Nietzsche on Trust and Mistrust

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Abstract

Nietzsche talks about trust [*vertraue**] and mistrust [*misstrau**] in all of his published and authorized works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. He refers to trust in 90 passages and mistrust in 101 – approximately ten times as often as he refers to resentment/*ressentiment*. Yet the scholarly literature on Nietzsche and trust includes just a handful of publications. Worse still, I have been unable to find a single publication devoted to Nietzsche and mistrust. This chapter aims to fill the gap in the secondary literature by using digital humanities methods to systematically investigate the functions of trust and mistrust in Nietzsche's writings. I argue that Nietzsche offers three main insights into trust and an additional two into mistrust. When it comes to trust, in his free spirit works, he reflects on the development of interpersonal trust, with an eye to situations in which trust is or is not reciprocated. He also criticizes some of the heuristics people use to identify trustworthy partners, especially the notion that all and only people with stable character are trustworthy. And perhaps Nietzsche's most interesting thoughts about trust relate to self-trust, which he thinks is often unjustifiably undermined. When it comes to mistrust, although he regards generalized mistrust as a sign of bad character, he also thinks that harnessing mistrust can be valuable in at least two domains. One is morality, where we are disposed to accept traditional pieties and would benefit from turning a suspicious eye towards these pieties. The other is science, which systematizes both trust and mistrust in pursuit of the truth.

Keywords
Trust, mistrust, distrust, self-trust, Nietzsche

Word count
9256

Introduction

Nietzsche talks about trust [*vertraue**] and mistrust [*misstrau**] in all of his published and authorized works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. He refers to trust in 90 passages and mistrust in 101 – approximately ten times as often as he refers to resentment/*ressentiment*. Yet the scholarly literature on Nietzsche and trust includes just a handful of publications (Dannenberg 2015, 2017; McKiernan 2016; Risse 2003). Worse still, I have been unable to find a single publication devoted to Nietzsche and mistrust. Dannenberg's engagement with Nietzsche draws almost solely from a few remarks about the "right to make promises" in GM 2.1; his philosophical goals are less interpretive and more about how we contemporary philosophers should understand the act of promising. McKiernan focuses only on the prefaces that Nietzsche added to several of his works in 1887; her interpretation points out that in these prefaces, Nietzsche aims to induce self-trust in his readers – a point with which I agree. But there is much more to Nietzsche on trust and mistrust than is found in the prefaces. Finally, Risse interprets Nietzsche is recommending "a joyous and trusting fatalism" (what Nietzsche elsewhere calls *amor fati*) rather than resentment; there is certainly something to this idea, but again it leaves out the vast majority of what Nietzsche has to say about trust and mistrust.

Arguably, this disproportionate scholarly engagement with trust, mistrust, and resentment has been driven by the fact that English translations of Nietzsche's writings systematically italicize and transliterate '*ressentiment*' rather than treating it as the normal word it is,[1] while translating *Misstrauen* and cognates sometimes as 'mistrust', sometimes as 'distrust', and sometimes as 'suspicion'. In any case, this chapter aims to fill the gap in the secondary literature by using digital humanities methods to systematically investigate the functions of trust and mistrust in Nietzsche's writings. These methods were pioneered in Alfano (2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b, forthcoming a, forthcoming b) and made accessible to scholars with no coding background in Alfano & Cheong (2019). For that reason, I do not explain them at length in this chapter.

Substantively, I argue that Nietzsche offers three main insights into trust and an additional two into mistrust. When it comes to trust, in his free spirit works, he reflects on the development of interpersonal trust, with an eye to situations in which trust is or is not reciprocated. He also criticizes some of the heuristics people use to identify trustworthy partners, especially the notion that all and only people with stable character are trustworthy. And perhaps Nietzsche's most interesting thoughts about trust relate to self-trust, which he thinks is often unjustifiably undermined. When it comes to mistrust, although he regards generalized mistrust as a sign of bad character, he also thinks that harnessing mistrust can be valuable in at least two domains. One is morality, where we are disposed to accept traditional pieties and would benefit

[1] This is not to claim that the English word 'resentment' perfectly translates the German, which sometimes connotes envy. However, such slight mismatches are common in translation and certainly not unique to *Ressentiment*.

from turning a suspicious eye towards these pieties. The other is science, which systematizes both trust and mistrust in pursuit of the truth.

