficient, impoverished view of philosophy. The deficient philosopher focuses on the internal logic of whatever language-game is at stake and clears up confusions by offering a perspicuous representation, an elucidation, of the relevant grammar. And while Rhees clearly thinks this is a view that Wittgenstein himself was tempted to embrace, Rhees also thinks that at his best Wittgenstein recognized that this picture of language (and therefore the task of philosophy) was inadequate. He expresses this explicitly in a letter to M. O’C. Drury from November 1965. In it he writes,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 81.

But in the *Tractatus* the statement about throwing the ladder away does have something like an ambiguity. For I think he is saying that the work ought to enable you to give up *philosophy*, in the sense of giving up thinking on philosophical questions. He speaks in this way even in the *Investigations* – although these passages are the earliest written in the book, and he said to me in 1944 that his remark in §133 about philosophical investigation enabling me to stop doing philosophy when I will, ‘is a lie: for I *cannot* stop it’. And when he said this, I do not think he meant simply that it was a compulsion in him personally, but that there would be something contrary to the whole point of philosophy if he did. I do not think he expressed himself clearly about this, because he was so eager to insist that it is not the task of philosophy to establish a *theory* of any kind. So he *seemed* to speak sometimes as though philosophy had no value on its own account – any more than ‘therapy’ has. But when he did speak in this way, he misrepresented what I think was more important in his view of it. Remember his last meeting with you: ‘*Don’t stop thinking.*’ This was what he wanted to teach you: not *how* to stop thinking.⁴⁸

Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, Rhees shows his take on Wittgenstein’s philosophy. And, if we can take him at his word, it is one that Wittgenstein admitted to sharing. In this view, philosophy is not just an attempt to get back to where one was *before* one is drawn into these questions, but neither is it an attempt to get somewhere new, on the far side of philosophical thinking. It is a process which cannot end because it simply makes no sense to speak of its ending. One might lose interest in philosophical questions, but this is something very different from a discovery which lets one stop. The problem with the deficient

⁴⁸ Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 261–262.

view of philosophy is not that it is incapable of doing good, interesting work on particular grammatical confusions. The problem is that this is not enough; it misses an appreciation for the larger and deeper question(s).

Rhees is insistent throughout that philosophy must have a positive side. There is a constant tension within Rhees' material between insisting on the one hand that a growth in understanding is possible, and that it makes sense to say of other philosophers that they have gotten things all wrong, and on the other hand making sure that philosophy is not turned into a kind of science which promotes particular theories. In notes from 1957, Rhees writes that

The point is that one *can* say that all this is wrong. And that is what Socrates and Plato were emphasizing. On the other hand, it does not mean that we have to do here with theories, and that the objective is to discover the right one. It is still perverse to talk about philosophy as a science... first and foremost you need understanding of difficulties. That is where the situation is unlike that of any science. There the positive technique is the thing, and the difficulties are incidental. But in philosophy, it is the difficulties that are the whole matter. That is *why* Wittgenstein was inclined to compare it to psychoanalysis, and to refer to therapy. There is a misunderstanding in that, but one sees where it comes from.

It does not mean that there is nothing positive in philosophy. That is one thing I would insist on. And that is what has to be pressed against those who think of philosophy as therapeutic. Something we may have to indulge in because some people are unfortunate.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 19. See also page 6: "But if we talk about the growth of understanding, it is a different matter. Has this anything to do with what is meant by saying that philosophy is contemplative? I expect Plato thought it had. Anyway, it looks as though the two issues hang together: (1) whether understanding is just competence; (2)

Rhees' dilemma here reminds one of Wittgenstein's remark that it is "Not empiricism and yet realism" that he is after.⁵⁰ For Rhees, the issue is to have growth in understanding without becoming a science, and to leave room for a positive contribution from philosophy without advocating theories. This is no easy task, but for Rhees, we miss something important if we do not attempt to find this middle way. What is missed is the importance of a discussion about the possibility of intelligibility, which includes discussions about the possibilities of philosophy, of language, and of reality.

Given Rhees' influence on Phillips, it is not surprising that we find him in his later works promoting a similar (if not the same) concept of philosophy. But given the early work of Phillips, it is not unfair for his readers to show surprise that he both embraces Rhees' contemplative view of philosophy *and* that he maintains this has been his conception all along. As von Sass has pointed out,⁵¹ words and phrases like "reality" and "possibility of intelligibility" rarely show up in Phillips early work, and when they do it is usually *not* with a positive contribution from philosophy in mind.

One way of linking the early work of Phillips with his "later" contemplative philosophy

whether we can talk in a general way about understanding, or the growth of understanding. Certainly we must agree that there could be no sense in speaking of the growth of understanding as Plato might have wished to, if understanding is just a matter of competence."

⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 325. The full quote reads: "Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing. (Against Ramsey.)"

⁵¹ Hartmut von Sass, *Sprachspiele des Glaubens*.

comes out by looking at a passage from another of the Swansea set, Peter Winch. Surprisingly, Mulhall thinks that Winch may be an example of a philosopher that Phillips would find “deficient.” In his critique of Phillips’ philosophy, Mulhall writes, “Phillips plainly, and rightly, thinks that many philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein operate in accordance with just such a conception of philosophy. Peter Winch – at least the Winch of *The Idea of a Social Science*, with its emphasis upon rules and its declaration that what counts as real is always internal to a practice – might plausibly be held to fit the bill.”⁵² This may be a jab at Phillips rather than a helpful description of the deficient view, as Phillips himself never puts Winch in this light and often cites him as a fellow traveler in contemplative philosophy. It is true that Winch himself later rejected parts of *The Idea of a Social Science*, especially its emphasis on rule following and its tendency toward linguistic fideism. But a passage sheds light on the early work of Phillips, and perhaps shows how the two varieties of contemplative philosophy can be linked. Namely, Winch writes, “On my view the philosophy of science will be concerned with the kind of understanding sought and conveyed by the scientist; the philosophy of religion will be concerned with the way in which religion attempts to present an intelligible picture of the world and so on... The purpose of such philosophical activities will be to contribute to our understanding of what is involved in the concept of intelligibility, so that we may better

⁵² Mulhall, “Wittgenstein’s Temple,” 15–16.

understand what it means to call reality intelligible.”⁵³ If Winch’s account is applied to Phillips, then Phillips’ early work provides precisely the kind of analysis of religion and religious life that Winch describes. And while this conceptual elucidation is interesting in and of itself, it plays another role when it is linked with the larger project that Rhees and Phillips (at least the “mature” Phillips) argue is at stake for contemplative philosophy. Namely, it sheds light on the possibility of intelligibility, here specifically the possibility of the intelligibility of a particular form of religious life.

In the end, we are left with what seem to me to be three connected but not necessarily exclusive claims about philosophy from the contemplative philosophers. 1) Philosophers (PPS) who go beyond description (have a tendency to) distort the concept at issue. 2) Contemplative philosophy addresses these distortions, but always with a discussion of 3) the possibility of intelligibility in mind. But as we have already seen with the examples of Cavell and Kierkegaard, there does remain the possibility of agreeing with the contemplative philosophers about the first point, without going down the road of points 2 and 3. That is, to see and therefore not make the mistakes of PPS, but to then find a new, positive role for

⁵³ Peter Winch, *The idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1990), 19. He also says in the same work, “Not all linguistic confusions are equally relevant to philosophy. They are relevant only in so far as the discussion of them is designed to throw light on the question how far reality is intelligible and what difference would the fact that he could have a grasp of reality make to the life of man.” 10. This is important to keep in mind with respect to Wittgenstein’s selection of topics. He is not just running around clearing up confusions – he is selecting particular confusions to unravel, in order to shed light on the topic of intelligibility.

philosophy, which is not merely therapeutic but which also does not limit itself strictly to the possibility of intelligibility. It is to some examples of this option that we now turn.

1.3 The Existential Wittgenstein

If there is a common thread to the philosophers that I am calling the existential Wittgensteinians, it is a shared belief that what Wittgenstein – and more broadly philosophy at its best – is trying to do is to open new possibilities of seeing and living life. They take their starting point to be broadly Wittgensteinian in spirit and in method, and like the contemplatives they emphasize that philosophy is descriptive and not explanatory or theoretical. But here the emphasis is not so much that we *should* be descriptive, but that we certainly *should not* be explanatory or theoretical. Wittgenstein's insistence on description must, for these philosophers, be viewed against this distinction and not taken on its own, isolated from what it is meant to criticize. Thus Cora Diamond writes, "Only if we understand Wittgenstein's aim in relation to metaphysical requirements will we see the point of his urging us to look at what we do. We shall get a wrong idea of the sense in which philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' if we ignore that aim... So, it is asked, why does he not leave such [philosophical] games alone? Why are *they* subject to criticism, if 'what we do' is supposed to

be all right? What a misunderstanding that is!”⁵⁴ It is a misunderstanding because it turns Wittgenstein into a quietist, something which perhaps the last sections of the *Tractatus* lend themselves to. But as we have seen by now, Wittgenstein thinks there is much more to be done than to merely describe things. Just as description can only be understood as a contrast to explanation and theory construction, so too “leaving things as they are” must be paired with a rejection of “metaphysical requirements.” “Leaving things as they are” is still a critical activity when seen against this backdrop, and Wittgenstein clearly does not respond to PPS with quietism.

So far so good, but as of yet this doesn’t offer anything that the contemplatives would disagree with. They, like Diamond, agree that it is squarely within the philosopher’s rights to both advocate for description *and* to criticize rival versions of philosophy. Criticism of philosophy is, of course, philosophy itself. But Diamond does not follow the contemplatives down the road of grammatical investigations into the possibility of intelligibility, nor even of grammatical investigations into particular forms of life. She has something else in mind, something which stays within the realistic spirit while at the same time attempting a creative, adventurous work: “The sense of adventure, expressed there, is closely linked to the sense of

⁵⁴ Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, philosophy, and the mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 21–22. She adds, “Leaving everything as it is consistent with showing that the interest of a game rests on mythology or fantasy or a failure of understanding of what it is for our own real needs to be met.”

life, to a sense of life as lived in a world of wonderful possibilities, but possibilities to be found only by creative response. The possibilities are not lying about on the surface of things. Seeing the possibilities in things is a matter of a kind of transforming perception of them. The possibilities yield themselves only as it were under pressure.”⁵⁵ This “transforming perception” brings to mind Wittgenstein’s discussions on seeing-as. In one sense the possibilities are always before us, we need merely to look at them. Yet on the other hand they are not before us “on the surface of things.” They are not obvious to us but hidden, concealed. These possibilities must be cultivated, and for Diamond it is the work of the philosopher to bring out these possibilities.

Richard Eldridge tackles the question of description in the *Philosophical Investigations* in a slightly different, but I think related, way. In *Leading a Human Life* he argues that what Wittgenstein is after in the *Investigations* is to show the constant desire in human life to search for answers, and how this desire always unravels itself when it tries to answer these desires in the form of theoretical knowledge. “Philosophy – leading words back to their complex lives in culture – is this drive, this activity, not its rational completion under doctrine.”⁵⁶ Philosophy isn’t the answer to these problems, it is the asking and re-asking itself of the problems. “In

⁵⁵ Ibid., 313. This could serve as a motto for this work.

⁵⁶ Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, intentionality, and romanticism* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1997), 118.

enabling us to overhear these struggles, the text of *Philosophical Investigations* offers us, dramatically, what Bouveresse has called ‘a narrow path that passes between predication and nonsense’ in thinking all at once about human conceptual consciousness, self-conscious self-identity, spontaneity, expressive power, and value – the way of *poesis*.⁵⁷ That philosophy should be related to poetry will show up again when we discuss Nietzsche and when we get to the discussion of possibility. But it should already come as no surprise that Eldridge would make such a connection. For if philosophy is to be descriptive, but descriptive in such a way that is creative, adventurous, and not “mere” description in the sense of a photograph, then poetry provides an easy metaphor. In poetry we have a use of language which is not nonsense (unless it is nonsense poetry, which itself plays a certain revelatory role about the grammar of our language) but which is also not strictly descriptive in the way of the *Tractatus*. Eldridge’s point, though, is that this poetry is used to enact the struggle that goes on in philosophy. Here the *Investigations* are not a solution but a dialogue, akin to Plato’s discussions though perhaps even more open ended than these, if Plato can be said to advance theses. “No thesis about the nature of conceptual consciousness is proven in this itinerary. Yet we are enabled, through tracing its progress, to acknowledge what we perhaps ineluctably are.”⁵⁸ This should sound

⁵⁷ Ibid., 120. Eldridge quotes from J. Bouveresse, “‘The darkness of this time’: Wittgenstein and the Modern World,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 28 (1990), 11–39.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 154.

strange; why must we be “enabled” to acknowledge what we are? Well, as we have seen already, we are often blinded to that which is closest to us. Here we can already hear an echo of Nietzsche’s proclamation to “become who you are!” Becoming what we are and acknowledging what we are go hand in hand, and yet they are things which do not necessarily happen automatically and which must be made possible. As Diamond said, the possibilities only yield themselves under pressure.

Eldridge believes that what Wittgenstein shows us is that the description can provide this pressure. Description reveals to us two things simultaneously; on the one hand it reveals a great variety of possibilities which have been passed over by us, while at the same time showing that these possibilities are not grounded on anything theoretical or metaphysical. To steal another Wittgensteinian phrase, they are merely there, like our lives.⁵⁹ So Eldridge tells us that in *Philosophical Investigations* §§66–142 we find that “we are no longer to attempt to give an absolute account of the metaphysical facts that create sense and conceptual consciousness *uberhaupt*. Instead, the task of philosophy, or its successor, is more simply to *describe* the varieties of meaningful utterance that are available to us within our language games as we

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein uses this phrase to speak of language games and the way that they are not grounded. This point is not disconnected from the one I am making. “You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life.” Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §559.

have them, with no further moves toward any deeper grounding of them.”⁶⁰ Yet is description satisfying? That is, does description fulfill our desires, quiet the need for answers and give meaning where meaning appears to be absent? Apparently, it does not. We want more than descriptions, and therefore constantly attempt to push past descriptions and look for their ground. For Eldridge, the *Investigations* (at least part I) is itself a picture of this desire. We take some feature of human life, describe it, and then ask, “does this satisfy our longing for self-unity?” The answer is – no. It does not, and because it does not we either return once again to explanations, theories, metaphysics – that is, to PPS – or we (re)learn to experience our world as uncanny. “The *Philosophical Investigations* is itself a perspicuous representation, a survey of cases, of our various temptations to sublime our ability to use language into *theoretical knowledge of something*, in such a way that our anxieties might be stilled. It tracks how these temptations arise, mutate, and come to exhaustion rather than satisfaction.”⁶¹ In light of this, I want to add: the problem with turning our ability to use language into theoretical knowledge is precisely that it closes off the variety of possibilities that are meant to be pressured out. Instead of living amidst the great variety of human possibilities, theoretical knowledge sanctions just one perspective, and therefore one possibility, as *the* human possibility.

If philosophy does not set out to solve these problems, does not set out to provide a

⁶⁰ Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life*, 175.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

theoretical framework from which to view the world (and even grasp the world), then it must be after something else. As we have seen over and over again, it is this that Wittgenstein wants to emphasize with respect to description. But then description could, instead of solve the problems (theoretical philosophy), or cure us of the problems (therapeutical philosophy), or even clarify the problems (contemplative philosophy), go farther and *intensify* the problems.⁶²

It is this that M.J. Bowles sees in Wittgenstein, and why he thinks there is a similarity between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche.⁶³ As I said in the first section of this chapter, it would be strange to think of Wittgenstein as doing something purely therapeutic in the *Philosophical Investigations*, since he seems to infect his reader with precisely the problems he would then have to go on to cure. If he is, instead, attempting to *intensify* the problems, his overloading the reader with examples begins to make sense as part of the project he sets out for himself. “It seems that the analyses contained within the pages of the *Philosophical Investigations* are not, as is so commonly assumed, looking for meaning, but for its collapse: we are being propelled toward meaninglessness. But why? What value is there in that?” He adds a few paragraphs later, “The

⁶² “Wittgenstein is proceeding in the opposite direction from Descartes. He is not analyzing in order to solve problems, but is quite clearly trying to intensify them.” M.J. Bowles, “The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 26 (2003), 21.

⁶³ “The river that runs through the *Philosophical Investigations* is the pulse of practice: life renews itself when it breaks down. A very similar river flows in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche was one of the first to insist that there is not only one response to slowdown and collapse. It is not necessary that life responds by creating yet another version of the ascetic ideal such that it find fresh delight in overcoming what it was. The remarkable claim of the *Philosophical Investigations*, however, is that the ability to break out of vicious circles is as common as the ability to speak language.” Ibid., 24.

claim that lies at the heart of the methodology of the *Philosophical Investigations* is that difference is only generated with the collapse of meaning. We need to break down, to become lost, if we are to wave goodbye to where we were. What Wittgenstein attempts to reveal is that the collapse of meaning, far from being the collapse of language, is in fact part of language's rhythm."⁶⁴ For Bowles, Wittgenstein, like Nietzsche, propels us towards meaninglessness precisely so that we can then begin again, with a fresh and perhaps novel perspective on our own lives and our own possibilities. Life and language are fully capable of supplying and revealing these possibilities, but "Life will only generate difference if there is a palpable need for it."⁶⁵ Metaphysics, theoretical explanations, and PPS are all attempts to deal with meaninglessness and therefore are part of human life. They fail, but because they play this role in our lives their failure itself is revealing, and it is for this reason that Wittgenstein can recognize that there is something deep and important at work there.

What Diamond, Eldridge, and Bowles all emphasize in their different ways is the existential component of Wittgenstein's philosophy. His questions are not removed from the way we live, and pace the insistence among the contemplative Wittgensteinians, philosophy should have a personal, existential effect both on the philosopher and on her readers. Genia Schönbaumsfeld continues this reading of Wittgenstein in *A Confusion of the Spheres*, where she

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 23.

writes, “Neither Kierkegaard nor Wittgenstein is concerned with combating a philosophical theory in order to replace it with another, but rather with undermining the philosophical misapprehensions that stand in the way of seeing that what we take to be the only available alternatives, are in fact a set of false dichotomies.”⁶⁶ Of course, the contemplatives would have no argument here. But Schönbaumsfeld makes explicit that she disagrees with Phillips about the difference between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. For Schönbaumsfeld, “Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard both desire the kind of reader for whom, ideally, philosophical clarity *would* lead to *existential* clarity, that is, to a breakdown of the distinction between a “contemplative” and a “partisan” conception of philosophy.”⁶⁷ In this sense Wittgenstein is trying to change things, to meddle, but the direction of the change is internal and not external. Wittgenstein wants to change his readers – as well as himself. That is why “Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)”⁶⁸ Wittgenstein said he was unable to teach his students anything unless they were willing to go through the same work that he went through, through the same struggles. This is so, because the point of the philosophical

⁶⁶ Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁸ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 24e.

labor is about the changed perception, and this is difficult and personal.⁶⁹ Would this be the case if the point of philosophy was to describe things, giving clarity for the sake of clarity? It is in comments like these that a strict contemplative reading seems to fall short. Schönbaumsfeld continues, “[Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein] believe that their philosophical authorship is more akin to an *artistic* rather than a scientific endeavour, for, contrary to science, where results can be given without attention to the way in which one gives them, in Kierkegaard’s and Wittgenstein’s work there is an *internal* relation between form and content – it is impossible to have one without the other.”⁷⁰ It is this “existential” reading of Wittgenstein that I wish to pursue, and which lends itself to a comparison with Nietzsche. For as we shall see, Nietzsche too thinks that we should think of the philosopher as more artistic than scientific, and it is to this that we now turn.

⁶⁹ Cf. Cavell, “The Investigations exhibits, as purely as any work in philosophy I know, a philosophizing as a spiritual struggle, specifically a struggle within the contrary depths of oneself, which in the modern world will present themselves as touches of madness.” Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson and Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Living Batch Press, 1989), 37.

⁷⁰ Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion...*, 55.

Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Artistic Philosophy

In what amounts to a striking contrast to this Welsh, “contemplative” version of Wittgenstein’s philosophy lies Nietzsche’s self-professed philosophy as art. Daniel Touey writes about Nietzsche’s endeavor that,

These notions disturb the traditional idea of what philosophy is by denying two key rationalist assumptions: the first, that there is a strict boundary between the creative, non-epistemic practices of the arts and the theoretical, explanatory nature of philosophy; the second, what has always been taken for granted by philosophers – that knowledge is good for its own sake. Nietzsche’s refusal to concede these basic philosophical principles has a certain debunking charm; he appeals, perhaps, to our best negative instincts.¹

Nietzsche, throughout his writings, blurs the line between the creative enterprise of art and the role of philosophy. His aim is not to give us “objective,” disinterested facts, but to create something new – new possibilities and new values. Yet Nietzsche’s relationship to art and contemplation is by no means unambiguous or obviously straightforward. A survey of Nietzsche’s remarks on both contemplation and art shows what is some mixture of the following: (1) outright contradiction, (2) a shift in his thinking from an “early” period to a “late” (reminiscent of Wittgenstein), (3) not only an early and late period but a series of “stages” or movement, and (4) a subtle, nuanced relationship to the two.

¹ Daniel Touey, “Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on the Nature and Limits of Philosophy,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 32 (1998), 243–252, 243.

The first and second of these four possibilities are closely related, since in either case the possibility of finding a unified position for Nietzsche on art and contemplation is abandoned. On the one hand we shouldn't be surprised to find such a situation with Nietzsche. He is not, after all, even trying to give a systematic or unified account of his philosophy, let alone of concepts like art and contemplation. That Nietzsche might in one context emphasize a point about art which in another context is rejected is to be expected. Yet I think there is something more here than mere contradiction with respect to contexts. In Nietzsche (unlike in Wittgenstein), we do not find a self-identified "turn" in his own philosophy.² Nietzsche is insistent throughout his writings that there is a continuity from early to late. And while he does recognize shifts in his thinking, they are of a piece, showing what he considers to be one continuous project and orientation. Thus if there is an inconsistency it is one which Nietzsche is blind to. On the other hand, just what it is that is continuous or consistent is up for grabs, which means that we may in fact have some mixture of 3 and 4. In other words, if what is continuous is not a particular doctrine or position but rather a *question*, then Nietzsche's work can be both continuous *and* "contradictory," but only if we, the reader, try to make something of

² This should be read without implying that Wittgenstein's work is so easily broken into 2 distinct sections, yet at the very least Wittgenstein *does* make an explicit distinction between his later project and certain features of the *Tractatus*. E.g., *Philosophical Investigations*, §23. Nietzsche *does* do something like this with respect to his relationship with Wagner (and Schopenhauer), and this shows up in how he views his earlier work. *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance, was largely devoted to Wagner, but Nietzsche does not disown these early works – only their reliance on Wagner himself. Nietzsche believes he was mistaken about Wagner, but not in the conceptual points he makes.

Nietzsche's work which isn't intended.

The chapter will proceed as follows: First, a discussion of Nietzsche's (complicated) relationship to perspectivism, moving from early to late (and back again), followed by two mirrored discussions of first contemplation, and second of the philosopher as artistic creator.

2.1 Nietzsche's Perspectivism (in brief)

Along with the will-to-power, Nietzsche's so-called "perspectivism" has dominated Nietzsche research for much of the last 100 years. More recent attention has turned to other aspects of Nietzsche's work, but the fascination with his "doctrine of perspectivism" remains. And like with most topics in Nietzsche research, there is no shortage of "perspectives" of just what perspectivism (sometimes: perspectivalism) is all about. On the one hand it is championed by those who wish to emphasize a radical relativism in Nietzsche's work, and on the other it is seen as a problem to be overcome for those who emphasize a more naturalistic and/or realistic reading of Nietzsche. There is, moreover, a considerable amount of literature dedicated to overcoming the "paradox of perspectivism." This paradox (or more accurately, dilemma) can be summarized as follows:

Perspectivism appears never to be true, and as such it is self-defeating. A simple version is stated thusly:

if perspectivism is always true, then there is at least one statement – perspectivism – that is absolutely

true. If so, then absolutism is true and perspectivism is false. On the other hand, if perspectivism is perspectively true, then sometimes it is false, and where it is false, absolutism is true. Again, absolutism is true and perspectivism is false. Either way, it appears perspectivism is never true.³

Once again, there are no shortages of responses to this dilemma. The options seem to fall roughly into the following positions: (1) Nietzsche does not advocate a positive theory of truth, a doctrine of truth, or a doctrine of perspectivism. Therefore, there is no “position” here to contradict itself or to provide a dilemma.⁴ (2) Nietzsche takes different views at different times, and the dilemma is only related to one particular period in Nietzsche’s thought, and not to his final “mature” position.⁵ (Similar to option 3 in this chapters introduction.) (3) Embrace both that Nietzsche does in fact propose a theory of truth and perspectivism and try to show why it is not susceptible to the dilemma.⁶

³ See Rex Welshon, “Skepticism, Antirealism, and Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Epistemology”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 37 (2009), 23–43. It is Welshon who also points out that we should not refer to this as a paradox so much as a dilemma, since strictly speaking it is not obviously self-contradictory in its formulation, but instead a logical consequence of its premises.

⁴ Advocates of this position include Ken Gemes and Christoph Cox. See Ken Gemes, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992), 47–65, and Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵ For representatives of this view see Robert Nola, “Nietzsche’s Theory of Truth and Belief,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47 (1987), 525–562; Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1983); idem, “Nietzsche: Truth and Knowledge,” in *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Babette Babich and Robert Cohen (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 25–38; James Conant, “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I,” *Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2005) and idem, “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, II,” *Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2006).

⁶ Maudemarie Clark, Peter Poellner, and R. Lanier Anderson all valiantly take up this task. See R. Lanier Anders, “Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism,” *Synthese* 115 (1998), 1–32; idem, “Nietzsche’s View on Truth and the Kantian Background of His Epistemology,” in *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Babich and Cohen, 47–60; Peter Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996); idem, “Causation and Force in

The most compelling of these options, so far as I can see, falls roughly within the second option. Nietzsche holds a variety of related, though different, positions on the nature of truth and knowledge. But it is the continuity of his question that is of primary interest. In other words, we must stop and ask “to what question does Nietzsche propose the “answer” of perspectivism?” What problem does Nietzsche think can be solved, analyzed, understood, or at the very least wrestled with by recourse to this metaphor? And the answer to this question, I think, must be: the problem of noumena and phenomena, reality and appearance, world and mind. If Hume wakes Kant from his dogmatic slumber, we could say that Kant (via Schopenhauer) wakes Nietzsche. One way of understanding perspectivism, then, is to see it as a (i.e., one possible) metaphor for understanding this relationship. Nietzsche’s answer(s) to this question of the relationship between noumena and phenomena changes throughout his lifetime, but his interest in wrestling with this question does not. It is for this reason that I claim that the continuity of Nietzsche’s work is a continuity of question but not necessarily a continuity of doctrine. Put this way, it is no surprise that we find such vastly different “positions” in Nietzsche. What we see in Nietzsche is the process itself of working through the question.

This is the first piece of Nietzsche’s continuity. But a second explains Nietzsche’s

Nietzsche,” in *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science*, 287–97; Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).

contempt for so many of his contemporaries. It is not merely that so many philosophers, artists, scientists, and so on misunderstand the problem. This is a problem to be sure, but not necessarily one to respond to with such contempt. After all, if Nietzsche's position changes, then we should find cases of Nietzsche turning on his younger self in contempt – and yet just the opposite is the case. Nietzsche continually praises himself (a glance at *Ecce Homo* is enough to appreciate this). No, Nietzsche's objection is to the *attitude* to which his contemporaries have responded to this problem. They have all, almost to a person, continued on as if nothing had happened. But for Nietzsche, to live in the face of this realization means to make a radical shift in one's life, and in our culture. Everything must be re-valued, since the basis for our values is gone. Even when Nietzsche's position with respect to the problem changes, Nietzsche *always* sees it as a problem which must be faced, head on, and descended into and worked through. It isn't to be toyed with or played with, and it cannot be ignored. It is the *apathetic response*, in the face of this sea-change, of his contemporaries that he continually rejects throughout his work.

If Nietzsche takes a variety of positions in response to the Kantian (or, as James Conant calls it, the pseudo-Kantian) problem, it still remains that he *does* in fact take positions. And to appreciate the movement that Nietzsche takes, then, it is necessary to map out these positions. One fortunate result of this process is that we will be able to see, at the end of it, why there are

so many perspectives and interpretations of Nietzsche. If we pick one “stage” in this movement and become convinced, for whatever reasons, that this is the “correct” interpretation of Nietzsche, then we use this stage as the interpretive lens through which to read the other stages. This has been the history of Nietzsche interpretation. Depending on the interpreter’s interests, she may pick the early material through which to understand the latter, the latter through which to understand the middle, and so on. The stage or movement reading of Nietzsche, however, has the advantage of letting each of the stages speak for itself, and only later to attempt to give coherence to the whole.

One final orienting question remains before we dive in to the stages themselves. We know now what problem Nietzsche thinks can be wrestled with through perspectivism; but where does the concept of perspectivism *itself* come from? What is the history of this concept, and does this play a role in Nietzsche’s use of it? The answer to the last of these questions is not necessarily yes; it would clearly be a fallacy to assume that a contemporary application of “perspective” will always invoke the history of the term. But in Nietzsche’s case I think the answer must be yes, since the history of the term is so closely related to the very theme of this chapter and to another of Nietzsche’s favorite references: art – and more specifically, painting.⁷ The term ‘perspective’ can be traced back to a technique in Renaissance art, which in

⁷ I am immensely indebted to James Conant’s paper(s), “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I-II,” for what follows. I

its earliest stage attempted to put three-dimensional objects onto two-dimensional surfaces. Think, for instance, of the ubiquitous cube drawing, with two squares overlapping and joined at their angles by line segments. Etymologically, “*Perspectiva* is a Latin word which means ‘seeing through’.”⁸ Thus, with the cube, we are able to see inside the cube, through its “walls.” A house or church represented in perspective art, then, would be a house or church drawn in such a way that the viewer could see not only the outside walls of the building, and moreover not only into the building as through a window, but into the building as though the walls themselves were windows, yet while at the same time attempting to faithfully represent the existence and place of the walls themselves.