Methodology

I first use hierarchical clustering to compare the language used in Nietzsche's published and authorized manuscripts, as shown in Figure 1.

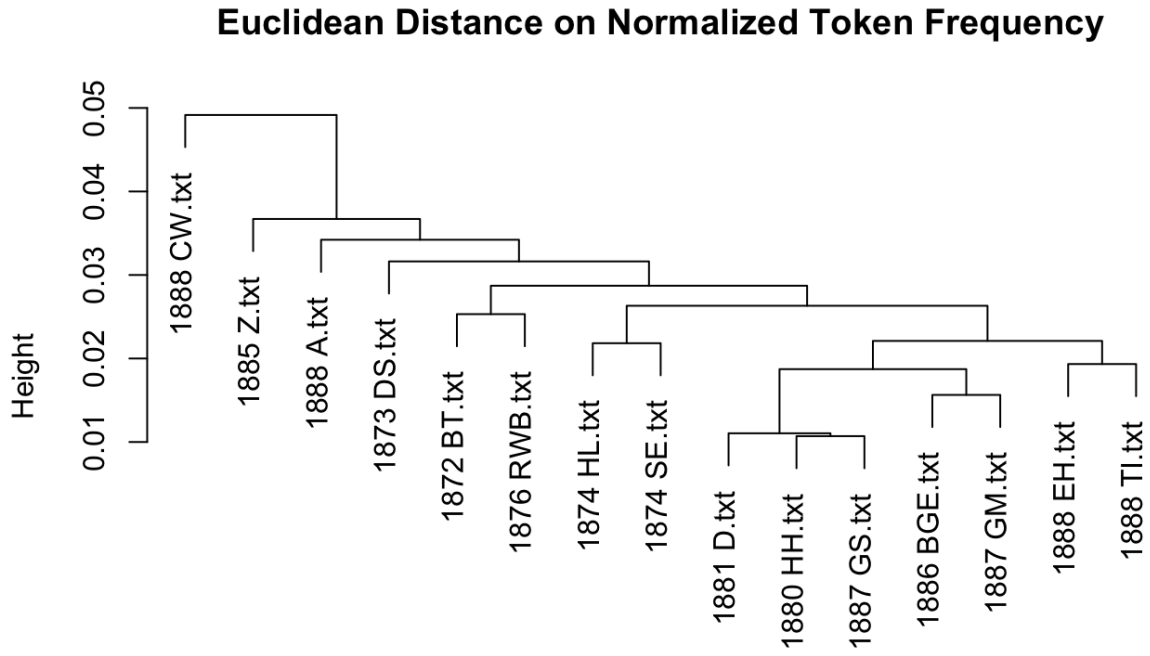

Figure 1: hierarchical clustering of Nietzsche's published and authorized manuscripts, based on final publication date in cases where multiple versions exist.

As Figure 1 shows, starting in 1880, Nietzsche's writings developed a distinctive style, with the free spirit works (HH, D, GS) clustering together while the mature works (BGE, GM) and the late works (EH, TI, though not A or CW) also cluster together. The analysis in this chapter covers Nietzsche's entire philosophical career, but I will primarily concentrate on these works.

Next, Figure 2 displays the lexical dispersion of the German word stems that Nietzsche uses to talk about trust (*vertraue**) and mistrust (*misstrau**). Each vertical line represents a usage of the relevant term, and the width of the bars represents the total word count of each book. For instance, *Human, All-too-human* is Nietzsche's longest book, which is why the bar representing it is the widest. As Figure 2 shows, Nietzsche's interest in trust waned over the course of his

philosophical career. It crops up sporadically in the early and middle works, but there are just a handful of attestations in the works of 1888. By contrast, mistrust is almost entirely absent from *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations*, but becomes much more an object of concern in the 1880s.