This interest quickly developed into another, though closely related interest; namely, to represent to the viewer what an object would look like *from a particular angle or vantage point* – what we commonly think of as a “perspective.” Far from being a radical relativism, then, perspectivism in its artistic genesis is an attempt to *faithfully* represent reality as seen from a particular perspective. Art historian Ernst Gombrich, for instance, writes, “One cannot insist enough that the art of perspective aims at correct equation: It wants the image to appear like

will attempt to do in a few pages what he does in over 100. Those interested in a fuller account should seek this essay out.

⁸ Albrecht Dürer, *Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. Konrad Lange and Franz Fuhse (Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 319.

the object and the object like the image.”⁹ Perspectivism in its earliest formulation was not about calling our epistemic capacities into doubt, but was an attempt to come up with an objective technique for representing objects, as they appear to subjects, from a particular vantage point and angle. And it is “this interplay of mutually interdependent moments of objectivity and subjectivity that makes it both such an attractive and such a treacherous metaphor for philosophy.”¹⁰

Leibniz picked up on the metaphor:

It is true that the same thing may be represented in different ways; but there must always be an exact relation between the representation and the thing, and consequently between the different representations of one and the same thing. The projections in perspective of the conic sections of the circle show that one and the same circle may be represented by an ellipse, a parabola and a hyperbola, and even by another circle, a straight line and a point. Nothing appears so different nor so dissimilar as these figures; and yet there is an exact relation between each point and every other point. Thus one must allow that each soul represents the universe to itself according to its point of view, and through a relation peculiar to it; but a perfect harmony subsists therein.¹¹

Leibniz’ version, related to his monadology, stays fairly close to the original application of

⁹ Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Pantheon: New York, 1960), 254, 259. Of course, as Conant points out, art historians debate this nearly as much as philosophers. So Nelson Goodman, arguing that perspective is just a convention and novelty, writes, “Perspective provides no absolute or independent position or standard of fidelity.” Nelson Goodman, *The Language of Art* (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1976), 19.

¹⁰ Conant, “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I,” 13.

¹¹ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. E.M. Huggard (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952), §357.

“perspective” as seen in art. Leibniz’ view is not that this perspectival nature of representation forces upon us a break down in our epistemic relationship to the world, but rather that it is part of a coherent and understandable whole. Reality is the totality of all these interrelated perspectives as they relate to one another. And although Nietzsche is critical of Leibniz at times (especially, for instance, in his idea that this is the “best of all possible worlds”), he never specifically criticizes Leibniz on this point. Moreover, Nietzsche praises Leibniz’ insight that there is more to us than our self-consciousness would lead us to think. One way of putting this, in the light of this conversation, is that our “perspective” is only one piece of the total set of relationships that make us who we are, and not a very significant piece at that.¹² This does not mean, of course, that Nietzsche adopts Leibniz’ model of perspectivism. Far from it. But it does alert us to two important features of the debate: (1) There is no obvious or self-evident way of using the metaphor of perspectivism. What it has come to mean in contemporary debates is in direct contrast to Leibniz’ use of it, and there is nothing in the concept itself which dictates to us how it is to be used. “[Leibniz’ way] is at least as natural a way of unpacking the philosophical metaphor here at issue as the presently fashionable way – one that takes itself to

¹² For instance, Nietzsche writes, “First, *Leibniz*’s incomparable insight that has been vindicated not only against Descartes but also against everyone who had philosophized before him - that consciousness (*Bewußtheit*) is merely an *accidens* of the power of representation (*Vorstellung*) and *not* its necessary and essential attribute; so that what we call consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) constitutes only one state of our spiritual and psychic world (perhaps a sick state) and *by no means the whole of it* - is there something German to this idea, the profundity of which has not been exhausted to this day?” GS §357.

be ineluctably driven to the opposite conclusion: namely, that our differing epistemic points of view on the world are necessarily radically incommensurable.”¹³ (2) What Nietzsche objects to therefore is not Leibniz’ use of perspectivism in a philosophical sense, but rather to Leibniz’ *attitude* toward the problem. Leibniz, like Kant and all the other German philosophers, doesn’t take the problem seriously enough. For Leibniz it is an intellectual puzzle, one which does not force him to critically rethink values, and ultimately lets Leibniz conclude that we are in the best of all possible worlds.

It is the objective (and we might say, contemplative) spirit that Leibniz adopts in his investigation that Nietzsche finds so infuriating, and has him write about the *objective* philosopher and scholar,

“*Je ne méprise presque rien*,” he says with Leibniz: that *presque* should not be overlooked or underestimated!

He is no paragon of humanity; he does not go in front of anyone or behind. In general, he puts himself at too great a distance to have any basis for choosing between good or evil. If people have mistaken him for a *philosopher* for so long, for a Caesar-like man who cultivates and breeds, for the brutal man of culture – then they have paid him much too high an honor and overlooked what is most essential about him, – he is a tool, a piece of slave (although, without a doubt, the most sublime type of slave) but nothing in himself, – *Presque rien*! The objective person is a tool, an expensive measuring instrument and piece of mirror art that is easily injured and spoiled and should be honored and protected; but he is not a goal, not a departure or a fresh start, he is not the sort of complementary person in which the *rest* of existence

¹³ Conant, “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I,” 16.

justifies itself. He is not a conclusion – and still less a beginning, begetter or first cause; there is nothing tough, powerful or self-supporting that wants to dominate. Rather, he is only a gentle, brushed-off, refined, agile pot of forms, who first has to wait for some sort of content or substance in order “to shape” himself accordingly, – he is generally a man without substance or content, a “selfless” man. And consequently, *in parenthesi*, nothing for women. (BGE, §207)

Allowing for his sexism for a moment, Nietzsche is clear: this is no way to be a man. The objective scholar who seeks to offend no one is himself *not* a philosopher but merely a tool to be used by those more fitting of the title. But this is a theme that we will return to in the following sections. Before doing so, however, we have finally arrived at the point of outlining the “stages” of Nietzsche’s perspectivism.

The stages of perspectivism we find in Nietzsche follow a movement from the pseudo-Kantian problem of disparity between noumena and phenomena. Using the metaphor of perspectivism to understand the gravity of this problem, the following options are available (and we can see how these “stages” in Nietzsche mirror the various options other philosophers have adopted in response to this problem as well).

(1) Stage one: Some features of experience are perspectival, other features are not.

Primary qualities (shape, size, etc) are subject-independent (i.e., objective);

secondary qualities (color, smell, etc) are subject-dependent (i.e., subjective).

Although it is not necessary to take this evaluative step, in stage one perspectivism

the objective is almost always given primacy of place over the subjective. Subjective knowledge fails to measure up to objective.

(2) Stage two: All features of experience are perspectival, except for one “correct”

perspective. Here the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is gone; size, shape, and so on are just as subject dependent as color – *except* where we have access to the one perspective that is not distorted. Nietzsche often criticizes Christianity for this, but it also applies to philosophy (Plato) and science (certain forms of naturalism).

(3) Stage three: All perspectives are equally distorting, there is no one “correct”

perspective. However, the “thing-in-itself” still remains as a limit concept which makes the concept of perspective itself meaningful. Perspectives are perspectives *on* something, even if we can never have access to the vague “something” itself. Nietzsche thinks this is Kantianism, though it is perhaps best described as pseudo-Kantianism (via Schopenhauer).

(4) Stage four: The idea of a thing-in-itself is incoherent. If we can never have access to it, it is meaningless to speak of it. There are only perspectives and every perspective is just as good as any other.

Stages 1-3 share at least one thing in common: they are all in one sense or another varieties of

realism. There is a “real,” objective world which is the measure against which our perspectives are judged. Some perspectives are distorting, others are not, and it is the “real” world which causes this to be the case. Stage 4, however, is fully non-realist. There are only perspectives, and the only thing that perspectives can be perspectives “on” are other perspectives. Conant writes about this final stage,

If we allow that there is no correcting for distortions of perspective and we continue to insist on the aforementioned other features of the ordinary grammar of the original concept, then we are pushed to the conclusion that no sense can be made of the idea that perspectives are perspectives on anything that is not itself a perspective. But what we have here then is no longer anything that should evidently be taken to be even a metaphorical extension of our original concept. What we have is a word in search of a meaning, figuring in a set of utterances made by someone who wants to continue to use the word ‘perspective’, even though all of the connections with its original grammar have, one by one, gradually been severed... This can appear to be the unavoidable outcome of the dialectic of perspectivism. It can therefore appear – as it does, for awhile, to Nietzsche himself – to involve a failure of philosophical nerve to fail to think matters all the way through to the end and acknowledge that such a skeptical conclusion is the inevitable endpoint towards which all one’s previous philosophical reflections on this topic were tending.¹⁴

Actually, Nietzsche *always* thinks it is a failure of nerve to not think this question through to the end. On this point he does not only think so “for awhile.” But this “for awhile” refers to his

¹⁴ Conant, “The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I,” 34.

final resting place. Nietzsche does not end with stage four. Rather, Nietzsche recognizes that stage four is incoherent – and yet, he returns there again and again, as the logic of what he takes to be the Kantian problem pushes him there again and again. The problem with much (though certainly not all) of the Nietzsche scholarship is that it bypasses any discussion of these stages and assumes that perspectivism refers roughly to stage four. At times Nietzsche seems to swing back to something like stage two. For much of his life he spent moving back and forth between some version of stages three and four. His consistency is in his insistence that this is not a question that one can turn her back on. It cannot be taken lightly.

So where does Nietzsche finally end up? Perhaps the dialectic would have continued if he had not broken down, but there does seem to be an “answer” to the problem in the last of his mature writings. Hints of his solution can be found throughout his works – the dialectic consistently got close to a solution while always circling back on the question – but by the time we reach his last writings he seems to have settled in. According to Conant, that final realization is this: “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.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Conant, “Dialectic of Perspectivism, II,” 46.

Knowledge and experience are perspectival, but this is, on Nietzsche's later view, no criticism. Of course they are – what else would they be? The perspectival nature of experience is not due to some lack of ability on our part but simply the way beings like us experience and understand the world. And, moreover, these perspectives do *not* involve “irremediable distortion.”¹⁶ Perspectives are always in principle correctable with respect to other perspectives, not because any other perspective is the one “correct” perspective (as in stage two perspectivism), but because any other perspective is in principle a *correcting* perspective.¹⁷ He is therefore able to affirm both that there are features of experience which are perspective- and subject-dependent, *and* that these features are not “second-class.” They are not failures with respect to a subject-independent form of knowing, since this form of knowing is nonsensical to begin with. In affirming this, he has rejected the dichotomy that gets the stages of perspectivism started. There is no longer any need to “slide” along the stages, since the idea of purging our view of reality of any subjective elements is rejected at the outset. Thus Conant adds in a footnote, “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

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ingolf Dalferth has suggested that we need only two perspectives to make sense of the “perspectival” metaphor, agreeing with Nietzsche that we do not need a perspective-less “thing-in-itself.” I think we need, perhaps, at least *three* perspectives, since with two alone we always stand in need of some way to distinguish between the two.

equally revelatory of genuine aspects of the world in which we live.”¹⁸

Nietzsche does not suggest, then, that we throw objectivity to the wind and adopt a radical relativism. To affirm something like this is to stay in stage four perspectivism. Nor, contra some contemporary readings of Nietzsche as a full blown naturalist, does Nietzsche argue that science gives us the “correct” perspective – this is to return to stage two perspectivism. Rather, Nietzsche argues that if we actually want to be objective, we have to recognize the *subjective* character of so much knowledge. Pretending that knowledge is best only when it is subject-independent is, perhaps ironically, a rather *un-objective* view of knowledge. Objectivity for Nietzsche thus becomes a collecting of perspectives. The more perspectives one is able to appreciate, the greater the objectivity one has on whatever is in question. But gaining perspectives meaning coming to see things from other angles, from perspectives that one does not necessarily or naturally hold. And to do this, one must develop a technique for representing things both to oneself and to others as they are from these perspectives – something, as we have seen, the perspective movement in art precisely set out to do.

¹⁸ Conant, “Dialectic of Perspectivism, II,” 46n.

2.2 Nietzsche and Contemplation

Before continuing on with Nietzsche's view of art, a brief intermission is in order. Given what we have discussed in the first chapter, a comparison of Nietzsche's thoughts on contemplation, with Wittgenstein in mind, follows. As has already been pointed out, if Wittgenstein's ideal is a certain "coolness," Nietzsche desires heat. He writes about himself, "Light to all on which I seize, / ashen everything I leave: / Flame am I most certainly!"¹⁹ Nietzsche is not after coolness, seeing himself as a destroyer (if not also a creator), and he is not about to "leave everything as it is." But for Nietzsche, perhaps surprisingly, the distinction is not between contemplative philosophy and some other way of doing philosophy. Rather, the distinction he draws is usually that between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*. It is this distinction, between the contemplative *life* and the active *life* that Nietzsche emphasizes. And although he will have some harsh things to say about "contemplatives," he almost always includes himself and those like him in this group. When he speaks of the *vita contemplativa* he speaks of "we contemplative ones."

After *The Birth of Tragedy* and once Nietzsche had turned fully toward philosophy and away from philology, he wrote a series of "untimely meditations" followed by *Human, all too*

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

Human. In this work Nietzsche makes hardly any mention of contemplation at all, except to point out that disinterested contemplation is impossible.²⁰ Although he has nothing more to say about the topic in this volume, it is interesting partly due to the absence of contemplation as a topic, and in the seemingly low evaluation of art that is paired with it throughout *HH*. Yet in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche's work which immediately follows *HH* by only a year, he has a lengthy section on the *vita contemplativa*. Here Nietzsche makes it clear that he has in mind himself and those like him when he speaks of this life.²¹ Of particular interest are those types that Nietzsche categorizes within the contemplative type: religious, artist, philosopher, and scientist are *all together* varieties of the contemplative type. In all of these cases, the contemplative is set off from the *vita activa*, the active or practical life. This has important implications, since it means that whatever else Nietzsche says about the religious person, or the philosopher, or the artist, or even the scientist, he sees them as in some sense sharing a particular way of living, one which is contrasted with the active life. And in all of these cases, except that of the scientist,

²⁰ Cf., "Historical philosophy, on the other hand, which can no longer be separated from natural science, the youngest of all philosophical methods, has discovered in individual cases (and this will probably be the result in every case) that there are no opposites, except in the customary exaggeration of popular or metaphysical interpretations, and that a mistake in reasoning lies at the bottom of this antithesis: according to this explanation there exists, strictly speaking, neither an unegoistic action nor completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations, in which the basic element seems almost to have dispersed and reveals itself only under the most painstaking observation." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 12.

²¹ The section begins, "Let us, as men of the *vita contemplativa*, not forget..." Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark & Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 28–29.

the contemplative type has done a disservice to the active type. The religious person seeks to inhibit the life of the active type, the artist is overbearing and generally a bother to be around (although their works bring pleasure), and the philosopher joins these two powers together (the religious and artistic) while at the same time adding dialectics. The end result, so thinks Nietzsche, is that they bring about the same evils as the other two types, with the additional trouble of being boring.

The scientist version of the contemplative life, on the other hand, has had a more or less positive effect on the active type. Nietzsche continues,

The thinkers and the workers in science; they have rarely aimed at producing effects but have dug away quietly under their mole-hills. They have thus caused little annoyance or discomfort, and often, as objects of mockery and laughter, have without desiring it even alleviated the life of the men of the *vita activa*. Science has, moreover, become something very useful to everyone: if *on account of this utility* very many predestined for the *vita activa* now, in the sweat of their brow and not without brain-racking and imprecations, beat out for themselves a path to science, this distress is not the fault of the host of thinkers and workers in science; it is 'self-inflicted pain'.²²

The active type is drawn to science, is even tempted to abandon the active life for the contemplative life, because science offers utility to activity. Is this the version of contemplation that Nietzsche advocates? It is true that HH and D both emphasize the

²² Ibid.

importance of science, particularly the natural sciences, for any adequate understanding of knowledge in the modern age. But to take from this that “we contemplatives” are to be like scientists – that is a mistake. Look at the way Nietzsche describes scientists: “they have rarely aimed at producing effects but have dug away quietly under their mole-hills.” If anything, this is the closest of the four contemplative types to the Wittgensteinian view of “not meddling,” and “leaving everything as it is.” (And it is worth noting here that what Phillips and others are now calling “Contemplative Philosophy,” is itself but one possible way of being contemplative. “Contemplation” and the *vita contemplativa* are broader than “contemplative philosophy” so-called.) Moreover, utility for the active type is itself no criterion of value. The title of the section here is “*towards an evaluation of the vita contemplativa*.” The worth of the *vita contemplativa*, however, cannot be judged based on its usefulness to *another* type. It is for this reason that Nietzsche frames the discussion as one of warning; it is as if he is saying, “Dear contemplatives: be careful!”

It is in the *Gay Science* that Nietzsche turns most to the contemplatives, and he is not sparing in his criticism. In a section entitled “*Delusion of the contemplative ones*,” Nietzsche addresses the problem. Again, like in the previous works, there is nothing inherently bad about being a contemplative. On the contrary, Nietzsche seems to stay fairly tamely within the philosophical tradition in seeing the contemplative life as the “higher” life. He opens the

section by telling us that, “Higher human beings distinguish themselves from the lower by seeing and hearing, and *thoughtfully* seeing and hearing, immeasurably more – and just this distinguishes human beings from animals, and the higher animals from the lower.”²³ This reflection makes the contemplatives both happier and unhappier than they would otherwise be, by imposing a kind of self-reflected relationship to our own lives. The problem is the aforementioned “delusion,” which “remains his constant companion: he thinks himself placed as *spectator* and *listener* before the great visual and acoustic play that is life; he calls his nature *contemplative* and thereby overlooks the fact that he is also the actual poet and ongoing author of life – that, to be sure, he differs greatly from the *actor* of this drama, the so-called man of action, but even more so from a mere spectator and festival visitor *in front of* the stage.”²⁴ This is related to the distinction we have seen Nietzsche make earlier. The distinction is *not* primarily one of art and contemplation, but of contemplation and action. In calling oneself “contemplative,” the temptation (the delusion) is to think that this somehow distances the contemplative from creativity, artistic expression, and invention. The contemplative is not an “actor” but neither is she a spectator.²⁵ To believe this is to accept the delusion as truth. And what is the artistic, creative side of the contemplative doing? Giving value to the world, which

²³ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 170.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ When we speak of the “actor,” it is very difficult to keep “one who does things” separate in English from “one who plays a role.” See note 45 of this chapter.

is in one sense a creation of the world itself:

Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less – but has rather been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and granters! Only we have created the world *that concerns human beings!* But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we catch it for a moment we have forgotten it the next: we misjudge our best power and underestimate ourselves just a bit, we contemplative ones. We are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we could be.²⁶

According to Nietzsche, the contemplative ones miss out on this fact about themselves: that they are the ones creating the world that is relevant to human beings. The value that we find in the world is always a *given* value; it is not there to be discovered except and insofar as someone has already given it value by valuing it.

But why have the contemplative ones missed this seemingly obvious feature of our world? One answer comes earlier in GS, where Nietzsche picks up a theme common throughout his work. Namely, that religion has – until now – so dominated the contemplative life that it has been hard to imagine one without the other. Religion is but one of the possible contemplative types, and yet the religious contemplative has, perhaps since the Greeks, taken center stage, and so much so that it has been dangerous to even consider other contemplative possibilities. And so the philosopher, the artist, and the scientist, each of whom would in principle pursue their own version of contemplation, have succumbed to the religious type. He

²⁶ Ibid.

writes, “The time is past when the Church had a monopoly on contemplation, when the *vita contemplativa* always had to be first and foremost a *vita religiosa* and everything built by the Church gives expression to that idea.”²⁷ This is troubling for Nietzsche since it means that rather than contemplate this world, our human world, the contemplatives have contemplated *another* world separate from our own, and in so doing devalued our world. This relates to Nietzsche’s ongoing critique of religion that it is life-denying and pessimistic insofar as it turns our most natural and basic drives into “sins” to be overcome.

But there is a logical point about value and meaning hidden here as well. If what is truly meaningful is a world-beyond, a transcendent world separate from our own, then in order to understand meaning and value we must contemplate this world. And since value always comes from some value-er, it is easy to see here who the value-er must be: God (or gods). If the religious type has dominated the contemplative type, and the religious type believes that value comes from God’s will, then it is easy to see why the contemplatives have missed the fact that they are the ones actually doing the valuing. The similarity to Feuerbach is not to be missed. But unlike Feuerbach, Nietzsche does not think that in God we have valued that which is best about ourselves. On the contrary, we have valued that which is *worst* and weakest about humanity. At least this is the case with the Jewish and Christian God, who he believes is the

²⁷ Ibid., 159.

embodiment of slave morality.

But there is another reason why contemplatives miss the point of their own value creation, which can be found in *Beyond Good and Evil* (skipping past *Zarathustra* for the moment, where Nietzsche has nothing to say of the contemplatives). In a section entitled, “On the prejudices of philosophers,” Nietzsche makes a point that Wittgenstein would surely appreciate. Nietzsche notes that it is only a prejudice that has led to a higher evaluation of truth than fiction. Some fictions may be vital to the kind of life which beings like us live, and if so, surely they are worth more than “truths” which are antagonistic to our life. So far as Nietzsche is concerned, that “truth” is somehow more valuable or more useful is “the world’s most poorly proven assumption.”²⁸ The world is made up of appearances, of various perspectives, and this feature of the world is intrinsic to it. If you abolish the world of appearance (as if that were even possible), you do not end up with a world of pure “truths” but with no world at all and therefore no “truths” either. Once we realize that the world is made up of appearance we realize that there is no sense in privileging one perspective over all others, no reason to decree that only one perspective is permissible.²⁹ The trouble comes,

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann & Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 35.

²⁹ “But I think that today we are at least far away from the ridiculous immodesty of decreeing from our angle that perspectives are *permitted* only from this angle. Rather, the world has once again become infinite to us: insofar as we cannot reject the possibility *that it includes infinite interpretations*. Once again the great shudder seizes us – but who again would want immediately to deify in the old manner *this* monster of an unknown world? And to worship

though, when we think of these perspectives as “fictions” and wonder about their author. He writes, “Why shouldn’t the world *that is relevant to us* – be a fiction? And if someone asks: “But doesn’t fiction belong with an author?” – couldn’t we shoot back: “*Why?* Doesn’t this ‘belonging’ belong, perhaps, to fiction as well? Aren’t we allowed to be a bit ironic with the subject, as we are with the predicate and object? Shouldn’t philosophers rise above the belief in grammar? With all due respect to governesses, isn’t it about time philosophy renounced governess-beliefs?”³⁰ And now we have arrived at a point that sounds like it could be made by Wittgenstein. Grammatically, fictions have authors. What’s more, if the contemplative discovers value in the world, a world of appearances, of fictions, which is meaningful to human beings, grammatically the temptation is to seek out an author for these values. And when the religious type dominates, the author is imagined to be other worldly and eternal – God.

In the writings after *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche has nothing specific to say about contemplation or the *vita contemplative*, although he has much to say about “objectivity” and

from this time on the unknown (*das Unbekannte*) as ‘the Unknown One’ (*den Unbekannten*)? Alas, too many *ungodly* possibilities of interpretation are included in this unknown; too much devilry, stupidity, foolishness of interpretation – our own human, all too human one, even, which we know. . .” Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 239–240. Ironically it is this infinite possibility which means for Nietzsche that humans are the only animal that does not have “eternal horizons and perspectives.” I take him to mean this: because we have an infinite range of possible perspectives, no single one can ever be eternal since it must always be only particular and relative. Our world is not fixed because we are always creating it anew. “In polytheism the free-spiritedness and many-spiritedness of humanity received preliminary form – the power to create for ourselves our own new eyes and ever again new eyes that are ever more our own – so that for humans alone among the animals there are no eternal horizons and perspectives.” *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *BGE*, 35.

those who seek knowledge. One telling remark is found in *The Will to Power*,³¹ written between 1887 and 1888 (a relatively “late” period for Nietzsche, who collapsed in 1889). There he tells us that:

Whoever is incapable of laying his will into things, lacking will and strength, at least lays some *meaning* into them, i.e., the faith that there is a will in them already. It is a measure of the degree of strength of will to what extent one can do without meaning in things, to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world *because one organizes a small portion of it oneself*. The philosophical objective outlook can therefore be a sign that will and strength are small. For strength organizes what is close and closest; “men of knowledge,” who desire only to ascertain what is, are those who cannot *fix anything as it ought to be*. Artists, an intermediary species: they at least fix an image of that which ought to be; they are productive, to the extent that they actually alter and transform; unlike men of knowledge, who leave everything as it is. *Connection between philosophers and the pessimistic religions*: the same species of man (they ascribe the highest degree of reality to the most highly valued things). *Connection between philosophers and moral men* and their evaluations (the moral interpretation of the world as meaning: after the decline of the religious meaning).³²

Here Nietzsche perhaps uses formulations which he would have been careful to avoid in his published works. Where he speaks of “living in a meaningless world,” elsewhere he might have talked of a world which is meaningless *in itself* – but then he thinks it is meaningless to speak of

³¹ Many of the points that I make can be found throughout *The Will to Power*. As a general rule, however, I do not use this work except where it helps shed light on what Nietzsche has published elsewhere. The history of its publication and use is, to say the least, ambiguous.

³² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 318.

the world as it is in itself to begin with. As it turns out, the world is not meaningless, because we give it meaning. But in what follows this remark Nietzsche adds to the discussion we have had about the contemplatives. Here they are the “men of knowledge,” who only try to see the world as it is (in itself?). In doing so they expose a weakness in themselves: they are not able to “fix things as they ought to be.” Artists go farther in fixing an image as it ought to be. And although we will see that artists similarly do not go far enough, they have at least taken an important first step. But what is of most interest in this section is what it says about “laying [one’s] will into things.” We are still answering the question we began with at the opening of this section: why do the contemplative ones miss out on their own creation? And here it is finally made clear. In their inability to lay their own will into things, the “men of knowledge” and contemplatives of the weaker sort, they still give meaning by having faith that there is already a will in them. Instead of seeing that it can *only* be a human will that gives meaning, they surrender this meaning creation to another will. Now we can see the problem, according to Nietzsche, in this particular form of contemplative philosophy: in leaving something as it is, you simply surrender your own creative will to the will of someone else. And when religion is dominant, this will is believed to be God’s will. But “God’s will” is just another name for the spirit of *ressentiment*, the slave morality expressed in a supernatural form.

More could be said, but for now the following 6 conclusions will suffice. 1)

“Contemplation” and “contemplative philosophy,” as it is understood by D.Z. Phillips and other Wittgensteinian philosophers (see chapter 1) is but one possible variety of the *vita contemplativa*. 2) Although Nietzsche is sometimes critical of the contemplatives, there is nothing inherently bad about them. On the contrary, Nietzsche includes himself in this group and considers it the higher type. 3) Contemplation has until now been dominated by religion – but this is coming to an end. 4) Art is not set against contemplation but is itself one form of the *vita contemplativa*. 5) Contemplation comes with temptations which must be overcome (often related to its religious history). 6) And finally, a contemplation which leaves the world as it is simply abandons its own will to the will of someone else.

2.3 Nietzsche and Art

Nietzsche’s relationship to art is no less complicated than that to contemplation. He seems to vacillate from an overwhelming appreciation for and love of art, to a near wholesale condemnation of it at times. Writing about the attitude toward art that we find in *Human, All Too Human*, Richard Shacht put it helpfully this way:

He had yet to learn to temper his new enthusiasm for the natural sciences, to figure out how to revisit the perspectives relating to the arts and culture he had known so well without becoming captive once again to them, to supplement both with yet others and to develop the ability to make larger interpretive

sense of our humanity in the light of this multiplicity of perspectives upon it. But he was on his way...

[T]he continuities between [the 'free spirit' volumes and the latter works] are strong, even if Nietzsche's arsenal of perspectives grows, his philosophical sophistication increases, his rhetoric sharpens and heats up, and his intellectual pendulum swings back from its scientifically-oriented extreme point in the direction of his artistic and cultural concerns and sensibility (moving subsequently in considerably shorter arcs in the general vicinity of the center of the spectrum they mark out).³³

Shacht points to something I have said in the introduction to this chapter. Nietzsche's work has important continuities, which can be obscured by the swinging of his rhetorical and intellectual pendulum. At times he embraces science over art, and other times art over science, but he gradually moves toward a median position. But before we can get there, we must see what it is he likes, and dislikes, so passionately about art.

In his earliest works, Nietzsche is overwhelmingly positive about art and sees in Wagner his closest kindred spirit. By the time we get to the first of the so-called "middle period" works, however, Nietzsche is beginning to turn his back on art, seeing it as co-opted alternatively by religion and romanticism, and in its place to give primacy to science.