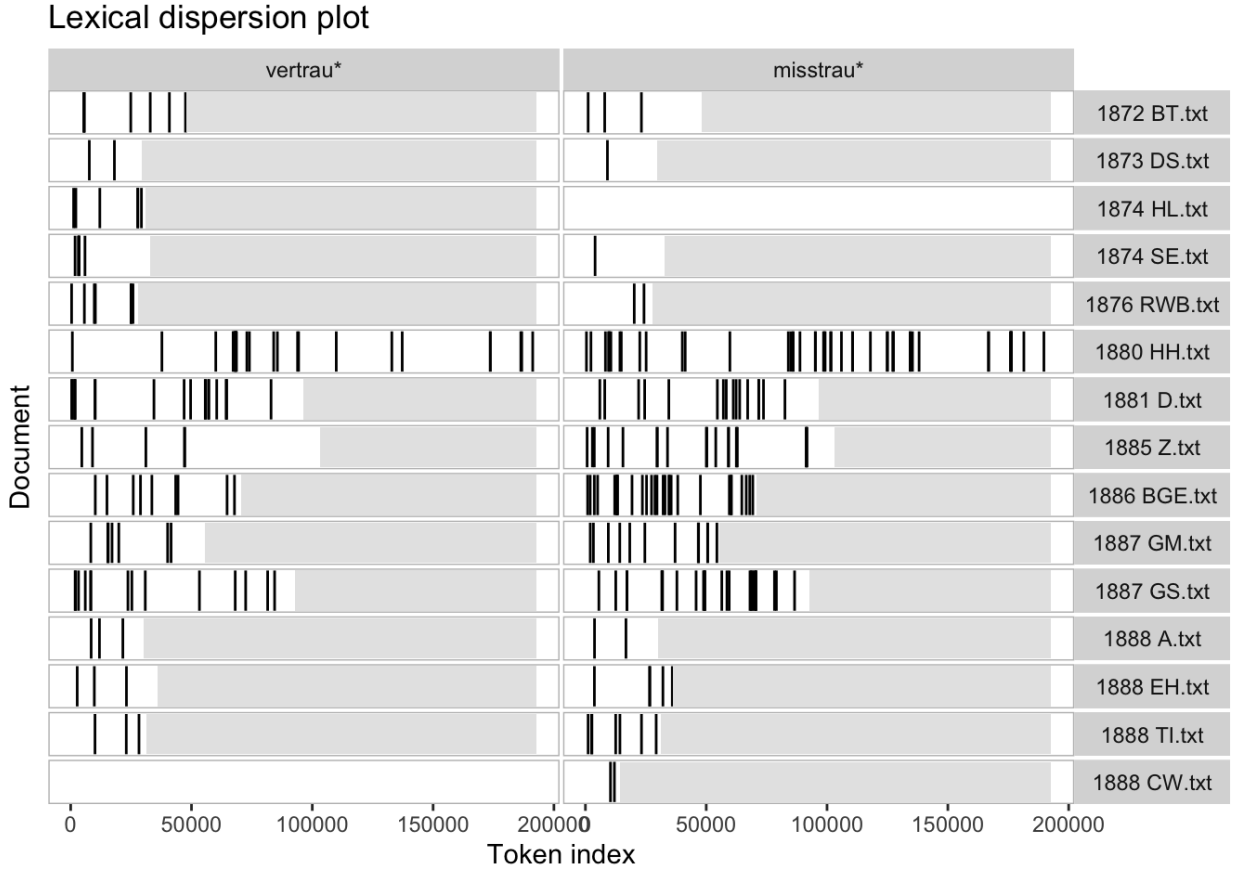

Figure 2: lexical dispersion of trust and mistrust in Nietzsche's published and authorized manuscripts

These figures provide some context and demonstrate Nietzsche's ongoing concern with the moral psychology of trust and mistrust. Delving deeper, I next examine all passages in which the relevant terms occurred and organized them around the functions that Nietzsche assigns to trust and mistrust.[2]

[2] Of course, for reasons of space, not all of these passages are explicitly discussed in this chapter. For instance, I leave out those passages in which Nietzsche seeks to establish a confidential rapport with his readers by saying that he is speaking confidentially [*im Vertrauen*] (DS 4, SE 2, D 130, GS 93) or by calling them "my friends" [*meine Freunde*] (24 passages, not including an additional 14 in which Zarathustra says "my friends"). I also leave out his scattered remarks on the relationship between trust and governance (HH 473, AOM 318, WS 190, WS 248, WS 285, GM 2.9).

The functions of trust

For Nietzsche, as for many contemporary philosophers, trust is an affective attitude. You trust someone when you feel optimistic that they will prove trustworthy — that is, when you feel positively about their disposition to act as you're counting on them to act, and to take into account the fact that you're counting on them as a reason for so acting.[3] Trustworthiness, in turn, is an underlying disposition to act as counted upon should the situation arise. Conversely, trustingness can be understood as a disposition to place one's trust in others. When this disposition is well-tuned, one trusts wisely. That could mean trusting all and only those who are in fact trustworthy, or perhaps even being more generous with one's trust in order to show respect or high regard, or to enable one to learn up-close how trustworthy another person really is. Starting in his free spirit works, Nietzsche reflects on what it means to place one's trust in others, how to coax others to trust one, what observable properties tend to inspire trust (even if they are not necessarily good evidence of trustworthiness), the relationship between trust and governance, and value of self-trust. In what follows, I explore each of these themes.

Interpersonal trust

Nietzsche's thoughts on the nature and cultivation of interpersonal trust are mostly restricted to *Human, All-too-human*, though they are dispersed throughout the original rump of the monograph and the two books that he later appended to it (*Assorted Opinions and Maxims* and *The Wanderer and his Shadow*). For instance, in HH 296, Nietzsche remarks that "Lack of intimacy or trustingness [*Vertraulichkeit*] among friends is a fault that cannot be reprimanded without becoming incurable." This observation relates to the affective dimension of trust. If I point out that you aren't treating me as a trusted friend, that is likely to lead you to react with resentment, not the warm optimism inherent in trust. A few passages later, in a section titled "*Trust and intimacy* [Vertrauen und Vertraulichkeit]" (HH 304), Nietzsche says, "He who deliberately seeks to establish an intimacy with another person is usually in doubt as to whether he possesses his trust." Precisely the anxiety associated with lack of trust is what leads people to seek to bind others to them via intimacy. But that anxiety, when detected, may undermine the effort to establish a trusting relationship because it gives off a whiff of desperation. Nietzsche returns to this theme in a later passage titled "*Against the trusting* [Vertraulichen]" (HH 311), where he says, "People who give us their complete trust believe that they have thus acquired a right to ours. This is a false conclusion; gifts procure no rights." The assumption he criticizes here is that trust must be reciprocated. Contrary to this assumption, Nietzsche conceptualizes the act of entrusting another person as a gift. Of course, in most gift-giving cultures, failing to reciprocate is considered at best tacky and at worst offensive. But Nietzsche is nevertheless right

[3] There are many, slightly different, versions of this account of trust. See, among others, Baier (1986), Jones (2012a), and Alfano & Huijts (2020).

that reciprocation is not morally required. Why think of trust as a gift, though? He does not explicitly say, but presumably the answer is that in trusting someone we demonstrate high regard for their competence in the domain of trust (e.g., trusting someone to fly you somewhere in an airplane), as well as esteem for them as (moral) agents.[4]

In AOM 254, Nietzsche returns to the presumptuousness of trying to induce a relationship of bidirectional trust by recklessly placing one's trust in another person: "What we have previously kept silent about we sometimes first reveal to our most recent acquaintances: we foolishly believe that this demonstration of our trust [*Vertrauens-Beweis*] is the strongest chain by which we could fetter them to us." But, he goes on, this tactic is not likely to work because "they do not know enough of us to appreciate the sacrifice we are making." If someone does not understand that he is being trusted with a secret, he is not likely to appreciate the regard and esteem expressed by the act of entrusting. Nietzsche also remarks on the relationship between intimacy and trust in WS 288, saying "Those to whom a warm and noble intimacy [*Vertraulichkeit*] is impossible try to display the nobility of their nature through reserve and severity [...] as though their feeling of trust [*Vertrauen*] were so strong it was ashamed to show itself." Here Nietzsche suggests that nobility is associated with the capacity to trust at least some others, echoing his claim in WS 190 that "nothing is so beneficial to the soul and body of man" as a sense of "trust [*Vertrauen*] in the future." This passage in turn echos HH 98: "To feel sensations of pleasure on the basis of human relations on the whole makes men better; joy, pleasure, is enhanced when it is enjoyed together with others, it gives the individual security, makes him good-natured, banishes mistrust [*Misstrauen*] and envy." Nietzsche expresses the same sentiment in HH 493, saying, "Nobility of mind consists to a great degree in good-naturedness and absence of mistrust [*Misstrauen*]."

Finally, In EH Wise.2, Nietzsche asks how you can "know that someone has *turned out well*" and answers by saying (among other things), "He only has a taste for what agrees with him; his enjoyment, his desires stop at the boundary of what is agreeable to him. [...] he is a principle of selection, he lets many things fall by the wayside. [...] he honors by *choosing,* by *permitting*, by *trusting* [vertraut]." Here Nietzsche quite explicitly associates trusting with esteem or honor. In particular, he thinks that being trusted *by the honorable or noble* is what confers honor. In other words, he affirms a sort of principle of affinity, where good people recognize themselves in other good people, leading them to honor and esteem those people with their trust. If this is right, then noble people's disposition to trust can be seen as a sort of touchstone or divining rod: those they do or would honor with their trust are also noble, while those they do or would mistrust are not.