Surprisingly, often his critique of art in HH looks almost exactly like his praise of art in other works. For instance, he tells us that, "Here lies the antagonism between the individual regions of science and philosophy. The latter wants, as art does, to bestow on life and action the

³³ Richard Shacht, introduction to *Human, All Too Human*, xix.

greatest possible profundity and significance; in the former one seeks knowledge and nothing further- and does in fact acquire it.”³⁴ The rhetoric of this section is clearly critical of art; Nietzsche seems to think that art and philosophy provide a kind of apologetics for life, one which is unnecessary if we are strong enough to live with the world exposed to us by the non-interfering methods of science. Indeed, he thinks that we must turn to science for a method to remove the illusions generated and propagated by the arts.³⁵ Later in HH he writes, “The science of art has, it goes without saying, most definitely to counter this illusion and to display the bad habits and false conclusions of the intellect by virtue of which it allows the artist to ensnare it.”³⁶ Thus it is not only a science of the natural world that is called for, nor even sciences of morality and psychology, but also a science *of art* which has the task of sorting through all the lies promoted by the artists. Yet here we can clearly see an example of the pendulum not yet at rest in its swing, for Nietzsche will later praise art precisely for its ability to create fictions and values, and insist that we *must* give value and meaning to the world which is “uncovered” by science – a point to which we will later return.

The claim that art falsifies or fictionalizes reality with an artificial appearance is, in the

³⁴ Nietzsche, HH, 14–15.

³⁵ In *Daybreak* Nietzsche calls this illusion generation a “petty deceit.” “Nothing is feared more by artists, poets and writers than that eye which sees their *petty deceit*, which afterwards perceives how often they have stood at the crossroads where the way leads either to an innocent pleasure in themselves or to the production of effects.” Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §225.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

end, no great criticism at all. So when Nietzsche criticizes art on what appears to be this point, he is often making an altogether different one. Namely, he directs us to *what end* this fiction is directed. This is as true in HH as in the more developed, mature works. Only a page after his directive that we must have a “science of art,” he describes “*Poets as alleviators of life*. Insofar as they want to alleviate the life of men, poets either turn their eyes away from the toilsome present or they procure for the present new colours through a light which they direct upon it from the past.”³⁷ Here the “insofar” is paramount. It is no necessary feature of art (whether in poetic or other form) that it seeks to alleviate human life, but *when poets and romantics want to* they do so by turning backward, towards a longed for “golden age” where humanity was in a better relationship to nature (romanticism), or to God (religion), or to itself (humanism?/philosophy?). In any case there is a turning away from human life which amounts to a negation of life, which for Nietzsche always evidences weakness and decadence. Moreover, this artistic expression of a longing for the past amounts to a kind of palliative or narcotic, which hinders others from fully embracing their own present and life as it is, now, without hesitation or exception. On this point Nietzsche carries on in the spirit of Marx, although he expands his critique far beyond Marx’s. It is not only religion that is the “opiate of the masses,” but any artistic expression which prevents or even distracts from facing life head

³⁷ Ibid., 81.

on. But note well: art does not *have* to do this. It is an accidental and not necessary feature.

If the devaluation of life (by valuing a different life than our own) is not a necessary feature of art and artistic life, why do artists succumb to this version of themselves? As usual, the problem seems to return to our particular history and the dominance of religion in cultural life. The artists have accepted a faith in the “other-worldly” through religion and turn their gaze to this world rather than to our own. And although the romantics and some other contemporary artists attempt to remove religion from art, they still accept the basic idea and faith that came along with religion.³⁸ So in HH Nietzsche writes, “*The Beyond in art.* – It is not without profound sorrow that one admits to oneself that in their highest flights the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false: they are the glorifiers of the religious and philosophical errors of mankind, and they could not have been so without believing in the absolute truth of these errors.”³⁹ Rather than glorify the best of humanity, artists have – up to now – glorified the errors of religion and philosophy. But this does not have to be so, and Nietzsche believes that this is coming to an end. Just as the religious domination of the *vita contemplativa* is coming to an end,

³⁸ Compare here what Nietzsche says in the preface to the 2nd edition of *Daybreak*: “[We are] hostile to every kind of faith and Christianness existing today; hostile to the half-and-halfness of all romanticism and fatherland-worship; hostile, too, towards the pleasure-seeking and lack of conscience of the artists which would like to persuade us to worship where we no longer believe – for we are artists; hostile, in short, to the whole of European *feminism* (or idealism, if you prefer that word).” Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 4.

³⁹ Nietzsche, HH, 102.

so too art is slowly becoming free to leave behind its subjection to religion.

There is perhaps a more pressing problem with artists, however, than this particular cultural and genealogical history. This history is contingent, and if it is coming to an end, then the negative remarks about art and artists will apply only to the older, religiously infected artists – not to the new artists Nietzsche is heralding. The more pressing and longstanding problem is this: there will always be a divide between one's tastes and one's ability. This insight is one which Nietzsche reminds his readers of more than once, and has several possible versions. One might overestimate oneself and one's own talent by having an undeveloped taste, just as one might overestimate someone else's talent for the same reason. But likewise, it is entirely possible to *underestimate* oneself by virtue of an undeveloped taste – and to underestimate others. Thus the estimation of oneself and others is itself *no reliable criterion* for judging the merit of one's artistic (or other) talents. Moreover, one could, by having an overdeveloped taste come to find oneself no longer able to create at all, since one's own judgment would be so hyper-critical of the product that to continue its production would be a kind of self-disgust. (Of course, there is also the case of the artist who continues on to produce horrible works of art thinking they are genius. Surely we have all come across *this* type on occasion.) Nietzsche, though, is perhaps most worried about the last group: those who think their art is bad (because they have an undeveloped taste) when in fact it is genius. We could

imagine a Shakespeare who, though capable of producing works like *Hamlet*, never releases them to the world due to a mistakenly low view of them (perhaps our imaginary Shakespeare believes reality TV to be the highest form of artistic expression). Thus he warns that,

A perpetually creative person, a 'mother' type in the grand sense of the term, someone who doesn't hear or know anything but the pregnancies and child-beds of his spirit anymore, who simply has no time to reflect on himself and on his work and to make comparisons, who no longer wants to exercise his taste and simply forgets it, i.e. lets it stand, lie, or fall – maybe such a person would finally produce works *that far excel his own judgement*, so that he utters inanities about them and himself – utters them and believes them. This seems to me to be almost the norm among fertile artists – nobody knows a child less well than his parents – and this is true, to take a colossal example, even in the case of the whole world of Greek art and poetry: it never 'knew' what it had done.⁴⁰

Why worry about these artists' self-misunderstanding? If the artist carries on with her creation and produces works that she does not appreciate herself – so be it. At least, like the Greeks, she has continued to produce. Yet even here there is a latent danger. "Those Greeks were superficial - *out of profundity!*" – But we are not always so. One can be superficial in both profound or shallow ways. The fear here is that those artists who do not understand their own talent will relinquish their goals to someone else. If the artist's own tastes are not the guiding principle in her creation, then inevitably it is someone else who determines her product. At one time this meant that religion determined the use of art and artists' works. Even now, it is

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 233–234.

not the artists who are their own appraisers: “[Artists] are always among the first to glorify the new good, and often *appear* to be the first to name it good and to appraise it as good. This, however, as I already said, is a mistake: they are only quicker and louder than the real appraisers. But who *are* the real appraisers? –The rich and the idle.”⁴¹ Artists are then always in danger of losing their own creative force to the taste of others, in this case the rich and the idle. This is in part due to their own lack of awareness of their true talents, and in some cases due to pride and vanity. Not knowing that they are capable of, they seek not so much to produce that which is greatest about themselves but rather to garner praise from others. It is this vanity that squanders their best creative talents.⁴²

Finally Nietzsche’s insight about the distinction between taste and talent comes to a head. There is, he thinks, only one solution to this problem, and that is *to stop looking at art from the standpoint of the spectator*. So long as art is viewed from the perspective of the spectator and not from the perspective of the artist, its value is always external to the creative activity itself. It always stands in wait of evaluation, and receives its value at second hand. This is true, moreover, not only of those artists who intentionally create art for others, but also to two

⁴¹ Ibid., 86.

⁴² “*On the vanity of artists*. – I believe that artists often do not know what they can do best because they are too vain and have set their minds on something prouder than these small plants seem to be that are new, strange, and beautiful and really capable of growing to perfection on their soil. That which in the last instance is good in their own garden and vineyard is not fully appreciated by them, and their love and insight are not of the same order.” Ibid., 87.

other groups: those who view their own art as a *spectator* (we have seen the consequences of this mistake), and those who practice monologue art while maintaining faith in God.

The first distinction to draw regarding artworks. - Everything that is thought, written, painted, composed, even built and sculpted, belongs either to monologue art or to art before witnesses. The second category must also include the seemingly monologue art involving faith in God, the entire lyricism of prayer; for solitude does not yet exist to the pious – this invention was first made by us, the godless. I know no deeper distinction in an artist's entire optics than this: whether he views his budding artwork ('himself') from the eye of the witness, or whether he 'has forgotten the world', which is the essential feature of all monologue art – it is based on *forgetting*; it is the music of forgetting.⁴³

So artists must stop viewing their work from the outside, stop giving way to the evaluations of others, and create from the fullness of their own lives. But there is one last danger in art that we must address before moving on to Nietzsche's "artistic philosophy." Namely, that there is always a temptation for the artist to fall for her own works of art. The artist is working with appearances, with shapes, colors, shades of meaning, values, and when she does this well, Nietzsche thinks, she is playful and adventurous. Nietzsche's artistic philosopher is an experimenter. But every attempt (experiment) is also a temptation, and the temptation, I think, is to see this experiment as somehow necessary and final. In the *Antichrist* Nietzsche says explicitly that this is the problem with the priestly type, that they have fallen for their

⁴³ Ibid., 231–232.

inventions.⁴⁴ But the priestly type, the philosopher, and the artist are closely related and share many of the same temptations. The artist's temptation *as an artist* is therefore twofold: on the one hand she might fall for her work of art as something eternal and necessary (like the priests do), but on the other hand, *even if* she has correctly made *herself* into a work of art (something Nietzsche highly values), there is still the temptation that she will fall for this creation and become an *actor*.⁴⁵

The actor, as a type for Nietzsche, is once again not necessarily bad, but does always represent something broken or stuck. There is something inauthentic about acting. Or, to put this differently, it is perhaps not surprising or blamable that artists have turned in to actors, given our history, but it is not ideal. So for instance, "One cannot be too careful to avoid bearing ill will against an artist for an occasional, perhaps very unfortunate and presumptuous

⁴⁴ "If you stop and think that among almost all peoples the philosopher is just a further development of the priestly type, then this legacy of the priests, the art of *falling for your own forgeries*, will not seem particularly surprising. If you have a holy task like improving, saving, or redeeming mankind, if you carry God in your bosom and serve as the mouthpiece for imperatives issuing from the beyond, then this sort of a mission already puts you outside any merely rational assessment, – you are sanctified by a task like this, you are a type belonging to a higher order of things!" Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 11.

⁴⁵ There is some ambiguity in the English translations which is also present in German. When Nietzsche writes about the "actor" he is speaking first of the person who performs a drama on stage (*der Schauspieler*) and then metaphorically from there. When in the same breath he speaks of the "men of action," this is *die handelnden Menschen* or sometimes *die sogenannten handelnden Menschen* (the so-called men of action). "Man of action" in English brings to mind someone who is quick to act, but not necessarily someone who has any relationship to the thespian. Moreover the formulation "*die handelnden Menschen*" bears some resemblance to "*handelnde Personen*," the list of characters in a play, a reference that Nietzsche is surely drawing by placing the two phrases together. But *die handelnden Menschen* can mean in German, just as in English, "those responsible," "the active ones," "the participating ones," etc. The point here seems to be that the "man of action" is himself just acting out a part in a play, unless he is himself responsible for his own artistic creation.

masquerade; let us not forget that, without exception, our dear artists are to some extent actors and have to be.”⁴⁶ And elsewhere he continues,

On the problem of the actor. The problem of the actor has troubled me for a very long time; I was unsure (and still sometimes am) whether it is only from this angle that one can approach the dangerous concept of the ‘artist’ – a concept that has heretofore been treated with unpardonable generosity. Falseness with a good conscience; the delight in pretense erupting as a power that pushes aside, floods, and at times extinguishes one’s so-called ‘character’; the inner longing for a role and mask, for an *appearance* (*Schein*); an excess of capacities for all kinds of adaptation that can no longer be satisfied in the service of the nearest, most narrowly construed utility – perhaps all of this is distinctive not *only* of the actor?⁴⁷

Actors teach us to “love pretense,” they raise our appreciation for appearances and even make us aware of new desires and expectations. It is actors who make us yearn for great speeches delivered in the heat of battle, for poetry in romance, for acts of valor and courage, when in ordinary life we are usually without words or acts. We learn to want these things, come to want these things, because of actors. But actors are still only giving us what the artist has directed, and we miss out on this as spectators when we look only to the actors. But not only we as spectators – but we as *authors* miss out, when we forget the real value of actors. The value of actors is *always* related to the author; their value is as an expression of the author’s creation. The danger is that they will themselves be seduced by their own artifice, and/or

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *GS*, §99.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §361.

seduce others in the process.⁴⁸

And so finally we can say that with acting as with art, philosophy, science, or anything else, it is not acting itself which is inherently good or bad, but what is done with it. It comes (inherently, if you will) with certain temptations, but it is not necessary to give oneself over to these temptations. Yet this does not mean that we turn to “art for art’s sake.” An inauthentic use of art is to use art for the sake of weak, religious, slavish morality. To use art *against* life is to pervert it from the outset. And when we forget that we creative ones are the authors’ of life’s drama, we are always at risk of accepting this inauthentic use from others. A lengthy section from the *Twilight of the Idols* should, perhaps, receive the last word:

L’art pour l’art. The struggle against purpose in art is always the struggle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against its subordination to morality. *L’art pour l’art* means: ‘morality can go to hell!’ – but even this hostility reveals the overpowering force of prejudice. Once you exclude the purposes of sermonizing and improving people from art, it does not follow even remotely that art is totally purposeless, aimless, senseless, in short, *l’art pour l’art* – a worm swallowing its own tail. ‘Better no purpose at all than a moral purpose!’ – those are just words of passion. A psychologist, on the other hand, will ask: what does art do? Doesn’t it praise? Doesn’t it dignify? Doesn’t it select? Doesn’t it have preferences? All of this *strengthens* or *weakens* certain value judgments ... Is this just incidental? accidental? completely unconnected to the

⁴⁸ “The insight that our actors are more admirable than ever does not mean that they are any less dangerous ... But who could still doubt what I want, what three *demands* have led me, in my anger, my concern, my love of art, to open my mouth? *That theatre not gain control over art. / That actors not seduce what is genuine. / That music not become an art of lying.*” Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, §12.

artist's instinct? Or: isn't it the presupposition for an artist *to be able to ...* ? Is the artist's most basic instinct bound up with art, or is it bound up much more intimately with *life*, which is the meaning of art? Isn't it bound up with the *desirability of life*?⁴⁹

We can therefore summarize the following seven features of “art” in Nietzsche: 1) Art, whether for good or bad, is about appearance and gives a kind of fictionalized version of life. 2) Art has, up to now, tended to reject and devalue life while at the same time giving an apology for it. 3) There is an inherent divide between one's talents and tastes. 4) The artist is always therefore in danger of misunderstanding her talent and having it co-opted. 5) Monologue art must replace spectator art and art must be viewed not from the point of view of the spectator but from the author. 6) Art is always an experiment and its creations are neither eternal nor necessary. 7) Finally, art is at its best bound up with the promotion and desirability of life – not with its devaluation.

2.4 Nietzsche's Artistic Philosophy

To say that Nietzsche's view of philosophy is artistic, therefore, we must take in to account all of these various features of contemplation and art. What precisely is it that Nietzsche values so much about art, when it comes with so many latent dangers? Why use art as the model or

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §24.

paradigm for philosophy at all? And what is the relationship between science and art (about which more will be said in chapter 3), and how do these two fit together as complementary parts of “artistic philosophy”?

To begin with, one must remember that Nietzsche is after something new. His use of types, histories, and examples gives his reader something to grab on to, a means through which he can communicate. But it is not that Nietzsche wants us to all be authors or artists like those of the past. So in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes,

Where do we need to reach with our hopes? – Towards *new philosophers*, there is no alternative; towards spirits who are strong and original enough to give impetus to opposed valuations and initiate a revaluation and reversal of “eternal values”; towards those sent out ahead; towards the men of the future who in the present tie the knots and gather the force that compels the will of millennia into *new* channels. To teach humanity its future as its *will*, as dependent on a human will.⁵⁰

It is in preparation of something *new* that Nietzsche writes, and for which he hopes to awaken others. And, he tells us, “in all seriousness: I see these new philosophers approaching.”⁵¹ These new philosophers will be experimenters, promoters of great “Perhaps!” They will revalue all values and show that evaluations themselves are always an expression of will – and importantly, *their own* will.

So Nietzsche wants new philosophers in service of new values and revaluations. But

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *BGE*, §203.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, §3.

still – why art? Why not science? Or philosophy as such? What benefit is there in comparing this new type of philosophy to art, with all the dangers that come with it? Here a section from GS is helpful:

What one should learn from artists. – What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are! Here we have something to learn from physicians, when for example they dilute something bitter or add wine and sugar to the mixing bowl; but even more from artists, who are really constantly out to invent new artistic *tours de force* of this kind. To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them at all*, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through coloured glass or in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins; we, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details.⁵²

It is in art, Nietzsche thinks, that we have the prototype for the kind of activity he envisions the “new philosophers” to undertake. The new philosophers will be modeled after artists, although not identical to the artists of old. These new artistic philosophers will combine art *with* science and psychology. Nietzsche’s philosophy is not scientific unless it is also artistic,

⁵² Nietzsche, GS, §299.

but neither is it artistic if it is also not scientific. Yet as important as science is for Nietzsche, it still does not have the primary role in this new philosophy that art does. Science seeks to break down appearances, to get at the underlying truth, to pursue truth and knowledge wherever it takes it. This, Nietzsche believes, is to be appreciated (something we will look at in the following chapter). The dangerous, free spirited exploration of truth at the expense of custom and traditional values is to be praised. But it is not enough.

What science uncovers is bare, but cannot remain so. Value always shows up. And when the scientist mistakenly believes that she is uncovering “bare facts,” “reality,” or things of this nature, she invites these values to come from somewhere other than herself. Or, perhaps just as frightening, she “discovers” that there are no values, and we are left with a nihilistic, meaningless world. This, Nietzsche thinks, is the outcome of the three millennium old search for truth. The pursuit of truth undermines the belief in truth, and with truth goes meaning and value, leaving us in a hostile, pessimistic world. At times Nietzsche thinks that it is a sign of strength that one is able to live in such a world, but ultimately he concludes that strength is not living in a meaningless world, but giving the world one’s own meaning.⁵³ Strength is not living without meaning, but living in a world which does not supply its own meaning, and in

⁵³ “Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them: the finding is called science, the importing – art, religion, love, pride. Even if this should be a piece of childishness, one should carry on with both and be well disposed toward both-some should find; *others-we* others!-should import!” Nietzsche, *WP*, §606.

which no God has done the work for you. The new philosophers will realize this – but hitherto it has only been the artists who have undertaken this project. Philosophy has been infected with religion and morality, leaving the world of appearance to artists alone.⁵⁴

Unlike artists, however, Nietzsche's philosophers do not stop with "works" of art, which is why the artist is a metaphor or bridge to the new philosopher, but not identical. Nietzsche again and again emphasizes that we are to be the poets and authors *of our lives*, not of external works. But as we have seen, this can only happen once we break down the mistaken view that the primary distinction is between spectator and actor. And if this is the case, then one final and significant point remains: *pace* the contemplative philosophers (in the Wittgensteinian sense), we should not be *disinterested* in this process, but deeply interested. If it is ourselves as works of art that we are creating, how could we not be passionately engaged in this endeavor?

Kant said: 'Something is beautiful if it gives pleasure *without interest*'. Without interest! Compare this definition with another made by a genuine 'spectator' and artist – Stendhal, who once called the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. Here, at any rate, the thing that Kant alone accentuates in aesthetic

⁵⁴ "\$794 Our religion, morality, and philosophy are decadence forms of man. / **The countermovement: art.** // \$795 The *artist-philosopher*. Higher concept of art. Whether a man can place himself so far distant from other men that he can form them? (Preliminary exercises: (1) he who forms himself, the hermit; (2) the artist hitherto, as a perfecter on a small scale, working on material.) // \$796 The work of art where it appears without an artist, e.g., as body, as organization (Prussian officer corps, Jesuit order). To what extent the artist is only a preliminary stage." Nietzsche, *WP*, \$794–796.

matters: *le désintéressement*, is *rejected* and eliminated. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal?⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, third essay, §6.

Chapter 3: Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Science

Nietzsche scholarship is going through something like a revival. In the last decade a number of philosophers have taken up Nietzsche as a project and advanced detailed, critical studies on a variety of topics within Nietzsche. This has had the effect of elevating the status of Nietzsche in contemporary philosophy, as well as providing a great contribution to general Nietzsche studies. But it has also made it incredibly difficult to wade through the multiplicity of readings on Nietzsche. There seems to be little consensus from one article or book to the next as to just what, precisely, Nietzsche is up to. In response and as a critique to this disparity, the new “official” reading of Nietzsche that has developed among English speaking philosophers is to view Nietzsche as a naturalist along the lines of Hume and Freud. How far one should take this naturalism is now often the central topic of debate, but that he is, in fact, a naturalist seems to be the established opinion. That this is so is perhaps a shock to those who are familiar with the Nietzsche of the past century, where he was interpreted on the one hand by existential humanists following Walter Kaufmann, or postmodern and post-structuralist French thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze. In the mix as well is the Nietzsche as interpreted by Heidegger, who is supposedly related to the postmodern reading but perhaps significantly different as well. In any case, *none* of these readings of Nietzsche placed any emphasis on

naturalism or science, unless to do so by placing them in a negative light.¹ The advent of the “naturalistic” turn in Nietzsche scholarship would thus seem to be a decisive shift in our understanding of his work.

One *prima facie* difficulty with the naturalistic reading of Nietzsche is thus that it seems to invalidate much that we expect to find in Nietzsche, and much that I have just claimed about him in the preceding chapter. That is, if his primary goal is to give a naturalistic account of human nature, morality, will, and so on, then he is seemingly committed to making substantive, true claims about “the way the world really is.” It is difficult to see how one could hold simultaneously to the scientific/naturalistic reading of Nietzsche *and* to the creative/artistic reading. Brian Leiter thus concludes that one must choose between reading Nietzsche among philosophers like “Freud, [for whom] Nietzsche is the philosopher who anticipates psychoanalysis by trying to discover the *deep, hidden* facts about human nature which explain who we are and what we believe,” and those like Foucault, for whom “Nietzsche is precisely the philosopher who denies that there are any ‘deep facts’ about human nature and who recognizes that all such putative facts are *mere* interpretations, mere contingent

¹ With, perhaps, the exception of Heidegger. Hans Seigfried has argued, for instance, that Heidegger and Nietzsche were both pro-science in a way that our contemporary naturalists might respect. See Hans Seigfried, “Transcendental Experiments (II): Kant and Heidegger,” *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Lectures and Essays*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology & University Press of America, 1988).

constructs.”² Leiter decides in favor of the former reading, which allies Nietzsche with Freud and Hume, and in doing so has become something like the spokesperson for the naturalist reading.³ This chapter will therefore proceed as follows. In the first section we will look at what the naturalist reading claims about Nietzsche and how it interprets both his claims about science and his claims about art. In the second section I will back up, historically, to Kant and attempt to situate Nietzsche’s comments about science in light of the Kantian tradition. In the third section we will look more specifically at Nietzsche’s own comments about science, which as one might by now expect, are varied and ostensibly contradictory. In the fourth section I will argue that what Nietzsche most admires about science is, *pace* the naturalists, not its ability to “get things right” but its experimental and adventurous spirit, combined with its rigor and precision. Finally, in the fifth section we will return to the topic of art, and consider what it would mean to have a philosophical orientation that is either an artistic science or a scientific art.

3.1 Nietzsche, a Naturalist?

On one hand, to say that Nietzsche is a naturalist is not yet to have said much at all.

² Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

³ Although he is by no means the only advocate of this position, nor the first.

“Naturalism,” as such and without qualification is too broad to be of much help here. In his book on naturalistic ethics, for instance, Simon Blackburn gives the following definition of naturalists: “To be a naturalist is to see human beings as frail complexes of perishable tissue, and so part of the natural order. It is thus to refuse unexplained appeals to mind or spirit, and unexplained appeals to knowledge of a Platonic order of Forms or Norms; it is above all to refuse any appeal to a supernatural order.”⁴ In its broadest sense, the last line captures what we mean by “naturalists;” naturalists are people for whom an appeal to anything supernatural or “spooky” is out of the question. In this sense Nietzsche is undoubtedly a naturalist, but not yet in a way that makes him philosophically interesting or distinguishable. Given Blackburn’s definition of a naturalist, there is no reason in principle why Kant, for instance, would not also be included. Many of the Nietzsche scholars who propose to read Nietzsche as a naturalist pass over this question; thankfully there are others who do not, and chief among them is Leiter.⁵

Leiter begins with a basic distinction between what he calls “Methodological Naturalists” (M-Naturalists) and “Substantive Naturalists” (S-Naturalists). And, he thinks, the naturalism we find in philosophy is most often of the former, methodological type. It is a view

⁴ Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 48–49.

⁵ Leiter takes the approach of more carefully defining varieties of naturalism. The other approach is to move on from calling Nietzsche a naturalist (without denying that he is one) and ascribe some more specific method to him as well. So for instance Mathias Risse argues that Nietzsche is engaged in an “animal psychology” that will challenge Kantian ethics. See Mathias Risse, “Nietzschean ‘Animal Psychology’ versus Kantian Ethics,” *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 57–82.

about the best methods for doing philosophy, and believes that philosophy is at its best when it emulates, to varying degrees, the best methods and practices of the sciences. Moreover, philosophical inquiry, on this view, should be “continuous with empirical inquiry in the sciences.”⁶ What one takes to be the “legitimate” science(s) to emulate is obviously important here. “Hard M-Naturalists” want this continuity to be with the hard, physical sciences. “Soft M-Naturalists” look for continuity with any successful science, including the “soft” social sciences. And while many contemporary philosophers lean toward Hard M-Naturalism, Leiter believes that Soft M-Naturalism is the dominant strand in philosophy. In some cases, however, philosophers go beyond M-Naturalism (whether of the hard or soft variety) and “embrace a *substantive* doctrine. S-Naturalism in philosophy is either the (ontological) view that the only things that exist are *natural* (or perhaps simply *physical*) things; or the (semantic) view that a suitable philosophical analysis of any concept must show it to be amenable to empirical inquiry.”⁷ In its most general sense, S-Naturalism is simply a denial and rejection of God, or any other non-natural cause, as an explanation of natural events. That is, as we have seen with Blackburn, S-Naturalism is primarily a negative orientation towards supernaturalism, while not necessarily promoting a particular methodology. Of course, many M-Naturalists are drawn to S-Naturalism, and vice versa, but neither necessarily entails the other.

⁶ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

So, what about Nietzsche? Leiter argues that Nietzsche is an S-Naturalist in the broadest sense, meaning he rejects supernaturalism as a meaningful explanation of value, meaning, or events. But he is not an S-Naturalist in the stronger, contemporary sense of physicalism, wherein “only those properties picked out by the laws of the physical sciences are real.”⁸ That Nietzsche is a naturalist in this broad, S-Naturalist sense (i.e., he rejects supernaturalism), should be relatively uncontroversial. More significantly, however, Leiter argues that Nietzsche is best understood as an M-Naturalist, in the sense that he thinks philosophy ought to emulate the best methods and practices of the sciences, and be in some way continuous with the findings of science. We are directed, among other places, to *Beyond Good and Evil* for an account of this naturalism:

To translate humanity back into nature; to gain control of the many vain and fanciful interpretations and incidental meanings that have been scribbled and drawn over that eternal basic text of *homo natura* so far; to make sure that, from now on, the human being will stand before the human being, just as he already stands before the *rest* of nature today, hardened by the discipline of science, – with courageous Oedipus eyes and sealed up Odysseus ears, deaf to the lures of the old metaphysical bird catchers who have been whistling to him for far too long: “You are more! You are higher! You have a different origin!” – This may be a strange and insane task, but it is a *task* – who would deny it! Why do we choose it, this insane task? Or to ask it differently: “Why knowledge at all?”⁹

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230.

Here Nietzsche is clear about his aim: to translate humanity back into nature. Hardened by science, humanity will stand before itself and look at itself in the same critical, naturalistic eye with which it views the rest of nature. Humanity will no longer think of itself as something fundamentally different than nature but rather as roughly the same as nature – and therefore open to the same types of investigations.¹⁰ In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche returns to this theme, indicating that humanity must be removed from its throne and returned to its rightful place in nature.

We have changed our minds. We have become more modest in every way. We have stopped deriving humanity from ‘spirit’, from ‘divinity’, we have stuck human beings back among the animals. We see them as the strongest animals because they are the most cunning; one consequence of this is their spirituality. On the other hand, we are also opposed to a certain vanity that re-emerges here too, acting as if human beings were the great hidden goal of animal evolution. Humans are in no way the crown of creation, all beings occupy the same level of perfection ... And even this is saying too much: comparatively speaking, humans are the biggest failures, the sickliest animals who have strayed the most dangerously far from their instincts...¹¹

Not only are humans here considered on par with the rest of nature, but Nietzsche goes

¹⁰ Of course, as McDowell makes clear in *Mind and World*, this doesn’t really get us away from the Kantian situation, a point I will make later. That is, one can recognize that we are a part of nature while also recognizing that we have a peculiar way of being natural. We are animals, but we experience our animality in a particular way.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), AC §14. As usual, Nietzsche is turning our usual expectations around. The development of ‘spirit’ or ‘mind’ on earth is not evidence of teleology but of its *absence*.

so far as to consider them a weak, sickly version of nature. Nietzsche has returned and is returning humanity to its place within nature, and along with this must help diagnose and treat humanity's sickness. He will do this, he believes, with scientific *discipline*, an important nod once again to the significance of method. In his later writings he returns to this multiple times. In the passage immediately preceding the previous one from *The Antichrist*, for instance, he writes, "The most valuable insights are the last to be discovered; but *methods* are the most valuable insights. *All* the methods, *all* the presuppositions of our present scientific spirit have been regarded with the greatest contempt for thousands of years, they barred certain people from the company of 'decent' men, – these people were considered 'enemies of God', despisers of the truth, or 'possessed'."¹² Or speaking of the pre-Socratic Greeks he writes again a bit later, "Everything *essential* had been found so that work could be started: – the methods, it should be said ten times over, *are* the essential thing, as well as the most difficult thing, as well as the thing that can be blocked by habit and laziness for a very long time."¹³ These passages and others make it clear that Nietzsche is enamored with method. But this last quotation is a bit surprising, and gives a clue into what exactly it is that Nietzsche values here. As we are about to see, naturalist readers of Nietzsche in the Leiter camp think that there is something special about the advances of modern science that Nietzsche is particularly appreciative of, as though

¹² Ibid., AC §13.

¹³ Ibid., §59.

we now, finally, have access to truths about human nature that have been missing for far too long. In one sense this is true; Nietzsche thinks the modern “revival” of the scientific spirit is opening doors that have been closed by “decent” men who scorn this spirit. But it is not, *pace* Leiter, any particular result that Nietzsche finds so impressive, but the method itself. This is shown in his insistence that the pre-Socratic Greeks already had the right method, and therefore in all essential aspects were able to do the kind of work that Nietzsche admires.

Leiter clearly sees the importance of method in Nietzsche’s naturalism; he is, after all, the one who has declared him an M-Naturalist (methodological naturalist). But when Leiter speaks of the “continuity with the sciences,” he goes beyond reading Nietzsche as being methodologically continuous to a “results” continuity. In other words, Leiter claims, Nietzsche not only applauds the methods of science but believes that philosophy should also be continuous with the *findings* of science.¹⁴ Moreover, in addition to methods continuity and results continuity, Leiter gives a third level to Nietzsche’s naturalism by claiming that

¹⁴ As evidence for this, Leiter claims that it is a result of science that leads Nietzsche, following 19th century German science, to conclude that humanity is not of a different, higher origin than the rest of nature but is himself a part of it. Leiter quotes Nietzsche’s contemporary German Materialist, Ludwig Büchner: “the researches and discoveries of modern times can no longer allow us to doubt that man, with all he has and possesses, be it mental or corporeal, is a *natural product* like all other organic beings.” Or again, “Man is a product of nature in body and mind. Hence not merely what he is, but also what he does, wills, feels, and thinks, depends upon the same natural necessity as the whole structure of the world.” But it is not so clear to me that this is evidence of results continuity, since these claims seem to merely repeat the naturalist assumption. These claims are not the *result* of natural scientific methods but the presupposition of them. See Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter*, trans. J. G. Collingwood (London: Trubner, 1870), lxxviii and 239.

Nietzsche wants to model his own philosophy on science, in the sense of giving the same kind of accounts and explanations that science gives: namely, causal accounts. As he puts it, “Nietzsche, the philosophical naturalist, aims to offer theories that explain various important human phenomena (especially the phenomenon of morality), and that do so in ways that both draw on actual scientific results, particularly in physiology, but are also *modeled* on science in the sense that they seek to reveal the causal determinants of these phenomena, typically in various physiological and psychological facts about persons.”¹⁵

By combining these three aspects together, he concludes that we can best understand Nietzsche’s project if we consider him to be a “Speculative M-Naturalist.” Speculative, in the sense that Nietzsche gives causal explanations for the origin of morality (among other human concepts and practices), methodological in the sense that he patterns his project on the sciences, and naturalist in the sense that he considers humans to be open to investigation and analysis on the same level as any other part of the natural world. So far so good, but Leiter takes his claim even further than he has already done when he says that *not only* is Nietzsche a naturalist in all of these ways, but that this naturalistic project is the *heart* of his philosophical work. Now, especially in *Nietzsche On Morality*, Leiter is always quick to point out that Nietzsche himself states that he has a different project in mind than giving a naturalistic account of

¹⁵ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 8.

human morality (and other concepts). That project is the revaluation of values, and the artistic creation of new values to replace devalued values. Thus Leiter adds (in a footnote, surely to be passed over by the casual reader), that

The point here concerns Nietzsche's actual philosophical practice, i.e., what he spends most of his time doing in his books. But it is worth keeping in mind that Nietzsche himself actually reserves the label "philosopher" ("genuine philosophers" he calls them in BGE: 211) for those who discharge a different kind of task than that of the naturalist: namely, those who create or legislate values. In this particular usage, "philosopher" is something of an honorific for Nietzsche. We shall return to some of these issues in the following chapters.¹⁶

Even if it is buried in a footnote, at least we can say that Leiter recognizes the difficulty. Nietzsche believes he is doing philosophy, and Nietzsche himself characterizes philosophy as something rather different than naturalism. Leiter's point is, *pace* Nietzsche on himself, that what Nietzsche *actually* spends his time doing is something like what Hume and Freud were doing – giving a naturalist account of human nature (here, especially, morality). I do not want to disagree with Leiter that Nietzsche often employs techniques which bear similarity to naturalism; but Leiter's almost dogmatic insistence that what Nietzsche is doing is primarily naturalistic obscures the point of Nietzsche's project. Nietzsche makes it clear himself: the goal is not to give a naturalistic account but to revalue all values. Naturalism, when it is employed

¹⁶ Ibid., 6n.

(if at all), is a tool in Nietzsche's toolbox – not the work itself.

Leiter's gloss on the preface to *On The Genealogy of Morality* is telling. Nietzsche writes about his encounter with Paul Rée's naturalistic account of morality, "Actually, just then I was preoccupied with something much more important than the nature of hypotheses, mine or anybody else's, on the origin of morality (or, to be more exact: the latter concerned me only for one end, to which it is one of many means). For me it was a question of the *value* of morality."¹⁷ Leiter gives a nod to this, while immediately then moving to and emphasizing the following from later in the preface:

At any rate, I wanted to focus this sharp, unbiased eye in a better direction, the direction of a real *history of morality*, and to warn him, while there was still time, against such English hypothesis-mongering *into the blue*. It is quite clear which colour is a hundred times more important for a genealogist than blue: namely *grey*, which is to say, that which can be documented, which can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short, the whole, long, hard-to-decipher hieroglyphic script of man's moral past! *This* was unknown to Dr Rée.¹⁸

Leiter (and others) insist that it is here we find a clear expression of Nietzsche's faith that he has "gotten things right." Nietzsche's philosophical naturalism is, unlike the English "hypothesis-mongering," an accurate account of our moral history. It is that which "can be documented, which can actually be confirmed and has actually existed." But I think something

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality*, preface §5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, preface §7.

very strange is at work in the interpretation by Leiter and the naturalist reading. For to read Nietzsche in this way is to read him as now *completely ignoring* the critical work he has been involved in with respect to perspectivism. If his work is, as I have argued in chapter 2, importantly related to the (neo/pseudo-)Kantian dilemma of the separation between mind and world, then this reading of Nietzsche concludes that in the end Nietzsche simply returns to what we have called “stage two perspectivism.” Namely, it states that Nietzsche, after working through the various stages, finally concludes that in science we do, after all, have a perspective on things which can be counted on where all other perspectives fail – that science is an epistemically privileged perspective. It is true that Nietzsche, after moving through the stages, comes to hold a position that says the pseudo-Kantian dilemma is, in the end, no dilemma at all. It is a false dilemma based on mistaken expectations for what we can expect from knowledge. By coming to this conclusion, Nietzsche is able to collapse the distinction between the real world and the world of appearances – but to conclude that he does this in such a way that privileges a particular perspective is to miss the point.

In *Nietzsche On Morality*, Leiter is (relatively) careful to never explicitly state this much stronger thesis, that Nietzsche privileges the scientific perspective. One always feels, however, as though he is leaning in this direction, and he makes this explicit in other writings. During the same time that he was writing *Nietzsche On Morality*, he wrote in the *Times Literary*

Supplement, “Nietzsche’s skepticism vanishes (in his later works) and he repeatedly endorses a scientific perspective as the correct or true one.”¹⁹ That Leiter so clearly states it in this way is, perhaps, shocking. Given all Nietzsche’s work on perspectivism, it would be absurd for him to, in the end, simply sanction one perspective in this way. And at stake, I think, is this: *scientific methods are not themselves a perspective but a way of dealing with perspectives*. Leiter confuses science, in the sense of a method, with a perspective itself. Or consider what Leiter said in an interview a decade later,

The thing about being a philosophical naturalist, a speculative methodological naturalist, is that the interest of your claims ultimately turns on whether you’ve got the facts right. If you’re lousy at speculation then you can pretend to be aping the sciences all you want, and it’s just not very interesting. So I’ve been interested in the question, how good was Nietzsche’s speculative moral psychology and his speculative psychology of agency, and so on.... I think there is a reasonable case to be made that Nietzsche was actually a pretty good speculative naturalist... I think it turns out that Nietzsche’s overall picture of the structure of human beings... [fits] contemporary empirical psychology... and it turns out to be quite plausible.²⁰

These two quotes make clear a tendency throughout all of the naturalist readings of Nietzsche. It is not only a project of (re)emphasizing Nietzsche’s return of philosophy to a more “natural”

¹⁹ Brian Leiter, “One health, one earth, one sun,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 October 1998.

²⁰ Brian Leiter, “Elucidations: Brian Leiter discusses Nietzsche on Morality”, delivered September 2009, http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/podcasts/recordings/Leiter_NietzscheMorality.mp3 (accessed 14 December 2009).

or “human” setting, nor is it merely a renewal of the discussion of the importance of methods for Nietzsche. No, the naturalist reading is committed to two further claims: 1) that in his mature works Nietzsche privileges science as the correct perspective; and 2) that Nietzsche’s work hinges on whether or not he gets “the facts” right. Whether or not he does get the facts right, in turn, is to be judged – on the basis of science (see claim 1). Yet these claims fail to adequately account for Nietzsche’s views on the matter. About the first claim we need only return to the stages of perspectivism. To suppose that Nietzsche ends up, once again, in stage two perspectivism is tenuous at best. About the second claim we may add this: it fails to take seriously what Nietzsche himself says the point of his philosophy is all about. *Unlike* Rée (and others), Nietzsche says that he is *not* “hypothesis-mongering.” But if Leiter et al. are correct in their claims, how is Nietzsche any different? How is he doing something other than hypothesis-mongering? What distinguishes his hypothesis from that of any other? Is it only that – Nietzsche’s is right? To my ears this makes Nietzsche rather foolish. If Nietzsche thinks the only difference between what he is doing is that where Rée gets things wrong, he gets things right, then he offers little, if anything novel or interesting to the history of philosophy. That is, Leiter seems to find “most interesting” about Nietzsche precisely what I am least interested in. Leiter’s position (along with the other naturalists) is that Nietzsche is to be judged based on “how good [his] speculative psychology [was].” Bet let’s be clear: Nietzsche

never sets up any verifiable experiments. He never conducts any studies, nor does he have any test or control cases (other than himself – an important point to which we must return). Thus, if he is doing something “scientific” in the sense that Leiter finds most interesting, we must simply conclude that he is a rather sloppy scientist. I am not interested, and I do not think it makes sense to even speak of a philosophic interest, in whether or not Nietzsche guessed various features of human psychology to be “correct” in some way which is now verifiable by contemporary scientific experimentation.

In an attempt to bring Nietzsche studies to a place of greater clarity and rigor, the naturalists have gone ahead of themselves. An overemphasis on the naturalistic elements of Nietzsche leads us away from his real aim; naturalism is a tool to be used when it suits the task, but it is not the end in itself, and it does not represent any final or “correct” perspective. Yet Nietzsche does, clearly, take science seriously and value it highly. One failure of the naturalist reading is in its inability to say precisely what it is that Nietzsche values about science. The claim seems to be that science is valued “because it gets things right.” But *even if* this were so, how does it get things right? “Through its methods.” But what methods in particular? Answering this question, it seems to me, will get us closer to understanding the many passages where Nietzsche praises the sciences. And distinguishing the answer from *other* aspects of science will help us understand those passages where Nietzsche admonishes the sciences. The

answer? In a word: experimentation. But Nietzsche is not the first philosopher to see the importance of experimentation within the scientific method, and he enters into an ongoing history and discussion of its relevance. So before proceeding to a discussion of Nietzsche's comments on science, we must back up nearly a century and turn to Immanuel Kant.

3.2 Kant and the Scientific Method

Immanuel Kant was not the only or first philosopher to recognize the importance of the sciences and the shift taking place. He did, however, see that philosophy must change as well or risk falling behind, and he thought that the new methods and orientation of the sciences could provide valuable insights into metaphysics and epistemology. That Kant wishes to pattern his new, critical philosophy on the sciences is made clear in the second preface (preface B) to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant tells us there that, "If it is not possible to unite the various collaborators on the manner in which their common aim should be pursued: then one can always be convinced that such a pursuit has not yet (by far) taken the sure path of science, but is merely groping about."²¹ Kant says that those who are not yet using the new "scientific" method, the sure path of science, are "groping about," a criticism not dissimilar to

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), Bvii.

what Nietzsche would later call “hypothesis mongering” (although more will be said about this phrase with respect to Kant as well). With respect to logic, Kant thinks we got on the right path pretty early, but that it took longer for mathematics to find its way and even still much longer for the natural sciences. Thus he continues,

But it must not be thought that it was as easy for [mathematics] to find this royal path, or rather to forge it for itself, as it was for logic, in which reason is concerned only with itself; on the contrary, I believe that for a long time it continued to grope about (especially still among the Egyptians), and that the change is to be ascribed to a *revolution*, brought about in one attempt by the lucky thought of a single man, from which point on there was no more departing from the route that had to be taken, and the sure path of a science was laid down and marked out for all times and to infinite lengths. The history of this revolution in manner of thinking... has not been preserved for us... With natural science things went much more slowly before it came upon the high road of science... a discovery that also can be explained only through a rapidly occurring revolution in manner of thinking.²²

Importantly, Kant sees this change in terms of a revolution. This “groping” does not slowly get better over time in the manner of small reformations. The disciplines have not “evolved” in this sense but remained in the dark until all at once a revolution put them on the “sure path.” What is this revolution? In one sense it is the methods and procedures of the sciences generally, but Kant makes the particular aspect that puts us on the “sure path” explicit:

[Galileo, Torricelli, and Stahl] grasped that reason as insight only into that which it produces itself in

²² Ibid., Bxi–xii.

accordance with its own plan, that reason must lead the way with principles of its judgments in accordance with fixed laws, and that it must require nature to answer its questions but must not let nature keep it solely as it were in leading strings; for otherwise accidental observations, not being made in accordance with a previously delineated plan, do not at all cohere in a necessary law, which reason nonetheless seeks and requires. Reason must go to nature holding in one hand its principles, through which alone consistent appearances can be taken for laws, and, in the other hand, the experiment it has devised according to those principles, so as indeed to be taught by nature; but it must go in the character not of a pupil who allows himself to be told whatever the teacher wishes, but of an invested judge who requires witnesses to answer the questions he puts before them... By this means natural science was first put onto the sure path of a science, whereas throughout so many centuries it had been nothing more than a mere groping about.²³

It here that we find a clear expression of Kant's own "revolution." It is that "objects must conform themselves to our cognition," rather than our cognition conforming to objects. In the past we were "groping about" because we had no system, no method, for how to get ahold of the objects in the right way. We sat before nature like an untrained student sits before her teacher, waiting upon the teacher to pass along some bit of information. But this is no real way to make discoveries or to push knowledge forward. And when we try to do this with nature, we are always casting about, hoping that something "natural" will happen to pass along information. Kant has realized that we are able to push knowledge further *not* when we wait

²³ Ibid., Bxii–xiv.

upon nature to inform us, but when we *interrogate* nature. We come to nature with our questions and we demand an answer. It is our questions combined with a method for how to seek their answer that are paramount. For Kant, a discipline only becomes scientific when it realizes this fact about itself: that it can only find answers to questions that it poses, which means that the answers must conform to the questions along with the predetermined methods for generating answers. Unfortunately, metaphysics has been the last of the disciplines to find its way to the “pure path” of the sciences: “To *metaphysics*... fate has before now not been so kind that it has been able to take up the sure path of a science, despite the fact that metaphysics is more ancient than all of the other sciences... In metaphysics reason continually gets bogged down... There is therefore no doubt that up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been merely to grope about, and, what is the worst, to do so among mere concepts.”²⁴

This then is the project, to:

test whether we do not make better progress on the problems of metaphysics by assuming that objects must conform themselves to our cognition – which already accords better with the desired possibility for *a priori* cognition of such objects, cognition that must establish something concerning objects before those objects are given to us. Matters stand here just as they did for the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when things did not go well for explaining the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire host of stars rotates about the observer, sought to find whether things might not go better if he had the

²⁴ Ibid., Bxiv–xv.

observer rotate, and by contrast left the stars at rest. The same kind of thing can now be tried in metaphysics, with respect to the *intuition* of objects.

Things were not going well for Copernicus until he attempted to conform the objects of experience with a new hypothesis which he generated. The objects of experience *did not tell* Copernicus that the Earth revolved around the Sun. The Ptolemaic hypothesis accounted, however inadequately, for the data. But Copernicus believed that a different hypothesis could do the job better, and he set out to interrogate the objects of experience to see if this would work. Likewise, Kant wants to “test” his own hypothesis, which is that objects must conform themselves to our cognition, and he will do this with the help of the scientific method. Key to this method is experimentation: “This method, imitating that of the student of nature, consists therefore in this: to seek the elements of pure reason in that *which admits of being confirmed or rejected through experiment*. But for testing the propositions of pure reason, especially if they venture out beyond all bounds of possible experience, there is no experiment to be made with their *objects* (as in natural science): therefore the experiment is feasible only with the *concepts* and *principles* that we assume *a priori*.”²⁵ Not only do we come to nature (or metaphysics) with our questions in hand, but we perform *experiments* to see whether or not our hypothesis should be accepted or rejected. The process is not haphazard but rigorous. And, I will argue, it is precisely this aspect of the scientific method, as used in the natural sciences, which Nietzsche

²⁵ Ibid., Bxiii–xix*.

adopts as well.

Of course, as the last quote points out, there are significant differences in the philosophical/metaphysical experimentation with respect to experimentation in the natural sciences. We philosophers cannot experiment with objects the same way that can be done in the natural sciences, but only with *possible* objects (that is to say, with the possibility of experience of objects as such). This is not, however, the only difference. Hans Seigfried points out three differences between the natural sciences and Kant's "scientific" philosophy:

(1) The *propositions* whose objective validity needs demonstration in philosophy and in the sciences are radically different (transcendental-logical propositions about the *experience* of objects in philosophy, and hypothetical propositions about *objects* of experience, even if to be demonstrated only indirectly by a *Gedankenexperiment*, in the sciences); (2) The objective *validity* of these propositions is radically different in each case (transcendental-logical necessity in philosophical propositions, and agreement with their [empirical] object, empirical truth, in scientific propositions); and (3) The experimental *demonstration* itself is radically different in each case with regard to its 'content' (what is experimentally demonstrated by a trial run in philosophy is *that* certain concepts and principles are necessary in order to conceive *a priori* the *possibility* of the experience of objects, and what is demonstrated in the sciences is that, as a matter of fact, there is something 'in the object of experience' that 'agrees with,' and is amenable to the application of, certain organizing concepts and their synthesis).²⁶

²⁶ Hans Seigfried, "Transcendental Experiments (II): Kant and Heidegger," *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Lectures and Essays*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Lanham, MD: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology & University Press of America, 1988), 135.

Philosophy is not to be *exactly* like the natural sciences – if it were, it would *be* a natural science and lose its distinctiveness. Nor is it just the natural sciences but with a particular subject matter. Chemists study molecules, biologists study genes, and philosophers study... what? No, it is not this that makes philosophy distinct. Kant does not advocate this kind of pattern but rather adapts and transforms the scientific method for philosophical purposes. And this means that whether or not the experiment is successful does *not* depend on how an “object of experience” agrees with organizing concepts and their synthesis. A successful hypothesis is one which makes sense of the possibility of experience at all, but not one which confirms that a particular fact is correct or incorrect. For Kant, *a priori* concepts and principles must relate to actual objects of experience – they are not fantasies after all.²⁷ But “to demonstrate their objective validity in transcendental philosophy, i.e., in the discussion of the *a priori* possibility of experience, can only mean to demonstrate that we *necessarily must* use certain concepts and principles in order to experience objects at all...”²⁸ Kant has adapted the scientific method for his own purposes, the purposes of providing the conditions for the possibility of experience and along with it the possibility of metaphysics. In this sense he is scientific and especially so with respect to experimentation. Yet as should by now be clear, to confuse his enthusiasm for and adaptation of the sciences with a “naturalist” project would be a mistake. One could

²⁷ Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 155ff and B 194ff.

²⁸ Seigfried, “Transcendental Experiments (II),” 138.

perhaps construct an argument for a “naturalist” reading of Kant (by emphasizing the lack of anything like the supernatural allowed as causal explanation of phenomena), but this would most likely only obscure Kant’s actual project. And, I want to argue, the same can be said of Nietzsche. As Seigfried concludes his essay on Kant’s experimentalism, “The task of philosophy, as conceived by Kant... can be accomplished *experimentally* and *with scientific rigor*, as I tried to show they demonstrate. Consequently, we should not admit any transcendental knowledge claims without proper legitimation, although we may have to show more leniency and admit many more such claims than Kant dares to dream of – maybe infinitely many, as Nietzsche argues.”²⁹

As we will see in a moment, what Nietzsche says positively about science and experimentation can be read as a continuation of this Kantian project. It is certainly not obvious, in any case, that it makes *more* sense to read Nietzsche with Hume and Freud than with Kant. If anything there is a much greater case to be made that we should place Nietzsche in the Kantian tradition – though without his swallowing the pill whole. Nietzsche is working within this tradition while modifying it and taking it further. Nietzsche at several points speaks of his “naturalizing” project, something the “naturalist” readers are quick to note. A better way of understanding this project, however, is not to see Nietzsche as a “naturalist” but

²⁹ Ibid., 154.

as doing precisely what he says he is doing: *naturalizing* morality and epistemology. In this sense, if we are adamant to speak of Nietzsche as a “naturalist,” it must be understood that his project is not one of giving (what would amount to pseudo-)scientific hypotheses about the history of morality (hypotheses-mongering), but as attempting to give a *naturalized* transcendental philosophy.

For Kant, the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience are fixed. Thus for the experiment to be successful, the following two conditions must be met:

“Transcendental arguments, thus, must prove *indirectly* that *a priori* connections of certain concepts in transcendental propositions are necessary by demonstrating *directly* that (1) with such propositions we can make the possibility of the experience of objects intelligible and manageable, and (2) without them we cannot.”³⁰ It is on the second of these points that Nietzsche will part ways with Kant. Moreover, Kant thinks of both the natural sciences and his own scientific philosophy as approaching something timeless. He writes near the end of the preface, “But, it will be asked, what sort of treasure is this that we intend to bequeath to posterity through a metaphysics such as is purified through critique, and also brought thereby into a condition of permanence?”³¹ Nietzsche sees what he thinks Kant fails to see: that once you have made this move and go down this path, there is not stopping the scientific method

³⁰ Ibid., 140.

³¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface B xxiv.

and its pursuits. Galileo and Newton didn't bring about a revolution and then come to a full stop. The scientific revolution does not bring a new, pure truth but only more and unending use of the method. Likewise, Nietzsche does not think that Kant's revolution has arrived at the pure truth but has only scratched the surface, unwilling to continue the project further. His *naturalized* transcendental philosophy argues that the conditions for the possibility of experience *themselves* have a history which can be talked about and investigated, and it is a history which *could have been different*. The conditions for the possibility of experience are conditions only for the particular kind of experiences that we have, but the second requirement for success listed above is denied – without these particular conditions we still can make sense of the possibility of experience even if it is not our own.

Perhaps even more important than this point, Nietzsche also believes that the impact of this revolution will be profoundly existential. We cannot go on living as before when the grounds for our world have been shaken in this way (never mind if so far everyone has – the news just hasn't reached us yet³²). Thus Nietzsche must not only talk about a revolution in our epistemology, but a revolution that must and will take place in our morality. *The Genealogy of Morals* represents Nietzsche's attempt to show the possibility of a naturalized morality, one which does not depend on fixed *a priori* conditions but on conditions which are themselves

³² Cf. the parable of the madman. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III, §125.

conditioned. But before we can give a detailed account of why and how this is different than the “naturalist” reading of the *Genealogy*, an overview of Nietzsche’s own remarks on science is in order, if only to confirm my reading of Nietzsche as best understood in the Kantian experimental tradition.

3.3 Nietzsche and Science

One feature of the “naturalist” reading is that it depends on accepting that Nietzsche’s mature writings are unambiguously pro-science (especially the natural sciences). Clark makes this explicit when she writes that in his later works Nietzsche “exhibits a uniform and unambiguous respect for facts, the senses and science.”³³ Leiter picks up this theme throughout his writings on Nietzsche’s moral philosophy and naturalism. As we have seen above, Leiter goes so far as to say that “Nietzsche’s skepticism vanishes (in his later works) and he repeatedly endorses a scientific perspective as the correct or true one.”³⁴ While it is true that Nietzsche’s work has a progression to it (see 2.1 and the stages of perspectivism), I do not think it is so clear that he comes to such an unambiguously pro-science position as Leiter et al.

³³ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 105.

³⁴ Leiter, “One Health.”

would have us believe.³⁵ But to get to the mature works, we will first go back to Nietzsche's first published book and work our way forward again.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche has little positive to say about the sciences. He seems to take it for granted that Schopenhauer and Kant have shown us the failure of the sciences to truly understand reality "as it is in itself." That Nietzsche is only espousing a pseudo-Kantian position is of little interest to us here. What is relevant is that this early Nietzschean position takes a stand with Schopenhauer and devalues the role of science. In its stead he hopes to see a revival of the place of art, and an art which is itself not bound to science but free to go its own path – a path that he believes will share more in common with the tragic than the Socratic. Thus he writes at the end of section 14 (where he mentions science for the first time in *The Birth of Tragedy*), "Perhaps there is a kingdom of wisdom from which the logician is banished? Perhaps art may even be a necessary correlative and supplement of science?"³⁶ In section 15 of the same work, Nietzsche goes in to some depth into the problem of science. Here he argues that the knowledge the scientist is after – Truth – always eludes the scientist; the more science pursues its questions, the less the scientist seems to know. Thus,

³⁵ Of course there are many other interpreters who also challenge the naturalist reading on this point, including some who support a more general "naturalist" reading than the one proposed by Leiter. Among others, see C. Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Beatrice Han-Pile, "Transcendental Aspects, Ontological Commitments and Naturalistic Elements," *Inquiry* 52, n2 (April 2009), 179–214.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 71.

This is why Lessing, the most honest of theoretical men, dared to state openly that searching for the truth meant more to him than truth itself; thereby the fundamental secret of science is revealed, much to the astonishment, indeed annoyance, of the scientifically minded. Admittedly, alongside this isolated recognition (which represents an excess of honesty, if not of arrogance), one also finds a profound *delusion* which first appeared in the person of Socrates, namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it. This sublime metaphysical illusion is an instinct which belongs inseparably to science, and leads it to its limits time after time, at which point it must transform itself *into art; which is actually, given this mechanism, what it has been aiming at all along*.³⁷

The scientific spirit, in this early understanding of Nietzsche, is anti-life. It does not accept life as it is found but wants to *fix* life. But here we also see a foreshadowing of the positive side of science found in Nietzsche's later work. *Pace* the Leiter reading, Nietzsche is not interested in results continuity but primarily in methods continuity, here praising Lessing for appreciating this. The search for truth counts more than the truth itself, since the latter is always elusive and retreats in the face of the search. Thus, in the end, science must either disintegrate into nihilism, convinced that there is no final meaning, or it must become art and simply create meaning where it appears to be lacking.

Of course, we might dismiss this work, at least with respect to understanding Nietzsche's mature work on science. Nietzsche himself writes that this work was childish and

³⁷ Ibid., 73.

unclear, but he continues to maintain that he was after something important here. When he writes the preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, he still has this to say about scientific scholarship:

And even scientific enquiry itself, our science—indeed, what does all scientific enquiry in general mean considered as a symptom of life? What is the point of all that science and, even more serious, where did it come from? What about that? Is scientific scholarship perhaps only a fear and an excuse in the face of pessimism, a delicate self-defense against—the Truth? And speaking morally, something like cowardice and falsehood? Speaking unmorally, a clever trick? Oh, Socrates, Socrates, was that perhaps your secret? Oh you secretive ironist, was that perhaps your—irony?³⁸

He goes on to add in the second paragraph that the problem the book really seeks to address is, “the problem of scholarship itself, scholarly research for the first time grasped as problematic, as dubious.”³⁹ In other words, Nietzsche can’t offer a purely scientific, scholarly work, since the work itself is meant to address the problem of science. If there is something *broken* or *at fault* with science, then science will not be able to address it. The problem will always elude science. At times Nietzsche seems to speak of this in harsh terms, as though science itself is one form of sickness (as when he compares it to the ascetic ideal). At other times he doesn’t criticize it for having a history but nevertheless wants to trace this history. In this sense, if Nietzsche later turns to the *Genealogy of Morals*, we could retitl

³⁸ Ibid., preface §1.