(Perceived) trustworthiness

Not everyone's disposition to trust is as reliable as the person who has "turned out well" in EH Wise.2. In earlier writings, Nietzsche talks about other ways in which people end up attributing

[4] For more on the esteem implied by trusts, see Pettit (1995).

trustworthiness to others, with an emphasis on the unreliability of these heuristics. The most relevant remarks are to be found in *Human, All-too-human* and the *Genealogy*. For instance, in HH 604, Nietzsche suggests that one indicator of trustworthiness is stability of character and affect, saying, "People who catch fire quickly, quickly grow cold and are thus on the whole unreliable." However, the opposite inference is not, according to Nietzsche, valid: "all those who are always cold, or pretend to be, have in their favor the prejudice that they are particularly trustworthy [*vertrauenswerthe*] and reliable: people confuse them with those who catch fire slowly and retain it a long time." The heuristic relationship between stability of character and trustworthiness also crops up in HH 608, where Nietzsche says that when someone is seen as "consistent through and through, homogenous in thought and being" they are likely to receive respect, as well as "trust [*Vertrauen*] and power." But of course, someone could be *seen* as consistent and homogenous without actually being so, and even if someone is consistent and homogenous, they might not be trustworthy in the domain in which they're being trusted. Thus, the stability heuristic is liable to lead us astray, as well as to induce people who want to be trusted to pretend to greater stability of character than they actually possess.[5]

Turning next to the *Genealogy*, consider GM 2.2. In this famous passage, Nietzsche paints a portrait of a character that he dubs the "sovereign individual." While much ink has been spilled in vain on this character, careful and contextual reading shows that he is an exemplar of what Nietzsche calls the herd instinct (Rukgaber 2012; Alfano 2019a, chapter 11). The herd instinct, in turn, is a drive to act and even to be as others expect one to act and be. In this passage, Nietzsche speculates about the prehistory of promising and contractual relations. In such circumstances, the promisor is expected to do as he's promised, the debtor to repay his debt. What's required for promises to be worth taking seriously is that the promiser has an "enduring and reliable will." In other words, he is unconditionally committed to do what the promisee expects him to do. Nietzsche goes on to half-parodically describe the attitude of someone who has internalized the herd instinct to this extent:

> The 'free' man, the possessor of an enduring, unbreakable will, thus has his own *standard of value*: in the possession of such a will: viewing others from his standpoint, he respects or despises; and just as he will necessarily respect his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the prerogative to promise) — that is everyone who promises like a sovereign, ponderously, seldom, slowly, and is sparing with his trust [*Vertrauen*], who *confers an honor* when he places his trust [*vertraut*], who gives his word as something that can be relied on.

Thus, the paragon of the herd instinct also treats his disposition to trust as a touchstone or divining rod. And in a sense he is right to do so, as it continues to serve as a principle of affinity. Whereas the honorable and noble are disposed to trust only other honorable and noble people, the exemplar of herd morality is disposed to trust only other people who have fully internalized the herd instinct.

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[5] For more on the (in)stability of character in Nietzsche's writings, see Alfano (2015; 2019a, chapters 3-5).

In a later passage (GM 2.5, see also GM 2.9), Nietzsche describes the methods that a promisor/debtor might undertake not only to inspire trust but also to ensure that his will really is enduring and unbreakable:

> The debtor, in order to inspire trust [*Vertrauen*] that the promise of repayment will be honored, in order to give a guarantee of the solemnity and sanctity of his promise, and in order to etch the duty and obligation of repayment into his conscience, pawns something to the creditor by means of the contract in case he does not pay, something that he still 'possesses' and controls, for example, his body, or his wife, or his freedom, or his life.

Such gruesome practices to assure creditors of trustworthiness and ensure that debtors do not default on repayment date back, according to Nietzsche, to prehistory. They are also dramatized in modern literature, for instance in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* through the device of the "pound of flesh." Such practices might seem to be at odds with the picture of trust that emerged above, where trust was portrayed as a gift that implied high regard and esteem. This tension may be due to Nietzsche's changing his opinion of trust between *Human, All-too-human* and the *Genealogy*, which was published seven years later. Alternatively, it may be that kind of trust Nietzsche has in mind in HH does not involve promising and debt, and thus does not operate through the same punitive regime that he describes in GM 2.