³⁹ Ibid., preface §2.

the *Genealogy of Science*. Nietzsche is asking what features of life give birth (to tragedy) but also to the scientific spirit. He situates science within human history, as a growth of a particular kind of life and an outcome of particular drives. To do this without at the same time becoming scholarly is a nearly impossible task, which is why Nietzsche turns to art. Thus he continues and writes that this book is “built on the basis of art (for the problem of scientific research cannot be understood on the basis of scientific enquiry)—a book perhaps for artists with analytical tendencies and a capacity for retrospection (that means for exceptions, a type of artist whom it is necessary to seek out and whom one never wants to look for),” and concludes the section, “to look at scientific enquiry from the perspective of the artist, but to look at art from the perspective of life. . ..”⁴⁰

Two points need to be addressed before moving on. First, the proponent of the “naturalist” reading might be quick to point out that I have not dealt with the distinction between “science” and “natural science,” a distinction confused by the tendency in English to conflate the two – something that does not take place in German. Nietzsche is clearly dealing, in these passages, with *Wissenschaft* in the broader sense of “scholarly work.” Thus, these comments may not apply to natural science as such. While this point is true so far as it goes, it does not get natural science off the hook. Natural science, in this sense, is just a sub-set of the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

sciences more broadly. I see no reason why we should think that Nietzsche excludes natural science from this critique. A case might be made with respect to the mature work, but it certainly does not apply here. But this leads to the importance of the second point; these last comments from the preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* are *not* the product of an “early,” “young,” or “immature” Nietzsche. They are from the second publication of all of Nietzsche’s works which he undertook in 1886. This puts them *after Gay Science* and roughly of the same period as *Beyond Good and Evil*. The last writings of Nietzsche, like *On The Genealogy of Morals*, *The Anti-Christ(ian)*, *Twilight of the Idols*, etc. are just a couple of years away and already in the works. They cannot, therefore, be so easily dismissed simply as being from an “earlier” period.⁴¹

By the time we get to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche has changed his tune a bit from his earliest work (and not yet “returned” to it in the sense of the second edition). Several commentators have repeated that it is in this work that Nietzsche is perhaps most infatuated with the ability of science to give us knowledge. Oddly, while it is true that Nietzsche is more enthusiastic about the sciences in this work than in some others, I do not find any evidence that he embraces science here to the extent that it is claimed. He does write, for instance, that, “Here lies the antagonism between the individual regions of science and philosophy. The latter

⁴¹ To be fair, Leiter would *still* include most work before 1888 in a “middle period,” allowing only the work from 1888 into the “mature” category. But I do not see any textual or biographical evidence to assume that only these works “count.” Nietzsche indicates that his mature period begins around *Gay Science*, which also seems to me, from a textual standpoint, to be a more fruitful starting point.

wants, as art does, to bestow on life and action the greatest possible profundity and significance; in the former one seeks knowledge and nothing further – and does in fact acquire it.”⁴² Here Nietzsche has slightly changed his tune; it is not “science” that hopes to give life meaning but rather philosophy, and there is a more optimistic belief that science actually does have a chance to achieve knowledge. When speaking of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche tells us that the scientific spirit hasn’t advanced enough in our age; it has successfully purged us of the dogmas of Christianity, but has not really gotten rid of the Christian concept of the world. In Schopenhauer, if anything, this world view has seen something like a “resurrection.”⁴³ Science is implicitly praised here as something which frees us from dogma. In the next paragraph he continues this theme, criticizing metaphysical philosophy and encouraging us once again to take up art. But here it is not art for its own sake, but art for the sake of science: “To effect a transition here, to relieve the heart overladen with feeling, it is much more useful to employ *art*; for those conceptions we have spoken of will be nourished far less by art than they will be by a metaphysical philosophy. From art it will then be easier to go over to a truly liberating philosophical science.”⁴⁴ Science is seen throughout HATH as being something liberating, freeing us from the dogmas that have dominated our thinking for too long.

⁴² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), I, §6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, §26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, §27.

Those who emphasize Nietzsche's positive attitude toward science in HATH are correct, then, but primarily with respect to the attitude and methods of science – not to its results. What Nietzsche promotes in science (in HATH and, I believe, throughout) is an attitude toward dogma, a skepticism of accepted truths and knowledge. He tells us that “the scientific man is the further evolution of the artist,”⁴⁵ and that “we must conjure up the spirit of science, which on the whole makes one somewhat colder and more skeptical and in especial cools down the fiery stream of belief in ultimate definitive truths.”⁴⁶ Far from praising science for *finding* “definitive truths,” Nietzsche thinks it is to be praised for causing us to be skeptical of these beliefs. Again, speaking of the distinction between the process and its results, he writes, “Science bestows upon him who labours and experiments in it much satisfaction, upon him who *learns* its results very little.”⁴⁷ A few paragraphs later he adds this:

Science furthers ability, not knowledge. – The value of having for a time rigorously pursued a *rigorous science* does not derive precisely from the results obtained from it: for in relation to the ocean of things worth knowing these will be a mere vanishing droplet. But there will eventuate an increase in energy, in reasoning capacity, in toughness of endurance; one will have learned how *to achieve an objective by the appropriate means*. To this extent it is invaluable.⁴⁸

Here Nietzsche is explicit: it is not the acquisition of knowledge that science is after, but the

⁴⁵ Ibid., I, §222.

⁴⁶ Ibid., I, §244.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I, §251.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I, §256.

increase in a certain kind of ability, one which allows for “endurance” and pursuit of an objective – but only by “appropriate means.”⁴⁹ Thus while it is clear that Nietzsche highly values science in HATH, it is not at all clear that he values *the results* of science, if by the results we are speaking of a body of knowledge. The “knowledge” produced by science is always changing, but it is precisely *that* it is always changing that makes it interesting and valuable to Nietzsche. It is anti-dogmatic, with a system built in which protects it from dogmatism. This, anyway, at its best. It is not impervious to the temptation, as in art and philosophy, to ossify its own results into something dogmatic in turn.

If *Human, All Too Human* is supposed to be the high water mark of Nietzsche’s early infatuation with science, *The Gay Science* (ironically?) is his highest praise of art, second only perhaps to *The Birth of Tragedy*. He tells us that we should be grateful to art, since science leads to “nausea and suicide. But now our honesty has a counterforce that helps us avoid such consequences: art, as the *good* will to appearance.”⁵⁰ Art provides us for “goals of action,” a reason to live, in a world increasingly devoid of meaning thanks to science. Moreover, he seems to think little of science’s chances of getting to the bottom of things anyway. What is truly revealed in science is not something about the world but something about ourselves, how we relate to the world. “How is explanation to be at all possible when we first turn everything

⁴⁹ One could go on listing sections such as these from HATH. See in particular Book I, §272 and §635.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §107.

into a *picture* – our picture! It is enough to view science as an attempt to humanize things as faithfully as possible; we learn to describe ourselves more and more precisely as we describe things and their succession.”⁵¹ On the one hand this is a negative remark about the possibility of knowledge through the sciences; on the other hand, Nietzsche himself does not seem to devalue science for this reason. It is only *if* you expect and hope for science to provide something more than this that there is anything lost in this account. In this sense his remark is not so different from those in HATH. Science is valuable due to its method and its ability to bring greater awareness of ourselves to ourselves. The problem is that we are not content with this result:

But you will have gathered what I am getting at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests - that even we knowers of today, we godless antimetaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine ... But what if this were to become more and more difficult to believe, if nothing more were to turn out to be divine except error, blindness, the lie - if God himself were to turn out to be our longest lie?⁵²

Throughout *Gay Science*, Nietzsche repeats this theme. Belief in God is not only about the belief in a supernatural being who masterminds the world's events; belief in God is, from a larger standpoint, about the belief in truth as such, and the corresponding evaluation that truth is

⁵¹ Ibid., §112.

⁵² Ibid., §344.

inherently worthwhile because it is divine. But we do not *have* to view science in this way, and the methods of science are still valuable to us so long as we do not confuse the value of science with the value of truth itself.

When we arrive at *Beyond Good and Evil*, we still find no radical turn toward the sciences as somehow offering a “correct” perspective. If anything, we find a repetition of his criticism of the sciences, and here now specifically of the natural sciences. Thus he writes,

We should not erroneously *objectify* “cause” and “effect” like the natural scientists do (and whoever else thinks naturalistically these days –) in accordance with the dominant mechanistic stupidity which would have the cause push and shove until it “effects” something; we should use “cause” and “effect” only as pure *concepts*, which is to say as conventional fictions for the purpose of description and communication, *not* explanation. In the “in-itself” there is nothing like “causal association,” “necessity,” or “psychological un-freedom.” There, the “effect” does *not* follow “from the cause,” there is no rule of “law.” We are the ones who invented causation, succession, for-each-other, relativity, compulsion, numbers, law, freedom, grounds, purpose; and if we project and inscribe this symbol world onto things as an “in-itself,” then this is the way we have always done things, namely *mythologically*.⁵³

Nietzsche continues his neo-Kantian criticism of confusing our experiences and scientific experiments of phenomena with knowledge of the thing in itself. As we have seen, this isn’t yet his most developed position with respect to causation and the “thing in itself.” But it is illustrative of his thoughts on the natural sciences. *They*, the natural scientists, “erroneously

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §21.

objectify” cause and effect, in accordance with “mechanistic stupidity.” This is hardly a resounding affirmation of the natural sciences. Moreover, he adds that it is precisely these natural scientists who espouse “arrogantly naïve comments about philosophy and philosophers... especially [from] those hodgepodge philosophers who call themselves ‘philosophers of reality’ or ‘positivists.’”⁵⁴ It may be argued here, of course, that these comments are irrelevant with respect to the mature Nietzsche. If his perspectivism has not yet developed to the point of fully rejecting the entire neo-Kantian orientation toward phenomena and noumena, then what he has to say at this immature stage is of no consequence. But tracing his argument chronologically in this way, we can see that the claim becomes ever more tenuous. BGE is within striking distance of those “mature” works, and it would be surprising to find that Nietzsche, within one year of writing these words, would simply join those who make such “arrogantly naïve comments about philosophy.” This is all well and good, we might hear Leiter respond – but this critique misses the point. Leiter is claiming that no matter what Nietzsche says, what he really *does* philosophically is join the naturalists, even if he does add that the moniker “philosopher” is a title for someone else. What can be said to this? Nietzsche himself provides an answer still later in BGE:

I am going to insist that people finally stop mistaking philosophical laborers and scientific men in

⁵⁴ Ibid., §204.

general for philosophers, – that here, of all places, people be strict about giving “each his due” and not too much to the one, and much too little to the other. In the course of his education, the genuine philosopher might have been required to stand on each of the steps where his servants, the philosophical scientific laborers, have come to a stop, – have *had to* come to a stop. Perhaps the philosopher has had to be a critic and a skeptic and a dogmatist and historian and, moreover, a poet and collector and traveler and guesser of riddles and moralist and seer and “free spirit” and practically everything, in order to run through the range of human values and value feelings and *be able* to gaze with many eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance, from the depths up to every height, from the corner onto every expanse. But all these are only preconditions for his task: the task itself has another will, – it calls for him to *create values*.⁵⁵

Following Nietzsche here, *I* want to insist that people stop mistaking Nietzsche with a naturalist. If Nietzsche at times does the work of a naturalist, this is part of the steps that the philosopher must travel in order to step over the prior work of the scientific men. Where they come to a stop, however, philosophy continues on. All of this is part of a larger project of seeing “the range of human values and value feelings,” to learn to see with new and different eyes. The point of doing the work of the natural scientist (when he does), is not to discover a correct perspective nor to come up with “true” claims about the nature of human behavior, but to develop the philosopher’s own ability to see from all of these perspectives.

This brings us, then, to the works that the naturalists most rely on, namely *On The*

⁵⁵ Ibid., §211.

Genealogy of Morals, *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*. Surely, one would think, at this point we will find an overwhelming appreciation for the sciences to support the naturalist reading. And yet even here, the evidence is mixed at best and patently contradicts the naturalist reading at worst. Early on in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche tells us that, “All sciences must, from now on, prepare the way for the future work of the philosopher: this work being understood to mean that the philosopher has to solve the *problem of values* and that he has to decide on the *rank order of values*.”⁵⁶ Note well: *all* sciences, natural science included. Insofar as the *Genealogy* participates in the naturalist project at all, it is only to do so as a preliminary stage to the revaluation of values. But alright, the naturalist line might continue, our argument has always been not to diminish the importance of *that* philosophical project, but only to add that Nietzsche does, after all, participate in the naturalist project on his way to getting there. Unfortunately for this line of argument, Nietzsche continues, through the *Genealogy*, to remind his reader that the sciences (including natural science) are actually a continuation of the ascetic ideal. Thus in Book III he writes, “Precisely the opposite of what they are declaring here is the truth: science today has absolutely *no* faith in itself, let alone in an ideal *above* it, – and where it is still passion, love, fire, *suffering*, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §34.

rather the latter's own *most recent and noble manifestation*.”⁵⁷ Science carries on the ascetic faith in truth, the belief that truth is valuable in and of itself and therefore to be pursued for its own sake. Rather than attempting to carry on in the tradition of the natural sciences, or to adopt a results continuity with the natural sciences, it is as if Nietzsche is attempting to *naturalize* the natural sciences themselves. That is, *Nietzsche wants to show that the scientific project, including the natural sciences, is itself part of a human history and depends on promoting a certain vision of the human life, and the values that come along with that vision.*

This is not just a use of the natural sciences, or of naturalism, as a tool along the way toward revaluing values. It is the ability of the natural sciences (or any other form of the ascetic ideal) to achieve their goal that must be called into question *before* the revaluation of values can begin. If this is not called into question, then it can always be hoped that these values await discovery through the use of some form of the ascetic ideal – precisely the idea that Nietzsche is attempting to move his reader beyond. Thus, near the end of the *Genealogy*, he concludes:

No! Do not come to me with science when I am looking for the natural antagonist to the ascetic ideal, when I ask: ‘Where is the opposing will in which its *opposing ideal* expresses itself?’ Science is not nearly independent enough for that, in every respect it first needs a value-ideal, a value creating power, in whose *service it can believe* in itself, – science itself never creates values... Both of them, science and the

⁵⁷ Ibid., III, §23.

ascetic ideal, are still on the same foundation – I have already explained –; that is to say, both overestimate truth (more correctly: they share the same faith that truth *cannot* be assessed or criticized), and this makes them both *necessarily* allies, – so that, if they must be fought, they can only be fought and called into question together. A depreciation of the value of the ascetic ideal inevitably brings about a depreciation of the value of science: one must keep one's eyes open and prick up one's ears for this in time! (Art, let me say at the outset, since I shall deal with this at length some day, – art, in which *lying* sanctifies itself and the *will to deception* has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science is: this was sensed instinctively by Plato, the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced.)⁵⁸

There remains then only the work from 1888 from which the naturalists can make their case. Even here, the textual evidence does not support the claim that Nietzsche is interested in results continuity with the sciences. As usual, there is a sense in which Nietzsche praises the sciences in his later writings (just as in his earlier). But it continues to be a praise which is based not on results or an epistemological priority, but of methods and anti-dogmatism. He notes that religion is almost inherently anti-scientific, and always fears science, for precisely this reason. Even God, apparently, fears science: “Have people really understood the famous story at the beginning of the Bible, – how God was scared stiff of *science*? ... People have not understood this. This priestly book *par excellence* begins, as is only fitting, with the priest's

⁵⁸ Ibid., III, §25.

inner difficulty: *he* has one great danger, *consequently* ‘God’ has one great danger...”⁵⁹ A bit later he continues the theme in writing, “The concepts of guilt and punishment, the whole ‘moral world order’ is invented *against* science...”⁶⁰ In these remarks and others, Nietzsche seems to value science mostly for being anti-religious and anti-dogmatic. But these comments do not necessarily negate the charge that science is still a branch of the ascetic ideal. It may be a more noble and worthy branch, but it is the ascetic ideal nonetheless.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche tells us that *Beyond Good and Evil* is “in essence a *critique of modernity*, including modern science, modern art – even modern politics – , along with indications of an opposing type who is as un-modern as possible, a noble, affirmative type.”⁶¹ This self description sits well with what I have said about Nietzsche’s relationship to both science and art. Neither is inherently good or inherently bad; in either case he wants to pursue a *new* art and a *new* science. Nietzsche is repeatedly critical of the sciences of his day. There is no reason to conclude, therefore, that in his later work Nietzsche changed his attitude toward the sciences or privileged the natural sciences as a “correct” perspective. He is consistently critical, rather, of any attempt to believe that in the sciences we have access to truth or knowledge as such, and further critical of the idea that we should value either of these as such

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, §49.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and other writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 135.

to begin with. Nevertheless, there *is* something about which Nietzsche consistently praises the sciences, and that is *experimentation*.

3.4 Nietzsche and Experimentation

At this point we may conclude that although Nietzsche's response to the neo-Kantian problem shifts (through his stages of perspectivism), his view of science is relatively constant. At times he is more inclined to praise its virtues, at other times his inclination is to criticize its vices.

But what he considers to be the virtues and vices of the sciences – including the natural sciences – is far more constant than the naturalist reading indicates. At the core of his praise is the adventurous, experimental side of science, a praise that is not dissimilar to that which we found in Kant. Throughout his writings, from early to late, Nietzsche sees that the sciences offer a method which is inherently anti-dogmatic, even if the results that come from the method might lead us back toward dogmatism. It is for this reason that he tells us every attempt (experiment) is a temptation. It is a temptation to think that the results of the experiment are themselves “correct” in a subjectless and non-perspectival way. So, in the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche praises the Greeks and Romans, because “all the presuppositions for a

scholarly culture, all the scientific *methods* were already there.”⁶² And earlier (which we have already seen), he tells us that “the methods, it should be said ten times over, *are* the essential thing, as well as the most difficult thing, as well as the thing that can be blocked by habit and laziness for a very long time.”⁶³

The various remarks by Nietzsche on experimentation will not be repeated here (they are scattered in the pages above). Focusing on this aspect of Nietzsche’s praise of science, however, reveals the following features: 1) Nietzsche thinks there is a relationship between science and art. Science, like art, is adventurous and does not limit itself to present dogmas. Instead, it proposes new perspectives, new ideas, new ways of thinking, and then pursues these proposals with rigor and care. 2) Experimentation is anti-dogmatic by its very nature; it has a methodological assumption of skepticism to all inherited truths. 3) Finally, experimentation in the sciences is not an end in itself for Nietzsche, but a metaphor and tool for something else, the revaluation of values. What is important in this third point is to see that Nietzsche does not introduce experimentation to praise the knowledge acquired by the sciences; he brings experimentation to our attention so that we may use experimentation *on ourselves*. Nietzsche’s project is not one of naturalism in the sense of Hume or Freud; he is not trying to give us the one correct perspective on reality. Instead he is giving us metaphors that we can apply to our

⁶² Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §59.

⁶³ See note 13, above.

own lives. The problem with both the modern artist and the modern scientist is that they do not apply their methods to themselves, they apply them only to their objects. Just as Nietzsche wants us to be the poets and authors of our own lives, he wants us to be the scientists and experimenters of our lives. We are now able to understand what he means when he writes,

As interpreters of our experiences. – One type of honesty has been alien to all religion-founders and such: they have not made their experiences a matter of conscience for their knowledge. ‘What did I really experience? What was going on inside and around me? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will turned against all deceptions of the senses and stalwart in warding off the fantastic?’ None of them has asked such questions. Even today, none of our dear religious ones asks them; rather, they have a thirst for things that are contrary to reason and do not want to make it too hard for themselves to quench it – so they experience ‘miracles’ and ‘rebirths’ and hear the voices of the angels! But we, we others, we reason-thirsty ones, want to face our experiences as sternly as we would a scientific experiment, hour by hour, day by day! We want to be our own experiments and guinea pigs.⁶⁴

To be artists and experimenters of our own lives: that is Nietzsche’s proposal. But I hear one final objection from Leiter: yes, this is all well and good, but in the end it *still depends on Nietzsche getting certain facts about us right*. In other words, the point of a book like *On the Genealogy of Morals* might be to get us to see that we must be adventurous experimenters, and do be so even with respect to our own lives – but along the way he is making “presumably truthful” claims about the nature of human morality. My response is this: by focusing on

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §319.

experimentation, even this demand fades away. A successful experiment does *not* depend on getting the “facts” right. It is a hypothesis, one to be worked through, and if the conclusion is “no, this isn’t right,” that is itself a successful project. It’s failure still adds to our knowledge. Is this what Nietzsche is doing in the *Genealogy*? Attempting to provide an example of an experiment whose hypothesis is disproven in the end?⁶⁵ No – I do not think we should go this far. I think Nietzsche’s experiment is successful in the stronger sense of confirming his hypothesis, but I do not think his hypothesis is one that shares in the naturalism of Freud and Hume to begin with. Namely, the hypothesis of the *Genealogy* is this: can we look at morality from the perspective of natural history? Can we give an account of how it is that we come to have morality, which does not depend on a transcendental structure like that given to us by Kant? And the answer to this question, Nietzsche has experimentally shown, to be “yes.” We can. If it turns out that the particular story Nietzsche has told is *wrong*, this does not mean that we return to Kantian morality, since in giving us this account at all Nietzsche has removed morality from its transcendental perspective and placed it with its “natural” human world. Nietzsche does not need to have given us the definitive genealogy of morality to succeed in his

⁶⁵ This is, in fact, a proposed reading of the work. Robert Guay argues that we should read the entire book as irony. See Robert Guay, “Genealogy and Irony,” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 41 (Spring 2011), 26–49. “By ‘irony’ here I mean that the discursive norm in which one is committed to the truth of what one says is disrupted or suspended. My claim is thus that Nietzsche does not assert most of the claims contained in the text and thus does not, in the text of *GM*, commit himself to an account of the origin of morality. Nietzsche’s procedure is neither to reliably report his own views nor to assert the reality of what might be called the theoretical terms of account.” 27.

experiment. The success is in showing that this sort of project can be done at all, that it makes sense to speak this way at all. Here, he has succeeded.

What makes him philosophically of interest to us then, *pace* Leiter, is not how well his claims match up with contemporary psychology or neuro-science. Why should we care about that? His ability to guess what our best scientists will think 150 years after his death is of little interest to me philosophically. What is of interest is that “he has done it,” given us a new perspective on morality that is a “natural” alternative to transcendental morality. This is no *failure* of Nietzsche’s or of science, if it is unable to give us the “correct” perspective. To hope for this perspective and to hope for definitive answers is to return to an earlier stage of perspectivism (stage two). Nietzsche does not share this longing:

[Lange] is longing for something which is not deceptive, changing, dependent, unknowable – such instincts belong to frightened creatures and to those who are still dominated by morality: they are still longing for an absolute master, some benevolent truth-teller. In short, this yearning of the idealists is a function of their moral-religious slave-perspective. Our artists’ sovereignty, on the other hand, could celebrate the fact that we have created this world. “Merely subjective,” but I feel the reverse: We’ve done it!”⁶⁶

This realization about science and its abilities is no nihilistic realization for Nietzsche but one of celebration. And perhaps this comment from *Daybreak* gives us the clearest picture of his

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *nachgelassene Fragmente* (Frühjahr 1884, 25[318]), KSA, Vol. 11 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), 94.

ideal, and with it we will conclude:

Investigators and experimenters. – There are no scientific methods which alone lead to knowledge! We have to tackle things experimentally, now angry with them and now kind, and be successively just, passionate and cold with them. One person addresses things as a policeman, a second as a father confessor, a third as an inquisitive wanderer. Something can be wrung from them now with sympathy, now with force; reverence for their secrets will take one person forwards, indiscretion and roguishness in revealing their secrets will do the same for another. We investigators are, like all conquerors, discoverers, seafarers, adventurers, of an audacious morality and must reconcile ourselves to being considered on the whole evil.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, V §432.

Chapter 4: Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Possibility

Whether one begins with the cool, descriptive, and self-limited philosophy of Wittgenstein, or with the hot, passionate, and self-expanding philosophy of Nietzsche, my contention is this: in either case what is at stake is the (re)awakening and (re)opening of certain forgotten or unknown possibilities of human life. Both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein fear that we have become blind to the full variety of our possibilities. For Nietzsche, this means the slave morality and herd thinking in general (and Christianity in specific) have for the last few thousand years closed off the possibility of human greatness for a great many people. Glimpses of this heroic type still manage to peak through into our history – one thinks of Napoleon, Goethe, and Mozart – but for the most part the widespread belief in “Truth,” the ascetic ideal, and slave morality have prevented humanity (through particular humans) from reaching its fullest potential. Likewise, Wittgenstein sees two connected problems which blind us to possibilities. The first is the tendency to generalize certain features of our grammar, through which we come to confusedly believe that features that apply in one area and to certain kinds of objects, practices, and so on, apply to others. But the second is his fear, like Nietzsche, that it is not only a general problem of language and grammar that is the root of our problems, but that there is something more specific to our particular age and era which closes off possibilities. It is in these passages and reflections that we find Wittgenstein speaking of “the

darkness of this time.”¹ Wittgenstein believes that we are too often like Frazer, unable to see the genuine possibility of meaning in practices that are alien to our own, while at the same time also failing to see the similarities that these “alien” practices actually share with ours.

But what exactly is meant by “possibility” here? And how do Nietzsche and Wittgenstein make use of and relate to these “possibilities”? Do they share a similar concept of possibility, or are there important differences in the way they speak of these? In this chapter I argue that what both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein are interested in should best be considered “existential possibility,” in contrast with formal, modal, logical possibility on the one hand, and with mere physical possibility on the other. But to get to this point I will take the following route: first we will take a slight detour into Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as a way to frame the discussion, second (and third) we will look at some remarks on the topic of possibility by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein individually, and finally I will argue that it is the opening up of existential possibilities that drives both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. In addition, I will offer some critical remarks on where Nietzsche and Wittgenstein go astray with respect to their philosophical work, especially with respect to the opening up of possibility.

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, viii.

4.1 Possibility in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

Interestingly, and we may assume significantly, Heidegger speaks of possibility most explicitly when he speaks of “understanding” as a basic and fundamental *existential* structure of Dasein. In other words, “understanding” is a basic feature of the structure of Dasein, a fundamental feature of the way that Dasein relates to the world. Here “understanding” is not contrasted with explanation, but that second type of understanding (which we ordinarily contrast with explaining) is only a derivative form of the “understanding” which is an *existential* structure of Dasein. It is tempting here to divert into a lengthy, and perhaps overly technical, exegesis of Heidegger, but this would not advance us toward a better understanding of possibility in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. What is relevant, however, is the contrast that Heidegger is here setting up. Since “understanding” is *not* about the everyday (ontic) use of the term but about the structure of human experience, when we speak of possibilities we are also not speaking of abilities, what we might call physical possibilities. For example, we sometimes talk about someone having “understanding” in the sense of having the ability to complete a task or to know how to do something or other. Heidegger: “When we are talking ontically we sometimes use the expression ‘understanding something’ with the signification of ‘being able to manage

something', 'being a match for it', 'being competent to do something'."² If we say about my niece that she understands how to ride a bike, we mean to say that she is able to ride the bike, and it is therefore possible for her to ride the bike.³ Or perhaps better, if she has a good understanding of mathematics, this means that she is able to work with numbers, do calculations, etc. Mathematics are therefore for her a possibility.

But with the understanding that Heidegger has in mind, these everyday examples do not suffice. The "understanding" which is a feature of the ontological structure of Dasein is not the ability to complete one task or another, but the ability to exist at all (in the special use of existence that Heidegger employs). The understanding which is a feature of human life is the ability to relate to our own Being, to orient ourselves to ourselves in concern for who and what we are. Thus he continues, "In understanding, as an *existentiale*, that which we have such competence over is not a 'what', but Being as existing. The kind of Being which Dasein has, as potentiality-for-Being, lies existentially in understanding. Dasein is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 183, H143.

³ It is interesting to compare here some thoughts that Wittgenstein has on possibility and ability. He asks us to imagine at one point a group of people for whom, "I am able to do x" can only be stated when we could also say "I have done x." If the chief asks for men who can swim across a particular river, only those men who have in fact swum across just this particular river can answer in the affirmative. Those who have swum across even larger distances in worse conditions must answer in the negative if the first condition is not met. See *Blue and Brown Books*, 103–104.

possible. Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility.”⁴

“Being as existing” is *not* a “what,” that is, it is not an object or even a task to be accomplished.

It is who we are, and we cannot escape from ourselves – no matter how hard we try. We are as

humans, beings for whom our being itself is an issue to ourselves. Dasein cannot but care about

who it is, and this means, when it is authentic, orienting itself to its possibilities. Moreover,

Dasein does not start off in the position from nowhere, randomly choosing one possibility from

another. Possibilities are chosen but not with indifference, and we never actually find

ourselves in a situation of not having chosen. “In every case Dasein, as essentially having a

state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities.”⁵ Unfortunately we have a

tendency to pass over our possibilities, to ignore the fundamental feature about ourselves.

Esposito characterizes it this way: “In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that the experience of

possibility is something *Dasein* seeks to avoid... *Dasein* simply denies that its possibilities are

real possibilities for itself.”⁶ Faced with our possibilities, faced with the possibility of

possibility, we flee from these possibilities and instead take solace in the possibilities that are

handed to us from others.

As something factual, Dasein’s projection of itself understandingly is in each case already alongside a

world that has been discovered. From this world it takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance

⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 183, H143.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183, H144.

⁶ Joseph L. Esposito, “Play and Possibility,” *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer, 1974), 142.

with the way things have been interpreted by the “they”. This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable – that which is fitting and proper. This leveling off of Dasein’s possibilities to what is proximally at its everyday disposal also results in a dimming down of the possible as such. The average everydayness of concern becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquillizes itself with that which is merely ‘actual’.⁷

Instead of embracing the full range of our possibilities, or relating to our possibilities in a meaningful and self-reflected way, we adopt the possibilities of others, content to merely do “what one does.” For Heidegger this is “leveling,” a closing off of possibilities in an attempt to be like everyone else, and through being like others to ignore and pass over all other possibilities. It is potentially frightening and anxious to consider possibilities; it is far easier to pass them by. But this means that not only our possibilities grow smaller and appear to be narrowly defined to us, but our understanding is also limited. Our possibilities and our understanding – of ourselves, of others, and therefore of our world – are intimately connected.

Moreover, we have a tendency – not only in everyday life but in philosophy as well – to give priority to what is “actual” over that which is possible. In the quote above, Heidegger speaks of our “tranquilizing” ourselves with the actual, as though the actual is a kind of narcotic which lulls us to sleep. Wittgenstein often reminds us to not think of possibilities as a shadow or dream of reality, but here Heidegger goes even farther. It is the “actual” which puts

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 239, H194–195.

us to sleep – not the possible! Here we are still only speaking of the everyday use of these words, but elsewhere Heidegger notes that in philosophy too we rush past possibilities in order to get to actuality. Heidegger wants to reorient us to the kind of possibility he has in mind, which is not the “empty” or “formal” possibility that philosophy so often treats.

The Being-possible which Dasein is existentially in every case, is to be sharply distinguished both from empty logical possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand, so far as with the present-at-hand this or that can ‘come to pass’. As a modal category of presence-at-hand, possibility signifies what is *not yet* actual and what is *not at any time* necessary. It characterizes the *merely* possible. Ontologically it is on a lower level than actuality and necessity. On the other hand, possibility as an *existentiale* is the most primordial and ultimate positive way in which Dasein is characterized ontologically.⁸

When we speak of possibility we have a tendency (in philosophy) to do one of two things with the concept. On the one hand we may speak of possibility as that which is coming to be and is therefore primarily understood with respect to what is actual (potentially actual). Here the category is contrasted both with the actual (contingent) and with the necessary, and is ontologically lower than both, which is why we speak of something being “merely” possible.⁹

⁸ Ibid., 183, H143–144.

⁹ According to Knuutila, there are four modal paradigms in ancient philosophy: “the ‘statistical’ or ‘temporal frequency’ interpretation of modality, the model of possibility as a potency, the model of antecedent necessities and possibilities with respect to a certain moment of time (diachronic modalities), and the model of possibility as non-contradictoriness. None of these conceptions, which were well known to early medieval thinkers through the work of Boethius, was associated with the idea of modality as involving reference to simultaneous alternatives.

On the other hand, the 20th century saw a revival of philosophical discussion of possibility as simultaneous alternatives, a view which goes back at least as far as Augustine's discussions of God choosing between alternative acts.¹⁰ It is this latter view which has come to take the primary use of "possibility" in contemporary philosophy as a formal modality, and which generates discussion on possible worlds.

In one sense this view of possibility – as simultaneous alternatives – comes closer to Heidegger's kind of possibility. The classical view of possibility as that which is potentially actual has in mind the actuality of being, the sort of being that Heidegger would call being of beings. This is the actuality of objects, the ordinary, everyday expectations that we have of things "ready-to-hand," that is, available to us in the course of our work, play, etc. But we do not relate to ourselves the same way that we relate to objects. We do not relate to our Being as something we await to come in to being, or which we make use of in some way or another. All

This new paradigm was introduced into Western thought in early twelfth-century discussions influenced by Augustine's theological conception of God as acting by choice between alternative theories." Simon Knuuttila, "Medieval Theories of Modality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/modality-medieval/>>. My two options in the text do not cover all of these paradigms, but the point is that *none of these* paradigms includes the idea of simultaneous alternatives, and likewise, none are consistent with what Heidegger is after.

¹⁰ Steven Kuhn surely overstates this point when he writes, "Although necessity and possibility have never ceased to play an important role in philosophical discourse, their logical properties were largely neglected in modern philosophy until the beginning of the twentieth century. The contemporary revival was sparked by C.I. Lewis' critique of Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*." Steven T. Kuhn, "Modal Logic," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), retrieved April 10, 2012, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/Y039SECT1>. Pace Kuhn, one thinks of Leibniz work here, among others. It is true, on the other hand, that the 20th century saw a new obsession with the logical properties of the various modalities.

of these sorts of possibilities take place because we already find ourselves Being-there; we are always already involved in our possibilities, and it is the central feature of who we are that we have these possibilities before us. We do, however, find ourselves faced with possibilities which can be considered genuine alternatives to each other, and which exclude one another. In this sense they are simultaneous, meaning that from our present standpoint the future possibilities are simultaneous alternatives. But they are not simultaneous alternatives in the sense of what Heidegger calls “empty” and “formal.” Nor are they simultaneously *present* alternatives, since the possibility we are in is already our own. These are our simultaneous existential possibilities, the options available to us, given who we are, of becoming who we are. Here the echo to Nietzsche is unmistakable. Heidegger writes, “Only because the Being of the ‘there’ receives its Constitution through understanding and through the character of understanding as projection, only because it is what it becomes (or alternatively, does not become), can it say to itself ‘Become what you are’, and say this with understanding.”¹¹ Nietzsche introduces this imperative – “Become who you are”¹² – as a kind of motto first in *The Gay Science*. We will return to Nietzsche’s use of the phrase in short order, but remaining with Heidegger for the moment we see that here Heidegger indicates that the existential structure

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 186, H145.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 152 (§270). The full aphorism reads: “§270: *What does your conscience say?* – ‘You should become who you are.’” This is an abbreviated version of a quotation from Pindar: “Become who you are *through knowing*.” “How to become what one is,” is the sub-title to Nietzsche’s autobiographical reflection on his works. See also Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 192.

of Dasein includes alternatives: the alternatives of becoming or not becoming who one is. We might call these *existential alternatives* but it makes more sense for the present discussion to call them *existential possibilities*. Understanding is essential here, but it is not only understanding but actually taking up this understanding into what one becomes – the choices one makes with respect to one’s possibilities – that is at stake.

We can then summarize the following features of possibility in Heidegger, features which will be of use to us as we attempt to locate Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s understanding of possibility as well. (1) Possibility is a fundamental feature of Dasein; in ordinary language, we may say that to be human is essentially to be open to a variety of possibilities. (2) Understanding and possibility go hand in hand. Understanding is here not to be understood as one way of thinking or reflecting in contrast to others (like explanation), but is, like possibility, a fundamental feature of being human. (3) Possibility is not to be taken as the coming to be of potential actualities (objects among other objects), nor as the simultaneous alternatives of empty, formal logic (lists of possible worlds), but is instead the existential possibilities that we always already find ourselves in in the course of our lives. In this sense we *can* speak of “simultaneous possible worlds,” but these are the (perhaps infinitely various) existential worlds of understanding. (4) Despite being essentially open to possibilities (as humans), we nevertheless cover up our own possibilities in an attempt to flee from them. We prefer,

consciously or unconsciously, to accept the possibilities given to us rather than to face them on our own. (5) The manner in which the understanding relates itself to its own possibilities can be either authentic or inauthentic, and in either case genuine or not genuine.¹³ In what follows, (1) – (4) serve as a framework for how to read Nietzsche and Wittgenstein together. (5), though obviously important and interesting, must wait for another work.

4.2 Nietzsche and Possibility

Unlike Heidegger, and to some extent Wittgenstein, Nietzsche never offers anything like a systematic treatment of possibility. His remarks on the concept are therefore varied and sometimes ambiguous. For instance, he will often speak of possibilities as something which are available to us if we would only discover them, and at other times of possibilities as something which must be created, indicating that they are *not* merely there waiting for us to notice them. On the other hand, it is not clear that this distinction would matter all that much to Nietzsche. He seems to take it for granted that at the very least, many of the possibilities he has in mind are not now possible. That is to say, the full range of human possibilities is greater than the limited range that we have placed on it. And if that is the case, the distinction between

¹³ Cf. “Anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one’s *ownmost* and uttermost potentiality-for-Being – that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*.” *Being and Time*, 307, H263.

creation and discovery is of little consequence for the person who lacks the possibility in question.

But why are we handicapped in this way? Why do we fail to see, understand, and therefore live into the full scope of human possibilities? At times, Nietzsche answers this question in ways that are far more likely to bring to mind Wittgenstein than Nietzsche. Anyone familiar with Wittgenstein, for instance, would perhaps not find the following remark surprising:

The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing speaks for itself clearly enough. Where there are linguistic affinities, then because of the common philosophy of grammar (I mean: due to the unconscious domination and direction through similar grammatical functions), it is obvious that everything lies ready from the very start for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; on the other hand, the way seems as good as blocked for certain other possibilities of interpreting the world.¹⁴

Yet this is not a remark of Wittgenstein's, but of Nietzsche. Nietzsche thus introduces in *Beyond Good and Evil* two concepts which are important for Wittgenstein: family resemblance and grammar. Nietzsche's point seems to be to emphasize the role that grammar plays in our interpretation of the world, so much so that it actually opens and closes particular possibilities of interpretation. So one reason that we are seemingly handicapped with respect to the full

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 20, §20.

range of possibilities is that a particular use of language, or a particular grammatical structure, can block off paths that might otherwise be open. Yet this is not a failure of language but rather a consequence of the nature of the way we experience and relate to the world.

Possibilities are tied up with understanding, and we understand both ourselves and the world through the use of language. Our linguistic history shapes the grammar that we use, which likewise determines which possibilities are open to us. This means, as already said, that certain possibilities are “as good as blocked,” but other possibilities are opened by the same process. It is not as though we stand in an original state with respect to our possibilities and then find that language gets in the way. Rather, we are always already involved in our language, which determines (at least partially) the possibilities. This is why Heidegger must say that we are always already in some possibility or other. There is then a seeming paradox of circularity (though it is a false one): on the one hand Nietzsche (and Heidegger and Wittgenstein) hold that the variety of human possibilities are greater than the possibilities we experience and which are currently open to us, but on the other hand all three also argue that we are always already in some possibility or other, and that the actual possibility (if I may be permitted such a monstrosity) we are in blocks these others. Other possibilities are possible, but they are “as good as blocked,” which it would seem makes them existentially impossible for those of us already involved in our actual possibility.

One blocked off realm of possibility lamented by Nietzsche is that of morality. Here we can begin to see why this discussion of possibility is so important to him. It is not the “empty” possibility of logic which he deals with, but the possibility of living a particular life. Morality, at least morality as we have come to accept it, gets in the way. Rather than “become who we are,” we become who the herd is. Heidegger might say that we become who “das Man” is. We listen to “them” and adopt “their” ways:

*Morality in Europe these days is the morality of herd animals: – and therefore, as we understand things, it is only one type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other (and especially higher) moralities are or should be possible. But this morality fights tooth and nail against such a “possibility” and such a “should”: it stubbornly and ruthlessly declares “I am morality itself and nothing else is moral!” And in fact, with the aid of a religion that indulged and flattered the loftiest herd desires, things have reached the point where this morality is increasingly apparent in even political and social institutions: the *democratic* movement is the heir to Christianity.*¹⁵

Nietzsche is explicit that “our” morality is merely one morality among others, others which he clearly prefers. Moreover, they are moralities which should be able to exist side by side with other moralities, invoking language similar to simultaneous alternatives but without the simultaneity of logical modalities. They “should” be simultaneous in the sense of possible for people here, now – not only in different “possible worlds” disconnected from our own. They

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 90, §202.

are simultaneous alternatives of life in *this* world. Yet Nietzsche touches on an important point to be remembered with respect to existential possibilities: though potentially simultaneous they can also be exclusive. Some possibilities exclude the possibility of other possibilities. Herd morality (slave/Christian) is not content to recognize other possibilities – it must rule the use of the concept above all others. What’s more, this morality has been so successful that Nietzsche must ask, “once again: is greatness *possible* today?”¹⁶ With this question I think we are at the center of Nietzsche’s concerns as an author and philosopher. We have, he worries, lost or very nearly lost not only *actual* greatness in our time – which would be bad enough! – but have perhaps even lost the possibility (or come dangerously close). The overwhelming influence and power of the herd possibility (such as it is) closes off and blocks the path to the possibility of greatness.

If this is the last word, however, we can only end in pessimism. A great many readers of Nietzsche would surely conclude that this is precisely where he leaves us. But there are good reasons for believing he has something else in mind, as we have already seen in chapters 2 and 3. Namely, Nietzsche does *not* think that this is the end of the story. He says in the quotation above that the way is “as good as blocked” to other interpretations of the world (given our shared grammar). But to be “as good as blocked” is not the same as “to be blocked.” Likewise,

¹⁶ Ibid., 107, §212.

though Christian/slave morality fights tooth and nail against the possibility of other moral systems, Nietzsche nowhere says that it has completely or finally won. It has, certainly, provisionally won, and done so with force. It is still, nonetheless, one possibility among others, and the possibility for re-awakening and opening these other possibilities always remains. To get us to these other possibilities will take a great effort and involve a variety of strategies, but it begins with finding people who will take up the task, Nietzsche's philosophers of the future. He needs people who have experienced the pain of lost possibilities:

There are few pains as intense as ever having seen, guessed, or sympathized while an extraordinary person ran off course and degenerated: but someone with an uncommon eye for the overall danger that "humanity" itself will *degenerate*, someone like us, who has recognized the outrageous contingency that has been playing games with the future of humanity so far – games in which no hand and not even a "finger of God" has taken part! – someone who has sensed the disaster that lies hidden in the idiotic guilelessness and credulity of "modern ideas," and still more in the whole of Christian-European morality: someone like this will suffer from an unparalleled sense of alarm.¹⁷

Nietzsche's "new philosophers" are those who have a vision for humanity's future, a future which is based not on accident and chance but on will. But precisely because these new philosophers see the greatest potential for humanity, guided by the creative endeavors of the new philosophers, they also see the worst potential for humanity. Left to its own course,

¹⁷ Ibid., 92, §203.

humanity will continue to degenerate, or at least this seems to be the path so far charted. This possibility is terrifying and Nietzsche sounds the alarm, though for his ideal reader the alarm will hardly be necessary. They will have already sensed it. Yet despite the danger and degeneration already present, all is not lost: “In a single glance he will comprehend everything that *could be bred from humanity*, given a favorable accumulation and intensification of forces and tasks; he will know with all the prescience of his conscience how humanity has still not exhausted its greatest possibilities...”¹⁸ The bad habits that we have accumulated, the tendency toward slave morality, ascetic ideals, a love of equality, the feeling of pity, and the like are *not* the only options available to humanity. We can change who we are (we can *become* who we are) through a long and difficult process. Nietzsche speaks of this in terms of breeding, lending himself to (mis-)use by those who would manipulate his work in the following century. To some extent Nietzsche is quite serious when he speaks of breeding, although I think the metaphorical meaning of his words are more important. The point is not to advocate a selective breeding program for humanity (by for instance killing Jews and encouraging Arians), but to highlight an important feature of breeding which he wants to signal. That is, breeding is not accidental or random. In breeding we choose those traits which we find best for a particular purpose (what we value) and we promote them above all others. Breeding is a

¹⁸ Ibid.

matter of will, the will of the one who legislates (to stick with Nietzschean language) the values that are desired. Thus, if we want to make humanity better, to revive its greatest possibilities, Nietzsche's point is that we must be intentional about those values which actually promote human greatness. Slave morality does not, but neither does a *laissez faire* attitude toward our future and our possibilities. Both of these approaches lead toward a total degeneration of humanity. He concludes, "Anyone who has ever thought this possibility through to the end knows one more disgust than other men, – and perhaps a new *task* as well! ..." ¹⁹ It is this extra task that Nietzsche feels and which guides his work – the task of making possible once again human greatness.

Of course, the question of what one means by "human greatness" can return us once again to a circle. What one takes to be great is bound up in the existential possibility that one finds oneself in. The Christian herd, for instance, celebrates compassion. One thinks here of Mother Teresa as an exemplar. In this light, we can imagine someone responding that *this* sort of human greatness is only possible when Christian morality is a live possibility. Nietzsche's possibility would destroy, in turn, the possibility of human greatness so conceived. There are two responses to this criticism. The first we merely need to repeat from the previous paragraph. The problem with Christian morality is not so much that it has its own values and

¹⁹ Ibid.

vision for human life – how could it not? – but that it thinks of itself as *exclusively* moral and valuable. Nietzsche is trying to get his reader to see that there is more to life than this singular vision of it allows. But I think there is a second point that Nietzsche hints at though never makes explicit, and that is that although we would say about Mother Teresa that she is compassionate, loving, and perhaps worthy even of being called a saint, the adjectives “noble” and “great” seem a little out of place. We have other examples that we are more likely to speak of when we think of greatness: Napoleon, Goethe, Mozart are “recent” examples, but we could also reach farther back to Caesar, Homeric heroes, and so on. These figures are more naturally thought of as “great,” yet (and here the exclusivity problem creeps back in) Christian morality tries to devalue these figures by calling those like Mother Teresa “great.” This is the theme we find throughout *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where Nietzsche proposes that we are well served to remember and revive the older language of nobility. “Good and evil” and “good and bad” do not speak of the same moral framework.

Returning to our theme, however, it has yet to be fully said just how we are to (re)make these alternative possibilities existentially possible. Nietzsche has offered one metaphor (and perhaps not only a metaphor) for how to go about this, namely, breeding. And as I pointed out there, the significance of breeding is that it is intentional and guided by those who legislate the values, a task that Nietzsche has handed to the new philosophers that he heralds. As a

metaphor, however, breeding is, even if necessary, not sufficient. To say that “breeding” is necessary is not yet to say how we are to come to the criterion of selection to begin with. To breed at random is in an important sense not to breed at all, and is tantamount to the random path Nietzsche fears humanity is already on. So we need not only to “breed” a new humanity but to come up with the values and ideals that will guide this process. We know that we cannot turn to the ordinary values at our disposal, because these values are taken from the herd, which means that in our context they are taken from Christianity and slave morality more generally. We must, therefore, look elsewhere. Nietzsche has offered some clues in the figures that I mentioned in contrast to Mother Teresa. Yet even these figures are merely glimpses and hints of what Nietzsche is after, since although we might have some nascent inkling that we know Napoleon to be great, we are not always sure why. Why Napoleon? Why Goethe? Is it enough to say merely that Nietzsche prefers them?

First, we should see these figures, to adapt a point made by Nietzsche, as *bridging figures*. Nietzsche does not make this explicit with respect to Napoleon and Goethe, but when speaking of that *other* revaluation of all values (the slave revolt in morality), Nietzsche uses Plato as someone we might call the antipode to Napoleon and Goethe. If these figures show glimpses of the possibility of human greatness, Plato likewise made it possible (once upon a time) for values to go in the other direction. About Plato he writes,

In the great disaster of Christianity, Plato represents that ambiguity and fascination (called an ‘ideal’)

that made it possible for the nobler natures of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and step out onto the *bridge* that leads to the ‘cross’ ... And how much Plato there still is in the concept of ‘church’, in the structure, system, and praxis of the church!²⁰

Just as we are now faced with the question of whether the kind of human greatness Nietzsche longs for is even possible today, there was also a time when it would perhaps have been nearly unthinkable that the “noble natures of antiquity” would relinquish their hold on values.

Nietzsche offers more than one account of how we got to our current state of affairs. In *The Genealogy of Morals* he argues that the Jewish rejection of Christ was a subtle trick of the ascetic ideal. If the exemplars of the slave morality (the Jews) rejected Christ, then surely Christ must not himself be the highest pinnacle of slave morality. At least, that is the trick. When Rome adopts Christianity, then, while they believe they are rejecting Judaism and slave morality, they are actually swallowing the bait whole. But in the figure of Plato we are offered a slightly different account of how this trick is pulled off (though not one which excludes the other).

Here Plato is offered as a bridge to the cross, a way for nobler minds and values to cross what should otherwise be an impossible chasm. It follows, then, that if Plato is a bridge across this chasm, there stands the possibility of a bridge back. Napoleon and Goethe offer two ways across, a (re)turn to other, and potentially greater, possibilities of human life.

Understood as bridging characters, we can see what role Napoleon and Goethe play in

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 225.

Nietzsche's philosophy. But it still remains to be seen why these two are so often cited as the bridge. Early on, of course, Nietzsche also shows a fascination with Schopenhauer and Wagner. Yet by the time we reach the mature works, these two play only the role of foil. He turns again and again to Napoleon and Goethe, for similar but related reasons. First, with respect to Goethe: in Goethe we have perhaps the best example of someone doing the kind of artistic/poetic philosophical work that Nietzsche admires and advocates. He is an "astronomer of the ideal":

Perhaps there will come a time when this courage in thinking will have grown so great that, as the supreme form of arrogance, it will feel itself *above* man and things – when the sage will, as the most courageous man, also be the man who sees himself and existence farthest beneath him? – This species of courage, which is not far from being an extravagant generosity, has hitherto been *lacking* in mankind. – Oh if the poets would only be again what they were once supposed to have been: – *seers* who tell us something of the *possible*! Now that actuality and the past are and have to be taken more and more out of their hands – for the age of harmless false-coinage is at an end! If only they would let us feel in advance something of the *virtues of the future*! Or of virtues that will never exist on earth, though they could exist somewhere in the universe – of purple-glowing galaxies and whole Milky Ways of beauty! Astronomers of the ideal, where are you?²¹

Nietzsche sees that we need people who can see what is possible in human life, and who share this with the rest of us. Our actuality and our past cover up these other possibilities.

²¹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 222, §551.

Unfortunately the poets are all too often co-opted by actuality and the past. As we have seen in chapter 2 and 3, they have a tendency to become one with the religious ideal, promoting the values of the herd rather than doing what Nietzsche thinks they (potentially) do best: tell us something of the possible. We must look for “astronomers of the ideal,” those who are willing and able to tell us about alternative values from our own, other possibilities. In Goethe then we have a figure who seems to do just that; he is willing to break with convention and explore alternatives, not only through poetry but also by exploring new and different possibilities in philosophy, science, and so on. He is, perhaps, the philosopher *par excellence* as sketched in chapters 2 and 3.

Napoleon, however, offers nothing like this. We do not think of Napoleon as a creator or seer of hidden possibilities in this sense. He is no “astronomer of the ideal.” Of all of Nietzsche’s heroes, he seems to share the least in common. So – Why Napoleon? A remark from 1888 is telling: “The attempt to *do* new things: revolution, Napoleon. Napoleon, the passion of new possibilities of the soul, an expansion of the soul.”²² Interestingly, Nietzsche makes this remark about Napoleon in a section dealing with art and artists. He has been discussing romanticism, music, literature, painting, and suddenly switches to this brief remark about Napoleon. Moreover, the context is unmistakably about possibility in the sense that we have

²² Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 438, §829.

been discussing. Thus the quote in full:

Fundamentally, even Wagner's music is still literature, no less than the whole of French romanticism: the charm of exoticism (strange times, customs, passions), exercised on sentimental stay-at-homes. The delight of entering the vastly distant foreign prehistoric land, accessible only through books, and of finding the whole horizon painted with new colors and possibilities–

The intuition of yet more distant, unexplored worlds; disdain for the boulevards– For nationalism, let us not deceive ourselves, is merely another form of exoticism–

Romantic musicians relate what exotic books have made of them: one would like to experience exotic things, passions after the Florentine and Venetian taste: in the end one contents oneself with seeking them in pictures– The essential thing is the type of new desire, the wish to imitate and to experience the lives of others, disguise, dissimulation of the soul– Romantic art is only a makeshift substitute for a defective “reality.”

The attempt to do new things: revolution, Napoleon. Napoleon, the passion of new possibilities of the soul, an expansion of the soul.

Weariness of will; all the greater excesses in the desire to feel, imagine, and dream new things– consequence of the excesses one has experienced: hunger for excessive feelings– Foreign literatures offered the strongest spices.²³

Here the contrast is clear. Nietzsche thinks that the arts, in their variety of forms, do well to show us entire horizons of new possibilities. He seems to think that we have become hungry for this experience: dilettantes of possibility. Romanticism is always a substitute for the reality

²³ Ibid., 437–438, §829.

that we actually find ourselves in, a yearning for these other possibilities without actually engaging in them oneself. And as such, it is always a life-denying orientation toward possibility. We long for difference as an escape from our own actuality, which at the same time therefore traps us in our actuality. The influence of Schopenhauer is clearly strong here. Nietzsche thinks that it is the desire for “excessive feelings” which makes our will weary. But amidst this pessimistic sketch Nietzsche offers Napoleon as something positive. Napoleon does not only look at other possibilities that are presented to him. His revolution is not one of romantic longing but of action. His is the “attempt to *do* new things.” Finally we can see why Nietzsche values Napoleon so highly. It is not only because he is powerful, or because he ends the democratic, egalitarian revolution in France (and Europe). Surely Nietzsche admires him for this as well, but it is in his attempt to do something new that Nietzsche finds so much to admire. Napoleon shows us not only how to contemplate possibilities but how to enact them, how to “expand the soul.”²⁴

Finally, Nietzsche offers himself as a bridging character, perhaps (he seems to think) the final and greatest bridging character. Nietzsche as philosopher and prophet unites (he hopes) not only the artistic goal of philosophy – showing, creating, revealing unknown

²⁴ Compare also, “Like a last signpost to the *other* path, Napoleon appeared as a man more unique and late-born for his times than ever a man had been before, and in him, the problem of the *noble ideal itself* was made flesh – just think *what* a problem that is: Napoleon, this synthesis of *Unmensch* (brute) and *Übermensch* (overman).” Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, §16.

possibilities – but also the Napoleonic side – expanding the soul in an attempt to *do* new things. Fortunately (he thinks), he has a knack for the kind of philosophical work that is needed: “I have a hand for switching *perspectives*: the first reason why a ‘revaluation of values’ is even possible, perhaps for me alone.”²⁵ Nietzsche, through life and work, seeks to bring about this revaluation of values, which means to show us that another life is possible than the life of the herd, the only possibility most of us have ever known. Perhaps we can say that he is successful in showing that this other life is possible, and less successful in showing that it is a real possibility *for us* (*for me*). This would cause Nietzsche no discomfort; that not everyone will be able to appreciate what he is attempting to offer should go without saying. So long as the *right* sort of person is made possible (once again), the possibility of human greatness (re)born, then Nietzsche is satisfied.

4.3 Wittgenstein and Possibility

When we switch to a discussion of Wittgenstein and possibility, it is easy to think first of the *Tractatus*. In his early work Wittgenstein is explicit about possibility and treats it as part of his systematic approach to language. Possibility here plays a role in the overall calculus that lays

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 76.

behind language. On this score much work has been done. Whether Wittgenstein is or is not a combinatorialist, and if so is so as an actualist, or a possibilist, or some new version which combines both in some novel way, has already been debated.²⁶ There is little agreement on how exactly to characterize Wittgenstein's thoughts on possibility, but I will make two general claims that I think will be relatively uncontroversial: 1) Wittgenstein's view of possibility in the *Tractatus* is primarily formal and 2) while Wittgenstein ultimately rejects the formal view of possibility in the *Tractatus*, he never gives up on the importance of possibility for philosophical investigation. The difference between the two approaches can be felt merely by paying attention to the kind of language used. For instance, in the *Notebooks* we find Wittgenstein saying things like: "My *whole* task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition . . . in giving the nature of all facts, whose picture the proposition is."²⁷ And in the *Tractatus* he makes the link with possibility clear: a proposition "depicts reality by representing a possibility of existence and non-existence of states of affairs... a possible

²⁶ See especially Andrew J. Peach, "Possibility in the *Tractatus*: A Defense of the Old Wittgenstein," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, v. 45, n. 4, (October, 2007), 635–658; D.M. Armstrong, "The Nature of Possibility," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 16:4 (December, 1986), 575–596; Raymond Bradley, "Possibility and Combinatorialism: Wittgenstein versus Armstrong," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 19:1 (March, 1989), 15–41; Jaegwon Kim, "Possible Worlds and Armstrong's Combinatorialism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, (December, 1986), 595–612. Could anything be more "empty" in Heidegger's sense than an argument about Haecceitism? (These works are explicitly on possibility, though of course there are countless others who mention possibility as part of a larger treatment of Wittgenstein's work.)

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1979), 39 (7).

situation in logical space.”²⁸ While he goes on to give up on this way of speaking, both about language and possibility, he does not abandon his interest in possibility; in the *Philosophical Remarks* he refers to his new form of philosophy as phenomenology, and tells us that unlike in the physical sciences which establish laws, “phenomenology only establishes the possibilities.”²⁹ He rephrases this in the collection *Culture and Value* by telling us that he is “not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings.”³⁰ Likewise, he tells us in the *Philosophical Investigations* that his work is “directed not towards the phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena” and that philosophy is about “what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.”³¹ But what is the relationship, if any, between the formal elucidation of possibility in the early Wittgenstein, and the phenomenological description of possibilities of phenomena in the latter? And in what way does Wittgenstein move beyond the formal, empty sense of logical possibility and into the realm of existential possibility? It is to these questions that we now turn.

When writing about Wittgenstein’s early thoughts on possibility, D.M. Armstrong

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), 2.201–2.202.

²⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1975), §1.

³⁰ Idem, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. Von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1980), 7.

³¹ Idem, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), §90, §126.

spends much time on the issue of possible worlds. A combinatorialist, Armstrong argues that Wittgenstein is so as well. For a combinatorialist, all possible worlds must be made up of the various combinations that could be arranged from items in the actual world. But Armstrong is a non-realist with respect to these other worlds, and tells us that “There are no worlds over and above the actual one, but it is very convenient, in many philosophical investigations, to speak of these extra worlds and hold them up against the actual world. The worlds are ‘constructed’ in certain ways from the materials provided by the actual world. And it is useful, for certain purposes, to move beyond possible world to merely doxastically distinct worlds, and even to impossible worlds.”³² Likewise, when Bradley responds to Armstrong, he writes that “The viewpoint of S5 is, in effect, a God’s-eye point of view in so far as to say that p is possible is just to say that there *is* somewhere in logical space, a world in which p is true. In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein writes: ‘The thing seen *sub specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole of logical space’ (NB 83[11]). I think it no exaggeration to say that this is the point of view to which Wittgenstein aspires throughout his early work.”³³ Though Bradley and Armstrong disagree with the precise nature of Wittgenstein’s combinatorialism (whether he is an actualist combinatorialist or a possibilist combinatorialist), they both agree that Wittgenstein seeks a view of the possible which spreads the possibilities out before as, as

³² Armstrong, “The Nature of Possibility,” 590.

³³ Bradley, “Possibility and Combinatorialism,” 33.

though from a bird's eye view. What is possible is mapped to possible worlds, and if we can understand the logical form of the proposition, we will be able to see what is possible in any given possible world from our own standpoint. Logic here gives us the view from eternity. What is interesting for our purposes, however, is the way that Armstrong characterizes this project: it is convenient in philosophical investigations to compare possible worlds to the actual world. Here we might add that the point is not to understand something about the possible worlds (or even of the doxastically possible and impossible worlds), but to better understand something about the actual world. It seems to me that this is something which Wittgenstein does not give up on. What we find, however, is that Wittgenstein moves from a formal elucidation of possible worlds to a phenomenological elucidation. Instead of a symbolic system which attempts to show a variety of formal possibilities, he begins to present us with a nearly overwhelming variety of practical possibilities (and impossibilities).

By the time we reach the *Blue and Brown Books*, he is not trying to give the form of the proposition (final or otherwise), but offering examples of things that we would be inclined to say or not inclined to say, and continually asks both himself and the reader whether or not it would be possible to say something or other. For instance, he writes:

Our ordinary language, which of all possible notations is the one which pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position, as it were, and in this position sometimes it feels cramped, having a desire for other positions as well. Thus we sometimes wish for a notation which stresses a difference more

strongly, makes it more obvious, than ordinary language does, or one which in a particular case uses more closely similar forms of expression than our ordinary language. Our mental cramp is loosened when we are shown the notations which fulfill these needs. These needs can be of the greatest variety.³⁴

From this short section several points can be drawn. First, although Wittgenstein here is moving toward a more phenomenological (or, we might say, existential) understanding of possibility, he still has a tendency to talk of this in formal ways. The formal is not wholly divorced from the existential here, and this, I think, is also something which does not go away for Wittgenstein. A discussion of formal logic, notation, possibility, and the like is itself not an answer to the questions Wittgenstein is after, but it *can be* a way of helping make sense of those questions, a way of getting into them. Here the relationship is one between a “mental cramp” and the notation that we use. Notation brings to mind the formal relationship of signs, but Wittgenstein is not speaking primarily of a formal notation but of our ordinary language. The first point is thus that at times we may find that the use of other notations than our ordinary language may be of use for easing the mental cramps that we experience, cramps which are caused by a desire to do something in language that our ordinary language doesn’t seem capable of. In this respect, a formal notation might be of use in certain cases. But the second point here is to note that our ordinary language is itself but one possible notation, which means that there are other possible notations alongside it. We miss these, of course,

³⁴ Wittgenstein, *BB*, 59.

because the ordinary one “pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position.” Just because we feel cramped and held captive by one particular position, however, does not mean that the others are completely removed from us, and it turns out that for Wittgenstein it is precisely the philosopher who explores and opens up these other possibilities – something we should by now be familiar with from our treatment of Nietzsche.

It is because Wittgenstein directs his questions not toward phenomena – particular actualities – but toward possibilities that he calls his investigation “grammatical.” “We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the possibilities of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena... Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one.”³⁵ As it turns out, to recognize that the investigation is a grammatical one means to shift away from a formal discussion into a discussion of practices and forms of life.

“So does it depend wholly on our grammar what will be called (logically) possible and what not, - i.e. what that grammar permits?” – But surely that is arbitrary! – Is it arbitrary? – It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life; and when we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless thing as a proposition, that is

³⁵ Wittgenstein, *PI*, §90.

often because we have not considered its application sufficiently.³⁶

In other words, what is logically possible or not is tied up with what we would actually say about something in some situation or other. Even logic, in this sense, cannot be abstracted from our ordinary, daily life and language. Is this arbitrary? Well, there is a certain arbitrariness to it, but only if you are hoping to look at logic from the perspective of eternity. From our perspective, it is our life which makes logic *not* arbitrary. What is possible for us is tied up with the sort of lives which we live and lead. To say that just *any* life is possible (or here, to say that any proposition which formally makes sense is possibly true) would be truly arbitrary.

But now we seem to be trapped. Our possibilities are tied to our grammar, which is tied up with our lives and practices, and it doesn't appear that there is any way around this. We have seen this dilemma before when discussing Nietzsche. This then is where the philosopher comes in, for Wittgenstein as well as Nietzsche. The philosophical job is to show that there are in fact more possibilities available to us than we imagine. Wittgenstein does this by exploring over and over again a variety of possibilities, often through elucidation and description of

³⁶ Ibid., §520. Cf. the following alternate version: "So it depends wholly on our grammar what will be called possible and what not, i.e. what that grammar permits. But surely that is arbitrary! Certainly; but the grammatical constructions we call empirical propositions (e.g. ones which describe a visible distribution of objects in space and could be replaced by representational drawing) have a particular application, a particular use. And a construction may have a superficial resemblance to such an empirical proposition and play a somewhat similar role in a calculus without having an analogous application; and if it hasn't we won't be inclined to call it a proposition." *Philosophical Grammar*, 128.

possibilities we have missed – but not only through description and elucidation. It may take more than this, since the description that takes place will always depend on the notation we have at hand, and the notation we have at hand will be bound up with its logic (its grammar), which has already, in a sense, predetermined the possibilities. This is why Wittgenstein writes that, “We shall also try to construct new notations, in order to break the spell of those which we are accustomed to.”³⁷ Here Wittgenstein is at his clearest with respect to newness and creation within the philosophical project. When we are stuck because of our notation, we have to break through its restrictions. At other points Wittgenstein tells us that we must *imagine* other possibilities, a task he takes to heart and performs himself, for us his reader, with creativity and care. Does this mean that actuality is irrelevant to Wittgenstein, or to philosophy? No – even scientific progress is relevant, insofar as it promotes the philosophical agenda of mapping out the possibilities. “Is scientific progress useful to philosophy? Certainly. The realities that are discovered lighten the philosopher’s task, imagining possibilities. [Variation: Realities are so many possibilities for the philosopher.]”³⁸ Anytime we discover a new reality/actuality (scientifically, or in any other way we might imagine), we also uncover a possibility. But we should never let the actualities rule; scientific progress and discovery is interesting for philosophy *not* for the discovery of the actuality but for the uncovering of a

³⁷ BB, 23.

³⁸ *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology I*, §807.

(potentially) missed possibility. The greater we become at understanding the variety of possibilities, the easier it will become to break free from the false restrictions we place on ourselves by way of our possibility.

We mentioned above that at times, Nietzsche makes remarks that we would ordinarily expect from Wittgenstein. The same is true in the reverse. For instance, Wittgenstein writes,

We keep hearing the remark that philosophy really does not progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. Those who say this however don't understand why it is so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there is a verb 'to be' that looks as though it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long as we still have the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as we continue to talk of a river of time and an expanse of space, etc., etc., people will keep stumbling over the same cryptic difficulties and staring at something that no explanation seems capable of clearing up.³⁹

The similarities to what Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §20 are striking.⁴⁰ Remember that there Nietzsche speaks of the way being as “good as blocked” to other possibilities than our own. Both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein trace this problem to a shared grammar. So long as we go on speaking the way that we do, we will be seduced by certain combinations of words

³⁹ Wittgenstein, CV, 21.

⁴⁰ Repeated from Section 2 of this chapter: “The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing speaks for itself clearly enough. Where there are linguistic affinities, then because of the common philosophy of grammar (I mean: due to the unconscious domination and direction through similar grammatical functions), it is obvious that everything lies ready from the very start for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; on the other hand, the way seems as good as blocked for certain other possibilities of interpreting the world.”

and false analogies from one use of language to another. And where Nietzsche writes that the way is “as good as blocked,” Wittgenstein tells us that these are problems which “no explanation seems capable of clearing up.” Yet this is not even the most powerful passage that shows a kindred spirit between the two. Consider:

Human beings are deeply embedded in philosophical – i.e., grammatical confusion. Freeing them from these *presupposes* tearing them away from the enormous number of connecting links that hold them fast. A sort of rearrangement of the whole of language is needed. – But of course that language has developed the way it has because some human beings felt – and still feel – inclined to think that way. So the tearing away will succeed only with those in whose life there is already an instinctive revolt against the language in question and not with those whose whole instinct is for life in the very herd which created that language as its proper expression.⁴¹

There are several occasions where Wittgenstein makes it clear that he is writing only to a select group, perhaps most notably in the preface to the *Tractatus*.⁴² But I have found nowhere in his writings where he is more clearly showing an empathy with Nietzsche’s evaluation of the herd. The problems that we are facing with respect to our possibilities are not problems that everyone is capable of facing. We are always already embedded in grammatical confusions (to adapt Heidegger’s point). And unlike what we are told by some of our contemporary

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, *Big Typescript*; cited from Brian McGuinness, ed. *Wittgenstein and His Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 113.

⁴² “This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it -- or similar thoughts.”

Wittgensteinians, these confusions are not only held by philosophers. “It is human beings that Wittgenstein ultimately hopes to “free,” not merely philosophers – and this freedom, he suggests here, will ultimately mean an entirely new way of thinking and speaking.”⁴³ Of course, this quote goes a little too far when it says “human beings,” since we know from Wittgenstein that it is not *all* human beings who will be capable. It is only those ones who already revolt against the herd, who reject the life that is mandated by the herd itself. If one’s instincts are for herd life, then this tearing away will be impossible. Englemann wrote about him, “What Wittgenstein’s life and work shows is the possibility of a new *spiritual attitude*. It is ‘a new way of life’ which he lives, and because of which he has so far not been understood. For a new way of life entails a new language...”⁴⁴

Wittgenstein is giving us examples to “widen our diet.” We are stuck, repeating and reliving the possibilities which are given to us by herd instincts. Other possibilities of human life are available to us, if we would only begin to imagine them once again. But now we face a final problem in understanding Wittgenstein. How can the Wittgenstein of “coolness,” of calm, deliberative contemplation, who says that “language is perfectly in order as it is,” be advocating a new language and a new form of life? Doesn’t this picture of Wittgenstein distort

⁴³ Glen T. Martin, “The Religious Nature of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” *Philosophy Today*, 32:3 (Fall, 1988), 208.

⁴⁴ Englemann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein – With a Memoir* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), 134–135.

his philosophical insistence on detachment and elucidation, and make him a caricature of a Nietzschean “philosopher of the future”? It is true that we must be careful to not lose sight of Wittgenstein’s project when we make these comparisons. Wittgenstein is *not* Nietzsche, whatever the resemblance. Yet these investigations have shown that we are missing something important with respect to Wittgenstein when we dogmatically insist that he is himself dogmatically descriptive. What these pages have shown, I think, is that Wittgenstein’s aim in using description is to open up possibilities of sense. Why “possibilities of sense”?:

The Possibilities of Sense, reflects the characteristic approach to philosophy that Phillips has always commended. On the one hand, it suggests that the resources of understanding that we need to think our way through philosophical perplexities are ingredients in the grammatical strictures of our speech, which both limit and enable our understanding of concepts. On the other hand, it suggests that there are forms of understanding that lie outside the familiar territory of *our* speech, being governed by their own grammatical limits... Yet it must be said that many of these *seemingly* alien ways of understanding are not as remote as they seem. More often than not, we have simply forgotten these possibilities of sense in trying to simplify our understanding, taking the intuitions that belong to once conceptual setting and generalizing them as if they applied to another. Thus, we approach one set of problems - e.g. about the rationality of religious belief or the self-interest involved in ethics - according to over-extended models of what it means to be reasonable. The cure for the problems that accrue by trying to force our thinking in this way is to remember that our ways of understanding range far beyond the privileged models that form our expectations. As Wittgenstein said, we need to remember differences, and to learn this from a

‘wider diet of examples’.⁴⁵

Whittaker is writing about Phillips, but much of what he says applies to Wittgenstein first and foremost. Phillips is, after all, attempting to carry on after Wittgenstein. We speak of “possibilities of sense” in the sense of possibilities of *meaning*. Where meaning seems absent, there are, it turns out, a wider range of possibilities than we ordinarily imagine. On the other hand, Whittaker characteristically goes too far when he says things like “these *seemingly* alien ways of understanding are not as remote as they seem.” Whittaker, perhaps following Phillips, makes it sound as though these other possibilities are extremely close to us, just beyond the horizon, and with a few more examples given to us by kind philosophers, these possibilities will be unlocked for us as well. That is why, they think, we can remain “cool” and “descriptive.” We need merely describe these forgotten possibilities to reawaken them. What we have seen, however, is that this is not actually Wittgenstein’s position. The situation is much more difficult than this. The possibilities of sense, what I have called above existential possibilities, are not only forgotten but *closed off*. Reminders of other possibilities are important, but reminders are not enough. Indeed, Wittgenstein fears that what is needed he is simply not capable of – which is perhaps why he stops with description and reminders. “The philosopher says ‘Look at things *like this*!’ – but first, that is not to say that people will look at

⁴⁵ John Whittaker, “Editor’s Introduction,” *The Possibilities of Sense* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), xi.

things like this, second, he may be altogether too late with his admonition, and it's possible too that such an admonition can achieve absolutely nothing and that the impulse towards such a change in the way things are perceived must come from another direction... Quite different artillery is needed here from anything I am in a position to muster.”⁴⁶

Perhaps the contemplative Wittgensteinian will respond that this “different artillery” is not the business of philosophy. Philosophy sticks to elucidating the possibilities, which means describing options which others have forgotten. Describing – only. There is no reason, following Wittgenstein here, to adopt this position. Wittgenstein sees this as a failure in his abilities, not a methodological proposal for how to do philosophy. We could say, where Wittgenstein is unable to muster anything else, Nietzsche provides the arms. Better would be this: Wittgenstein offers his descriptions, elucidations, reminders, etc., in order to open the possibility for a different possibility of life than that which most of us go on living. I said in reference to Nietzsche, that for the person caught up in the herd life, it means little whether the new life offered is an old, forgotten option or a newly created one. Existential possibilities are not objects; for the person confronted with alternatives they are *always* new, no matter what they have been (or for whom) before. And, finally, there is an important distinction to be made about the role of description. When Wittgenstein promotes description and clarity for its

⁴⁶ CV, 25.

own sake, he is always contrasting this with explanation and scientific progress. He refuses to give *that* sort of philosophical account; where others offer explanations, he offers reminders, clarifications, and descriptions of possibilities. But this is not the same as to contrast description with creation and creativity. Indeed, descriptions *must* be creative if they are to be of any interest at all philosophically. We are offered a picture, but not a picture in the sense of a photograph, which is merely a catalog of the actual. Wittgenstein's descriptions do not play this role; they are more like abstract paintings, which are descriptions that open up new possibilities of orienting oneself toward the actual. There is then no reason to think that Wittgenstein's method of description is at odds with the creative, artistic work of opening possibilities.

4.4 Opening Possibilities: Nietzsche and Wittgenstein Together

My contention then is this: Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, each in their own way, are interested in expanding the range of possibilities of human life. Nietzsche does this both by attempting to destroy what he takes to be the dominant way of life among his contemporaries; Wittgenstein does this by examining the range of possibilities and attempting to make these clear. But he also does this by breaking down our assumption that meaning is an easy, obvious thing for us. He heaps examples on us, one after the other, which destabilize our expectations. M.J. Bowles

argues that in the *Philosophical Investigations*, for instance, Wittgenstein is not attempting to give us the source or ground of meaning but to collapse meaning, to propel us toward meaninglessness. “The claim that lies at the heart of the methodology of the *Philosophical Investigations* is that difference is only generated with the collapse of meaning. We need to break down, to become lost, if we are to wave goodbye to where we were. What Wittgenstein attempts to reveal is that the collapse of meaning, far from being the collapse of language, is in fact part of language’s rhythm.”⁴⁷ If he is correct about this (it is, to be sure, an unorthodox reading of Wittgenstein), then the *Investigations* are a prime example not only of opening up possibilities but of opening the possibility of *being open* to possibility. That is, just as we find in Nietzsche, it is not enough merely to tick off the possibilities as though they were a list of grocery items. This would be to fall back to a formal understanding of possibilities. No, we must ourselves be opened to the possibilities that are opened to us. Bowles continues, “The river that runs through the *Philosophical Investigations* is the pulse of practice: life renews itself when it breaks down. A very similar river flows in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche was one of the first to insist that there is not only one response to slowdown and collapse. It is not necessary that life responds by creating yet another version of the ascetic ideal such that it find fresh delight in overcoming what it was. The remarkable claim of the

⁴⁷ M.J. Bowles, “The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 26 (2003), 22.

Philosophical Investigations, however, is that the ability to break out of vicious circles is as common as the ability to speak language.”⁴⁸

Both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein think that we must in a sense be broken down before we can be built back up (before we can build ourselves). Moreover, for both thinkers the way to move forward is to get beyond a craving for general answers and to come to see that answers can only exist provisionally, for someone or some group in a particular time and space and with particular values and expectations. Objectivity, insofar as it can be attained, does not come through a view from nowhere but from learning to see the world from a variety of perspectives and frameworks. Thus Turanli, when writing about the two, says that “the cure is an escape from a platonic cave, and *seeing the connections*... I argue that both Nietzsche and the later Wittgenstein share the idea that *perspicuous representation* is possible only if we free ourselves from this craving for generality... concepts regarding moral issues cannot be analyzed in a vacuum.”⁴⁹ How they go on to analyze the concepts and moral issues is, of course, different. Nietzsche employs a variety of techniques himself, never relying on only one, though genealogy is perhaps his favored method. Wittgenstein favors the grammatical approach. If we put this back into Kantian terms, the point is that both Wittgenstein and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁹ Aydan Turanli, “Nietzsche and the Later Wittgenstein: An Offense to the Quest for Another World,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 26 (2003), 55.

Nietzsche see that the categories of human thought are not crystalline and pure. “The point of similarity... is that both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein reject categories and *a prioricity*.”⁵⁰ The concepts and categories of our life, which partially determine our possibilities, do not exist independently from human life. For Nietzsche this means reminding us that human life has a history; for Wittgenstein we must be reminded that human life is bound up in a variety of practices and language games. The two approaches are not incompatible. And to refer back to an earlier argument in this work, we may say that both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein *naturalize* without being naturalists. “What Nietzsche does in ethics Wittgenstein does in philosophy of language. Nietzsche opposes idealization in ethics; he naturalizes ethics. Wittgenstein opposes idealization in language, and suggests naturalization of language by bringing ‘words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (PI §116).”⁵¹

Finally, there is an important similarity between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche (and we could easily add Heidegger here) about the relationship between philosophy and art. This is especially relevant when we continue to struggle with how to understand the contemplative, ‘cool’ side of Wittgenstein with this other picture of him which looks startlingly like Nietzsche. Michael McGhee takes this question up, and argues that for Wittgenstein the reason that

⁵⁰ Ibid., 60. I don’t think this is put just right. Better would be: both want to show that even the *a priori* has a history related to practice.

⁵¹ Ibid., 61.

contemplation and coolness are important – the reason we must enter the temple for the passions – is that in *some* cases there are possibilities which will remain hidden except when we place ourselves in this surrounding. We do not enter the temple in order to be so remotely objective that we are finally able to get things right – this is still too long for a crystalline purity in our language and grammar that both Wittgenstein and Nietzsche insist we must reject. Instead, we enter the temple in order “to be sensitive to the possible *inadequacies* of sense.”⁵² This isn’t about “getting things right” since it is only from within our framework, our language, our grammar, etc, that we are able to say that something is right or wrong to begin with. That is, it is only from the vantage of the possibility that we are already in that it makes sense to speak of right and wrong. Rather, “it is a matter of *antennae*, of a disciplined sense of unease about what still eludes us, a sense that there *is* something that *does* elude us, the sense that our understanding is *inadequate* to something we are still only half aware of. This very particular *poiesis*, this activity of making new sense, is a point of intersection between philosophy and poetry.”⁵³ McGhee’s point is strengthened by the reminder that the temple metaphor itself comes not of Wittgenstein’s own creation, but from a poet – Rilke. “The use of the temple metaphor by Wittgenstein and Rilke is *itself* an example of this distinctively

⁵² Michael McGhee, “Wittgenstein’s Temple: Or How Cool is Philosophy?”, *Philosophical Investigations*, 30:1 (2007), 33.

⁵³ Ibid.

philosophical work, viz. that of *making new sense*, and it is not an accident that we are talking here of metaphor... the role of the philosopher is to push back the limits of our understanding – of our world – by assimilating into the language realities that were previously beyond it or only imperfectly or fitfully discerned or conceptualized.”⁵⁴

The danger for both Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, and those of us who do philosophy after them, is to fall into what we earlier called stage two perspectivism. There, we may remember, one believes that the issue of perspectival relativism can be fixed by finding the one right and final perspective to which all others must be measured. There is a temptation, I think, to view Wittgenstein’s temple as just such a perspective, a place from where we can view things and get them right. But this is not Wittgenstein’s aim in using this metaphor (and if it is, we should move past him). The point is, rather, that there are times when we must set aside a space from which to contemplate other perspectives, to imagine the possibilities of sense to be found therein. Yet it is also possible, and here we are well served to learn from Nietzsche, that some perspectives close off other possibilities. If and when this is the case, we may find that these possibilities cannot be dispassionately contemplated precisely because we value contemplation. They stand in the way of contemplation, stand in the way of human possibilities, and according to Nietzsche, stand in the way of that which is greatest and most

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

admirable about being human. Chapter 5 will take up this discussion, using Christianity as an example for how Wittgenstein and Nietzsche part ways on at least this possibility of human life.

Chapter 5: Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Religion

At this point we have seen a variety of similarities, as well as differences, between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, unlike Nietzsche, advocates for a non-meddling, descriptive approach to philosophy. Nietzsche, on the other hand, announces himself to be a dynasty, a burning flame, a destroyer of idols, the anti-christ(ian), and so on. He is, certainly, no contemplative philosopher in the Phillipsian sense. Yet I have also argued that it turns out both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein share a similar goal; namely, the (re)opening up of possibilities which our contemporary civilization covers up and passes over. In this sense Wittgenstein is an advocate no less so than Nietzsche, though it should be obvious that Wittgenstein employs different tools in pursuit of his project. But if *both* Nietzsche and Wittgenstein are advocates, then the most natural and obvious way for distinguishing their approach to religion breaks down. We would expect, following Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion like Phillips, to put the difference as follows: Nietzsche attempts to dismantle religion in order to promote his own vision for human life, while Wittgenstein seeks clarity and understanding (for their own sakes) of the very religious practices Nietzsche attacks. In this chapter I want to pursue a different approach to this question, and argue that Nietzsche and Wittgenstein treat religion differently precisely with respect to the possibility of life that

they wish to promote. For Nietzsche, religion itself is that which “as good as blocks” the possibility he has in mind, while for Wittgenstein religion provides an avenue through which to re-open his own favored possibility. Before we can get to this point, however, we should be clear about just what we are talking about when we talk about religion in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. Here, it turns out, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein come quite close to one another. This chapter will thus proceed as follows: in the first section we will examine the character of religious beliefs according to both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. In the second and third sections we will examine how Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s view of the role of philosophy plays out when they turn to religious examples. Finally, in the fourth section, we will ask where we are to turn as we move forward with philosophical questions about religion.

5.1 Religious Practices, Religious Beliefs

What Nietzsche and Wittgenstein share in their evaluation of religious life is this: religious life, a life of faith, is not primarily or even necessarily about cognitive belief but is instead a way of living. It is an orientation to life but not an additional belief about the world. Readers familiar with Wittgenstein may not be surprised by this, yet Nietzsche holds to this position no less so than Ludwig. Particularly in *The Antichrist* Nietzsche makes this clear. He writes there about Jesus,

This bearer of 'glad tidings' died the way he lived, the way he *taught* - *not* 'to redeem humanity', but instead to demonstrate how people need to live. His bequest to humanity was a *practice*: his behaviour towards the judges, towards the henchmen, the way he acted in the face of his accusers and every type of slander and derision, - his conduct on the cross. He does not offer any resistance, he does not defend his rights, he does not make a single move to avert the worst, what is more, *he invites it ...*¹

As Nietzsche sees it, Christ does not come to teach us doctrine or to impart any particular set of beliefs. He is not even trying to redeem us. To make Christ's life about redemption is already to make it about a particular kind of belief; it would be a belief-that Christ is here to save us, which is again to embrace a system of beliefs and doctrines. These beliefs include, for instance, *that* we are sinners, *that* we are in need of redemption, and *that* it is Christ who provides this redemption. Instead, Nietzsche sees in Christ a demonstration of a way of life, the revelation of a *practice*, something Wittgenstein sees as well.

Nietzsche makes this point in an even stronger fashion a few paragraphs later. He writes:

It is false to the point of absurdity to think that Christians are characterized by their 'beliefs', like a belief in salvation through Christ: only the *practice* of Christianity is really Christian, *living* like the man who died on the cross ... A life like this is *still* possible today, for *certain* people it is even necessary: true, original Christianity will always be possible ... *Not* a believing but a doing, above all a not-doing-much, a different *being* ... States of consciousness, any sort of belief, such as taking something to be true, are (as

¹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §35.

every psychologist knows) trivial matters of fifth-rate importance compared to the value of the instincts: to put it more rigorously, the whole idea of spiritual causation is false. To reduce Christianity, to reduce being Christian to a set of claims taken to be true, to a simple phenomenalism of consciousness, is to negate Christianity.²

Contrary to what may be considered the popular expectation (and certainly the standard view in contemporary philosophy of religion), Nietzsche thinks what characterizes Christians is not their beliefs but the practice of Christianity. It is not about believing but about doing – and characteristically Nietzsche then turns this once again, into a not-doing. This is, in fact, his criticism of Christianity, something we will get to in more depth in a following section. What is important to note here, however, is that Nietzsche sees in Christianity an orientation toward life, a practice, a way of living, and not a set of beliefs about the world. And for him, this means it is a different way of *being*. In Christianity we have a particular possibility of being, but this also means that it is not the only one nor, especially, even the most likely or natural one for human beings. Yet Nietzsche is even stronger here than merely saying that what is important is the life and practice of Christianity. That is significant enough, but still leaves open the response (familiar to our contemporary ears amidst the state of philosophy of religion today) that though Christianity (and religion more broadly) may not primarily be about propositional belief-that (such and such is the case), the practice of Christianity nevertheless still depends

² Ibid., §39.

on these propositional claims being true. To this Nietzsche has two responses. First, he tells us that these propositional beliefs are “trivial matters of fifth-rate importance.” Today we might call them “epiphenomena.”³ For Nietzsche, it is our instinctual behavior that is most important, and we adopt those beliefs which match our instincts best. Of course, “adopt” here is not meant to indicate anything intentional or conscious; we do not (usually) pick our beliefs since this itself would include a conscious, self-orienting point of departure, precisely the thing which Nietzsche is criticizing as a fiction. (On the other hand, clearly Nietzsche does think we have *some* control over this process, since otherwise there would be no reason to tell us about it in the first place or to encourage the stronger types to move on and leave Christianity behind. Perhaps we should say that for Nietzsche, the self is not something we start with but something that must be earned at the end of a long struggle.)

The second reason, however, goes further. It is not only that religious beliefs are epiphenomena of the instincts, but also that viewing Christianity as being *about* these beliefs (epiphenomenal or not), in turn *negates* Christianity. In other words, there is an internal relationship between Christianity and the Christian life, and this relation is one which does not permit the reduction of Christianity into a body of beliefs. When one does this, she is no longer talking about Christianity – at least, not the Christianity taught by Christ. And here Nietzsche

³ Permit me a Nietzschean construction of my own: could we call them pente-phenomena?

makes the final *coup de grâce*, by informing us that, after all, there actually haven't been any Christians since Christ. If Christianity (in the conceptual sense) is primarily a way of life patterned on the life of Christ, and if since Christ Christianity (in the historical sense) is hopelessly entangled with doctrine and a commitment to orthodoxy, then Christianity isn't, at the end of the day, Christian at all. It is, instead, a system of epiphenomena that simply validates the sick and broken instincts of the weak. Thus he writes, "*In fact, there have never been any Christians. 'Christians', the people who have been called Christian for two thousand years, are just a psychological self-misunderstanding. Examined more closely and in spite of all 'belief', they have been governed only by instincts,- and what instincts they are!*"⁴ Thus Nietzsche tells us in the same breath both that it is *always possible* to be a Christian in the conceptual sense of living like Christ – even that it is *necessary* for some people to live this way – and that the history of Christianity (in the historical sense) does not include any Christians. He thus appears to have committed himself to a contradiction; on the one hand it is always possible and sometimes necessary for people to be Christians, and on the other hand there have in fact been no Christians. So long as we keep the idea of the *practice* of Christianity (living a life like Christ) separate from the history of Christianity (as a set of epiphenomenal beliefs) separate, however, no contradiction need arise.

⁴ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §39.

Many of these sentiments are later echoed by Wittgenstein, though as we will see in the following sections, to a rather different purpose. And while Wittgenstein agrees that we should not think of Christianity as primarily about belief, he does not make the ephiphenomenal, psychological move that Nietzsche does. If anything, rather than separate belief from practice (as Nietzsche), Wittgenstein links them even closer together but argues that in religious belief we do not have the same sort of belief that we do when we talk of objects. In any case, what is at stake here is the shared ground with Nietzsche. We find this especially in comments throughout *Culture and Value*. For instance, he wrote sometime in 1949, “If Christianity is the truth, then all the philosophy about it is false.”⁵ That is, all attempts to give evidence for Christianity, all attempts to elaborate on various propositions thought relevant or central to Christianity, and any attempt to construct a philosophical system around Christianity must fail. They must do so not contingently, but necessarily, since in the very attempt to do so they (necessarily) reduce the practice to something objective and external to the lives of the people who practice it. One hears not only echoes to Nietzsche here but Kierkegaard as well, which Wittgenstein makes explicit in another remark a few years earlier in 1946:

Amongst other things Christianity says, I believe, that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.)

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Past Masters Edition), 89.

That all wisdom is cold; & that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights, than you can forge iron when it is *cold*.

For a sound doctrine need not *seize* you; you can follow it, like a doctor's prescription.—But here you have to be seized & turned around by something.—(I.e. this is how I understand it.) Once turned round, you must *stay* turned round.

Wisdom is passionless. By contrast Kierkegaard calls faith a passion.⁶

Wittgenstein's point should be recognizable to anyone familiar with Kierkegaard. In both their accounts, Christianity is not about something objective and external, but subjective and relational. Wittgenstein sees in Christianity a call to change your life, but this call is not based on doctrine, even if the doctrine is “sound.” Suppose for a moment that *everything* about a robustly metaphysical version of Christianity is somehow proven to be true. It turns out that there is, after all, a personal, conscious God who sends his Son to die for our sins, when we die we will ourselves continue to have conscious life, and so on. Even if this were (astonishingly, even contradictorily) shown to be the case, this would tell us *nothing* about how to live or what to value. It would not in and of itself make *any* difference to the world that matters to human beings. It can only matter to those who have faith, faith conceived as a passion, and who have therefore changed their lives.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁷ This can also be stated in the reverse; it could turn out that everything about Christianity is demonstrably false

He makes the same point in the “Lectures on Religious Belief” when he tells us that “the point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business.”⁸ Like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein thinks that turning religious belief into a set of propositional claims about the world that can be confirmed or disconfirmed awaiting future (or present) evidence is already to have negated those very beliefs. Evidence “destroys the whole business.” He continues,

Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn’t in the slightest influence me.

Suppose, for instance, we knew people who foresaw the future; make forecasts for years and years ahead; and they described some sort of a Judgement Day. Queerly enough, even if there were such a thing, and even if it were more convincing than I have described, belief in this happening wouldn’t be a religious belief.

Suppose that I would have to forego all pleasures because of such a forecast. If I do so and so, someone will put me in fires in a thousand years, etc. I wouldn’t budge. The best scientific evidence is just nothing.⁹

and belief not suffer for it. “Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this: but not because it has to do with ‘universal truths of reason’! rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by a human being believingly (i.e. lovingly): That is the certainty of this “taking-for-true”, nothing else. // The believer’s relation to these messages is neither a relation to historical truth (probability) nor yet that to a doctrine consisting of ‘truths of reason’. There is such a thing.—(We have quite different attitudes even to different species of what we call fiction!)” Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 37e–38e.

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 56.

⁹ Ibid. A few lines later he writes, “As it were, the belief as formulated on the evidence can only be the last result –

Knowing something definite about the future is not then what religion is about. It is not a forecast of the future, nor is it something that science can tell us about one way or another (even in the future; pace Schellenberg, we are *not* waiting for our epistemic capacities to get better¹⁰). And as I have said elsewhere,¹¹ for Wittgenstein, not only is it not so, but if there *were* such a prediction of future punishment, it would have no religious significance. What is religious, we might ask, about guaranteeing your own benefit? Wittgenstein goes so far as to state that if evidence were available for such a day of judgment, he wouldn't budge. I take him to mean that *that* sort of judgment just could not motivate him. "The best scientific evidence is just nothing." Moreover, one can imagine the religious person, not the scientist, rejecting this kind of evidence. For the religious believer, to accept proof of the Last Judgment in this manner would be to reject the original picture altogether. An event that can be proven with scientific evidence can also be disproved, shown probable, or improbable. But the Last Judgment is not like this. It is not something to which someone can reply, "well, maybe." Wittgenstein concludes the lectures by telling us that "The whole *weight* may be in the

in which a number of ways of thinking and acting crystallize and come together." Here he seems to leave open the possibility of having evidence based beliefs, but only if the other pieces are in place. This has hints of Nietzsche's epiphenomenal view.

¹⁰ See J.L. Schellenberg, *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (Cornell UP, 2009); Idem, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Cornell UP, 2007); and Idem, "Skepticism as the Beginning of Religion," *Skeptical Faith*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Michael Ch. Rodgers (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming). Also see my response in the same volume.

¹¹ Michael Ch. Rodgers, "Anxiety and the Fear of God," *Passion and Passivity*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Michael Ch. Rodgers (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 162.

picture.”¹² One either sees the world this way, or they do not.

Finally, one last example to illustrate Wittgenstein’s view here. Much earlier than the previous quotes, he writes in 1937 that “Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened & will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life. For ‘recognition of sin’ is an actual occurrence & so is despair & so is redemption through faith. Those who speak of it (like Bunyan), are simply describing what has happened to them; whatever gloss someone may want to put on it!”¹³ We see then that for Wittgenstein, what ordinarily pass as “doctrines” (the doctrine of sin, redemption, etc) are in fact descriptions of features of the religious life. The experience of sin, of being a sinner, is first an experience, or a state of being. It is the existential awareness and experience of seeing oneself as a sinner before God. When this orientation towards one’s own life – and to the lives of others – is turned into a doctrine, the power and force of its reality is lost. Those who come along and systematize are doing then precisely what Nietzsche thinks they are doing: giving a gloss on actual experiences and practices of life. Thus for both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, when we talk about Christianity (and religion) we must always be clear what we have in mind. The doctrines and propositional claims of Christianity, whether they are made by self-identifying Christians or by outsiders attempting to describe and explain

¹² Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, 72.

¹³ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 32e.

Christianity, do not actually engage with Christianity itself. It is the practice and way of life that is at stake, and not the second order comments and statements about it.

5.2 Nietzsche and Christianity

Anyone who has read him even casually can easily see his views on Christianity: Nietzsche despises it and thinks we should too. “Leave everything as it is” is no motto of his. Nietzsche can’t stand Christianity. Belief in God is rejected outright, yet Nietzsche never, in his expansive *Nachlaß*, offers a “proof” for the non-existence of God. So in the third and final section of his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche asks, “What, strictly speaking, has actually *conquered* the Christian God?”¹⁴ Note well – conquered, not proven or convinced of the non existence. And he offers his own, earlier answer from *The Gay Science*:

Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness which was taken more and more seriously, the confessional punctiliousness of Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into scientific conscience, into intellectual rigour at any price. Regarding nature as though it were a proof of God’s goodness and providence; interpreting history in honour of divine reason, as a constant testimonial to an ethical world order and ethical ultimate purpose; explaining all one’s own experiences in the way pious folk have done for long enough, as though everything were providence, a sign, intended, and sent for the salvation of the soul: now all that is over, it has conscience *against* it, every sensitive conscience sees it as

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), III, §27.

indecent, dishonest, as a pack of lies, feminism, weakness, cowardice, – this severity makes us *good*

Europeans if anything does, and heirs to Europe's most protracted and bravest self-overcoming!¹⁵

It is the pursuit of truth, the will to truth, that has finally overcome the Christian belief in God.

But it has not done so by developing a set of logical premises that make this “discovery” final and irrefutable. Nietzsche does not say that Christian morality has, in the end, *reason* against it.

It has *conscience* against it. The drive to honesty celebrated by Christianity has in the end folded upon itself. Nietzsche believes that Christian morality ultimately must face that its own answers to the irrationality of life are failures.

Much of the *Genealogy of Morals* is an account of how we got here in the first place.

Whether Nietzsche means for this account to be taken literally, or ironically, or as a kind of proto-deconstruction is of little account here (and already discussed at length earlier in this work). If the *Genealogy* is a fictional, “just-so story,” or an attempt at a certain kind of naturalism, in both cases (and any other) Nietzsche is trying to break the spell that Christian morality has held on us. And one result of that spell is that Christian morality, as the latest and perhaps most powerful version of the ascetic ideal, has convinced us that meaning is only possible if we are given a purpose external to ourselves. We have become, as Hubert Dreyfus once put it, “meaning junkies.” Or as Nietzsche himself wrote,

The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind, –

¹⁵ Idem, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), §357.

and *the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning!* Up to now it was the only meaning, but any meaning at all is better than no meaning at all; the ascetic ideal was, in every respect, the ultimate '*faute de mieux*' *par excellence*. Within it, suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism. The interpretation – without a doubt – brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of *guilt*... But in spite of all that – man was *saved*, he had a *meaning*, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense'; from now on he could *will* something, – no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the *will itself was saved*... And, to conclude by saying what I said at the beginning: man still prefers to *will nothingness*, than *not will*...¹⁶

The ascetic ideal, through Christianity, has provided a meaning, an answer, to the suffering and experienced meaninglessness of life. Yet always lurking around the corner of this meaning is suicidal nihilism. Nietzsche sees that if God is gone, the question of nihilism and suicide are thrust upon us again.

But Nietzsche is not content to merely sketch out the contours of this dilemma, nor does he dedicate his time to writing on behalf of reform. Instead, Nietzsche has two goals (with respect to our discussion): first, to *hasten* this realization (that Christianity fails to give us meaning in the face of nihilism), and second, to offer new, alternative values with which to live out our lives in the face of this dilemma. To bring about the first of these goals, the hastening

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, III, §28.

of the realization, Nietzsche comes at Christianity from a variety of angles. But again, even as a rhetorical device, one angle Nietzsche never takes against Christianity is one of logical proof. Even in the *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche offers no proof but only distaste and disgust at Christianity. There he writes,

The fact that we have not rediscovered God, either in history or in nature or behind nature: this is not what separates us. Rather, we are separated by the fact that we view the thing worshipped as God as pathetic, absurd, and harmful, not as 'divine'; the fact that we do not treat it as a simple error but as a *crime against life* ... We deny that God is God ... If someone were to *prove* this Christian God to us, we would believe in him even less. – In a word: *deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negation*.¹⁷

Not only does Nietzsche not offer a proof of his own for the *non*-existence of God, a proof for God's existence would do nothing for him but intensify his disgust. His rejection is not one of calculation but of affect. "God" is pathetic, absurd, and harmful. Thus, rather than appeal to logic or proofs, Nietzsche appeals variously to people's moral sense, their taste, their sense of style, their desires and so on.

Even though Nietzsche hopes to hasten our awareness that belief in God is no longer a viable option, he also recognizes that he will almost surely be unsuccessful. His thought is "untimely" in the sense that "he has come too early." The now famous parable of the madman

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 45.

attests to this;¹⁸ the madman speaks to those who consider themselves to be atheists, and yet they cannot understand his message of the death of God. Since Nietzsche links belief in God with the unquestioned absolute faith in truth, he accordingly does not consider these “atheists” to have given up on the age-old belief in God/Truth. Like the madman, Nietzsche worries that his audience will miss his message. But it is for those rare few that have yet to come that Nietzsche writes. These “nascent higher types” Nietzsche hopes to awaken, even if the rest of us miss out. It is not enough, however, to awaken the higher types. Nietzsche must give them an alternative vision for human life, a way to go forward across the vast sea that has been opened up. Nihilism is a constant threat. At various places, Nietzsche offers the *Übermensch* as one possible source of value. The belief in the *eternal return* is another. For our purposes, the point is this: Nietzsche rejects Christianity as a weak and therefore harmful continuation of the ascetic ideal. For Nietzsche it is not only that Christianity does not offer *him* meaning, nor merely that Nietzsche does not share the Christian hope. For Nietzsche, Christianity is a sickness and weakness that must be *attacked*, so that those few who have the potential for something greater, something higher, will be free to pursue their potential. Yet it cannot be attacked on the grounds of reason, as this would merely be to remain in another version of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche must bring his readers (at least, the right sort of readers)

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

to a place of seeing Christianity as he sees it: weak, slavish, decadent, and unworthy of their higher nature.¹⁹ What Nietzsche rejects – and wants his readers to reject – is not merely a faulty metaphysical orientation if that means adopting another faulty metaphysical orientation in its place. He rejects a certain way of living, an ascetic form of life, which robs certain members of humanity of a form of life which is life-promoting – and therefore *not* life-denying.

What I want to say, given all that we have seen up to now, is that the reason Nietzsche is not content to merely offer an alternative to Christianity is precisely because of the way in which it closes off other possibilities. Thus my language of “robbing” is not merely rhetorical. If Christianity represented the value system of a few slaves in Egypt, but was not the dominate morality of an entire culture, perhaps he could pass over it in silence. But Christianity stopped being a marginal morality long ago, and today represents *the* evaluative framework of western civilization. And, as we have seen, this does not only refer to self proclaimed Christians.

Nietzsche is indicting all of Western civilization, including the most ardent atheists, as at heart

¹⁹ “Christianity *needs* sickness, more or less as Greece needed a surplus of health, - *making* things sick is the real intention behind the church's whole system of salvation procedures. And the church itself- doesn't it have the Catholic insane asylum as its the ultimate ideal? - The earth as one big insane asylum? - The sort of religious people the church *wants* are typical decadents...” Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §51. In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche offers a kind of criterion for how to judge values: “*and what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?” *GM*, preface, §3.

still resting on two key beliefs: the first is the age old metaphysical belief in Truth (that is, in God), and the second is the moral belief that claims all people are equal. The two beliefs are not separable; the second depends on the first since in the absence of the belief in Truth, there is no external, objective standpoint to which to appeal on behalf of “fairness,” “equality,” “justice,” and the like. It would be one thing for Nietzsche to disagree with these claims (he obviously does), but for Nietzsche something much greater is at stake. These claims demand exclusivity. Thus about the ascetic priest (who now includes far more than a few religious figures) he writes,

The idea we are fighting over here is the *valuation* of our life by the ascetic priests: they relate this (together with all that belongs to it, ‘nature’, ‘the world’, the whole sphere of what becomes and what passes away), to a quite different kind of existence that it opposes and excludes, *unless* it should turn against itself and *deny itself*: in this case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong path that he has to walk along backwards till he reaches the point where he starts; or, like a mistake which can only be set right by action – *ought* to be set right: he *demand*s that we should accompany him, and when he can, he imposes his valuation of existence.²⁰

The problem is not just that the ascetic priest is wrong. From what perspective would Nietzsche be able to make this claim anyway? Nor is the problem just that Nietzsche disagrees with the ascetic ideal. If that were the extent of the situation he could merely walk away. His

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, III, §11.

criticisms would, in the end, be nothing more than someone who constantly complains about reality tv – all you have to do is turn off the television. No, the real problem is that the ascetic priest (and the ascetic ideal) *imposes* its valuation of existence on all the rest. As we saw in the previous chapter, Nietzsche wonders now if true greatness is even possible now, or if the way is “as good as blocked.” Nietzsche hates Christianity, slave morality, and the ascetic ideal therefore not merely because it is weak,²¹ but because it claims to be so much more than it is, and in doing so prevents the higher types from achieving that which they otherwise could be.

Finally, perhaps one responds to Nietzsche thus: alright, I see that Christian/slave morality and the ascetic ideal are anathema to your higher types. But so what? Why should I be concerned that it is no longer possible for people like Napoleon to show up? Why would I want another Napoleon? Or worse, another Hitler? Goethe, yes – we would like some more of those. But Goethe showed up amidst Christian morality anyway, as did Mozart. Of course Nietzsche could always claim that we would have even *more* of these higher types if Christian morality were not in the way. But are things really so bad? Do we actually *want* different values and evaluations than we have? Nietzsche predicted these questions. His interlocutor responds in this way: “But why do you talk about *nobler* ideals! Let’s bow to the facts: the people have

²¹ In fact, if it were merely weak (and not dominate in its exclusivity), Nietzsche wouldn’t hate it at all. As the birds of prey say about the lambs, “We don’t bear any grudge at all towards these good lambs, in fact we love them, nothing is tastier than a tender lamb.” Ibid., I, §13.

won – or ‘the slaves’, the ‘plebeians’, ‘the herd’, or whatever you want to call them – if the Jews made this come about, good for them! No people ever had a more world-historic mission. ‘The Masters’ are deposed; the morality of the common people has triumphed.”²² Descriptively, we may say, that all we can do is describe the manner in which this event took place. There is no philosophical ground from which to say that herd morality is any better or worse than “noble” morality. To do so is to make a value judgment about the two moralities, and there is no neutral place from whence to make this judgment. Here I imagine Nietzsche with a wry smile, perhaps tipping his hat. His answer: “This is the epilogue by a ‘free-thinker’ to my speech, an honest animal as he clearly shows himself to be, and moreover a democrat; he has listened to me up to that point, and could not stand listening to my silence. As a matter of fact, there is much for me to keep silent about at this point.”²³ One is reminded here of the final lines of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”²⁴ Nietzsche sees, with Wittgenstein, that at the end of the day philosophy, even Nietzsche’s, does not underwrite the revaluation of values that he has in mind. If one simply responds that Nietzsche’s descriptive account is more or less adequate, but then shrugs her shoulders and says “so what?” or even “thank God!” there is nothing which Nietzsche can say in reply. Of

²² Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, §9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Routledge, 2001), §7.

course, for Nietzsche this would just mean that this “free thinker,” who has listened to and taken Nietzsche seriously, is after all *not* the sort of reader Nietzsche hopes to inspire.

Nietzsche’s ideal readers are few and far between, indeed.

To conclude this section, the point that I want to emphasize is that Nietzsche treats Christianity in the way which he does *not* primarily because he dislikes it and is even disgusted by it. This would merely be to have an orientation toward another possibility. The problem with Christianity, slave morality, herd morality, the ascetic ideal (that is, whatever you want to call it and however it shows up), is not just that it is a life denying weakness, but that it *negates* and *excludes* what Nietzsche takes to be the best possibilities for human greatness. He therefore cannot respond to it as one possibility among others; insofar as he is interested in (re)opening and expanding the possibility of greatness, Christianity must come under attack.

Now I have come to the end and I pronounce my judgment. I *condemn* Christianity, I indict the Christian church on the most terrible charges an accuser has ever had in his mouth. I consider it the greatest corruption conceivable, it had the will to the last possible corruption. The Christian church has not left anything untouched by its corruption, it has made an un-value out of every value, a lie out of every truth, a malice of the soul out of every piece of integrity.²⁵

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §61.

5.3 Wittgenstein, Religious Belief, and Christianity

There is no shortage of works discussing Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion, and I will not attempt to repeat that work here. D.Z. Phillips alone has written and inspired dozens of works that reflect (and carry) on the Wittgensteinian approach to religion.²⁶ As we have seen from chapter one, according to the contemplative Wittgensteinians, the job of the philosopher is to describe the religious practices as she finds them, doing her best to do justice to the practices themselves. She is not to give explanations, theories, or arguments for or against any particular doctrine or belief-that. She remains in "philosophy's cool place," promoting clarity for its own sake. If there is anything constructive to this project, beyond elucidation of the religious practices themselves, it is in shedding light on the possibility of intelligibility, something which Phillips, following Rhees, increasingly emphasizes in his later writings.²⁷ If this encompasses the whole of Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion, then the difference between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein is easy to get hold of. Nietzsche hates Christianity, thinks it blocks off the path to human greatness, and therefore attacks it with all the tools available to

²⁶ See especially D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1994); Idem, *The Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge UP, 2001); *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, ed. D.Z. Phillips and Mario Von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Andy Sanders, *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Mikel Burley, *Contemplating Religious Forms of Life: Wittgenstein and D.Z. Phillips* (Continuum, 2012); and Hartmut von Sass, *Sprachspiele des Glaubens: Eine Studie zur kontemplativen Religionsphilosophie von Dewi Z. Phillips mit ständiger Rücksicht auf Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

²⁷ See Chapter 1 of this volume for more on these claims.

him. Wittgenstein, on this reading, reserves judgment precisely because he is doing philosophy. He is not a “citizen of a community of ideas” but calmly and dispassionately contemplating the religious possibility. There is no goal other than understanding and clarity. I will not rehash my response to this here, and certainly Wittgenstein lends himself to this reading. But if I am correct that he is after something more than clarity for its own sake (even if he is at times tempted to speak this way), then this explanation for the difference between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche fails. Where does this leave us? If we emphasize the existential reading of Wittgenstein, and agree that he, like Nietzsche, is after the (re)opening of a particular existential possibility, then why is the orientation to religion from the two philosophers so strikingly different?

By now my answer to this question could perhaps be predicted. Where Nietzsche sees in Christianity that which blocks off the possibility he has in mind (and any other possibilities we might imagine), Wittgenstein sees in religious belief precisely the opposite. For Wittgenstein, religion offers an example to us of *another* possibility. Wittgenstein does not think, like Nietzsche, that Christianity is at the heart of our civilization, whether we think we believe or not. Wittgenstein thinks that “in the darkness of our time” we have followed a different possibility, and it is this possibility which he struggles with and hopes to overcome – both for himself and for potential readers. He writes, tellingly, that “Man has to awaken to

wonder – and so perhaps do peoples. Science is a way of sending him to sleep again.”²⁸ In our scientific age we are passing over the possibility of wonder. University students, confronted with philosophical questions, assume that science has answered all the basic problems. What is the self? What is language? How is communication possible? What is being? These are not questions we hear often in our culture, aside from the mandatory “Introduction to Philosophy” course required of students. Wittgenstein is interested in reawakening us to wonder, to another possibility of orienting ourselves to the world that does not succumb to the sleep narcotic of science.

Consider, for instance, Wittgenstein’s various remarks in response to Frazer’s *Golden Bough*. Frazer’s work is about the myths and religious practices of “primitive” people, but Wittgenstein is quick to point out the similarities between the way of life we find in these practices and our own religious and cultural traditions. Thus he tells us that, “If Frazer’s explanations did not appeal to a tendency in ourselves, they would not really be explanations.”²⁹ As different as these practices may seem to us, there is a latent possibility within ourselves that shows the connection we share with these people. “I should like to say: nothing shows our kinship to those people better than the fact that Frazer has on hand a word

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 5e.

²⁹ Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*,” *Philosophical Occasions*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 127.

as familiar to himself and to us as ‘ghost’ or ‘shade’ in order to describe the views of these people.”³⁰ We are, after all, *not* so different from these people, but it is true that we no longer think like them about the world. Where they see signs, miracles, the work of the gods, we see only naturalistic science. Does this mean we have a different view of nature? No, “Their view of nature is not fundamentally different than ours. Only their magic is different.”³¹ When it comes to building a house, or to farming, or to any number of daily activities in the physical world, we have the same view of nature as these “primitives.” But their magic is different than ours – which implies that we too have our own kind of magic.

Frazer believes that the magical views of these people are pre-scientific errors. If they had our technology, our methods, our double blind peer reviewed journals, then surely they would have discarded their erroneous views. Or perhaps if a primitive proto-Schellenberg had arrived on the scene, they would have believed nothing, waiting on their epistemic capacities to get to the point of justified belief. In any case, Wittgenstein wants to show that the practices of the people Frazer describes are not based on errors, and in fact not on opinions of any kind to begin with. “It can indeed happen, and often does today, that a person will give up a practice after he has recognized an error on which it was based. But this happens only when calling someone’s attention to his error is enough to turn him from his way of behaving. But

³⁰ Ibid., 133.

³¹ Ibid., 137.

this is not the case with the religious practices of a people and *therefore* there is *no* question of error.”³² Or again, “But *none* of them was in error except when he set forth a theory.”³³ Here “none” refers not only to the “primitives” that Frazer describes, but to the Buddha and Augustine, as well as anyone who has ever looked at baptism as a “washing.” There is no question of error here. When we speak of the Resurrection, we do not find people who say, “well, possibly.”³⁴ It simply does not play this sort of role in the life of the religious person – nor even of the atheist.

Yet so far none of this is in conflict with the way a contemplative would read Wittgenstein’s “Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough.” What I want to insist is that Wittgenstein is not raising these issues primarily to give a fair, contemplative, “cool” elucidation of the practices of the “primitives.” After all, he has never even encountered these practices apart from Frazer’s work; we can hardly consider him a qualified ethnologist on these matters. Instead, it seems to me that Wittgenstein uses these examples, and examples throughout his work, in order to show that we have present within our language and our form of life the possibility for getting out of the existential possibility that we are all too often locked into. Moreover, Wittgenstein sees, like Nietzsche, that to do this two different things must be

³² Ibid., 121.

³³ Ibid., 119.

³⁴ See Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics...*, 57.

provided. First, anything blocking the possibility must be exposed and attacked. For Nietzsche this is Christianity, but for Wittgenstein it is a positivism that fails to see wonder in the world around us. Thus the first of his remarks in response to Frazer are so: “One must start out with error and convert it into truth. // That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place. // To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the path from error to truth.”³⁵ Someone who is in error is not capable of receiving the truth. (Is he intentionally quoting Kierkegaard here?³⁶ The religious overtones are unmistakable in any case.) Thus Wittgenstein cannot come at his project head on. He has to come at it from the side – much like Nietzsche. It is not enough to jump strait to offering an alternative; when the error actually blocks the alternative it is no alternative at all. Therefore Wittgenstein must trace the path of the error, walk us along the way, in order to reveal to us where we have been. But even this is not enough; once the error is revealed we are still not necessarily in a position to embrace the alternative. Thus the second component: a collection of examples, reminders, and metaphors which show alternative possibilities to our own. And it is for this purpose that Wittgenstein so often turns to religious practices. Here we have, in the

³⁵ Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough,” 119.

³⁶ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard (Johannes Climacus), *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).

midst of our modern, scientific world, an ongoing example of a possibility which does not give to science the final perspective on the world. It does this *not* by contradicting science (we are not talking about creationists here...) but by offering a different perspective on the world. They simply are not playing the same game as we play when we speak scientifically.

Am I to say they are unreasonable? I wouldn't call them unreasonable.

I would say, they are certainly not *reasonable*, that's obvious.

'Unreasonable' implies, with everyone, rebuke.

I want to say: they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability.

Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly.

Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be.³⁷

Finally let me add only this; far from being the dispassionate, uninvolved philosopher that the contemplatives have claimed him to be, Wittgenstein is in the end vastly more passionate than they allow. How else can we understand such comments as, "I am in a sense making propaganda for one style of thinking as opposed to another. I am honestly disgusted with the other. Also I'm trying to state what I think. Nevertheless I'm saying: "For God's sake don't do this." E.g. I pulled Ursell's proof to bits. But after I had done, he said that the proof had

³⁷ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations...*, 58.

a charm for him. Here I could only say: “It has no charm for me. I loathe it.”³⁸ Wittgenstein, like Nietzsche, is *disgusted* with this other way of thinking. They are both out of step with their times. In a similar vein he writes in a sketch for a foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks*,

This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is industry, architecture, music, of present day fascism & socialism, is a spirit that is alien & uncongenial to the author. This is not a value judgement... Even if it is clear to me that the disappearance of a culture does not signify the disappearance of human value but simply of certain means of expressing value, the fact remains that I contemplate the current of European sympathy, without understanding its aims if any. So I am really writing for friends who are scattered throughout the corners of the globe.³⁹

Wittgenstein is clear here except on one point; namely, I think we must say that it is *of course* a value judgment! How could it not be? Wittgenstein writes this, I think, to underscore that he is not giving any philosophical justification for his lack of sympathy. There is no *reason* that he should be so out of step, so disgusted with his contemporary civilization (and again – not culture). But it is not an *unreasonable* disgust either. His is a different orientation to the world

³⁸ Ibid., 28.

³⁹ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 8e–9e. Cf. the version included in *Philosophical Remarks*, which is similar but slightly different. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), foreword.

than “the typical western scientist.”⁴⁰ His writings are then, just as he says, really a working on the self, an attempt to see the world rightly. They change nothing about the world because it is not the world that must change, but our way of seeing the world.

5.4 Possibilities Blocked, Possibilities Opened

This is by no means an exhaustive treatment of Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and religion. Much more could and should be said. But what has emerged through this work is a way of looking at both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein which places existential possibility at the center. The two thinkers part ways when it comes to the content of their treatment of religion. Despite this, I am arguing that the form is the same. *Both* are critics of their contemporaries, both think that the path to the best of human possibilities is “as good as blocked,” and both see it as their task to simultaneously reveal how this possibility is blocked while opening another possibility. For Nietzsche the hoped for possibility is radically anti-Christian (although ultimately it must drop any orientation to Christianity altogether); for Wittgenstein, Christianity, myths, and the religious practices of “primitives” serve as a resource of examples to show the possibility for a non positivistic orientation toward the world.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

What Nietzsche does with a phrase like “God is dead” (and all that goes with that) is open up a new possibility. It makes possible – one could say “creates” – an orientation to life that was previously lacking. Given the cultural climate of his, and our, age, there is a growing sense that the old categories don’t work anymore, that something is wrong. Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, offers a new orientation to the world that lets his desired reader feel at home again. Kierkegaard might have argued that his newly offered orientation wasn’t new at all, but an “old, old story.” Nietzsche, as well as Wittgenstein, clearly thinks that his is new (even if it does share similarities with the past). But in any case, for the reader the situation is the same. Philosophy creates a possibility that lets us feel at home. It goes without saying that some will embrace this possibility and others will reject it. But the possibility is not offered to illustrate this point. It is not meant to show us something about the unpredictability of human life, nor even to show us something about the possibility of intelligibility. It is offered so that those few who do embrace it can finally be at peace. And that is surely something Wittgenstein can appreciate.

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