In any event, the final passage to consider in this section is GM 3.15. In it, Nietzsche characterizes the psychological profile of the "ascetic priest" who perpetrates the revaluation of values described in the first essay of the *Genealogy*. The ascetic priest is, like the warrior class that he undermines, noble. But, according to Nietzsche, he must also be "sick himself, he must really be a close relative of the sick and the destitute in order to understand them [...] but he has to be strong, too [...] so that he has the trust [*Vertrauen*] and fear of the sick and can be their support, defense, prop, compulsion, disciplinarian, tyrant, God." Once again, we see here the idea that the disposition to trust and inspire trust operates through a principle of affinity. In particular, Nietzsche here seems to think that establishing a trusting relationship requires a kind of perspective-taking or empathy, which is enabled by psychological affinity. The ascetic priest is able to inspire trust in the sick because — being sick himself — he understands their point of view.

Self-trust

Perhaps Nietzsche's most interesting thinking about trust occurs in the context of *self*-trust. He is especially concerned to ensure that people do not lose trust in themselves without justification, which he seems to think occurs all too frequently, and he actively invites his readers to restore their self-trust as McKiernan (2016) points out. Before turning to the relevant passages, it's worth reviewing some contemporary research on the nature and value of self-trust. There is a remarkable near-consensus that, unless you have particular reasons to the contrary, you ought to trust yourself. For example, Pasnau (2015) argues that self-trust justifiably influences how we

should react to peer disagreement. Lehrer (1997) argues that self-trust grounds reason, wisdom, and knowledge. Govier (1993) argues that self-trust grounds autonomy and self-respect. Jones (2012b) positively evaluates self-trust from a feminist perspective. And Goldberg (2013) argues that self-trust is a good model for trust in others. If trust in others involves a positively-tinged affective attitude towards them and their disposition to do as we're relying on them to do because we're so relying on them, then trust in oneself involves a positively-tinged affective attitude towards oneself and one's own ability and commitment to carry through with commitments diachronically. If this is right, then loss of self-trust could be undermined in two distinct ways. First, one could lose confidence in one's abilities or capacities. For instance, if you've had a few drinks, you probably shouldn't trust yourself to operate a car. Second, one could lose confidence in one's own persistence, diligence, self-control, or patience. If you can't suffer fools for more than a minute, you probably shouldn't trust yourself to chair tedious committees. Nietzsche is interested in both ways in which people lose self-trust, but he is especially concerned with cases in which people lose faith in their own affective responses, that is, cases in which they no longer trust their intuitions and evaluative reactions.

Nietzsche's concern with unwarranted loss of self-trust dates back at least to HL 5, where he says of the contemporary German, "he has lost and destroyed his instincts and, having lost his trust [vertrauend] in the 'divine animal', he can no longer let go the reins when his reason falters [....] Thus the individual grows fainthearted and unsure and dares no longer believe in himself." As I have shown elsewhere, Nietzsche understands virtues and vices as drives that interact with the rest of the agent's psychic economy in characteristic ways (Alfano 2019a, chapter 4). In particular, a drive becomes a virtue when it is integrated with the agent's other drives and a vice when its possession or expression leads the agent to condemn fixed or immutable aspects of themselves. For Nietzsche, instincts are innate drives. So when he says here that the contemporary German has destroyed his instincts and that he no longer believes in himself, this constitutes a charge of vice (even if, as Nietzsche argues elsewhere in the passage, that this vice is acquired through German education and not directly attributable to the agent). Later, in HL 10, Nietzsche laments the state of his contemporaries, saying that they are "Fragmented and in pieces, dissociated almost mechanically into an inner and an outer, sown with concepts as with dragon's teeth, bringing forth conceptual dragons, suffering from the malady of words and mistrusting [ohne Vertrauen] any feeling of our own." This is again a charge of vice and a rejection of any claim to virtue. Instead of being integrated, Nietzsche's contemporaries are fragmented and dissociated; instead of affirming or at least accepting their own feelings, they mistrust them. In SE 2, Nietzsche continues this theme, criticizing his past self for embodying a certain kind of heteronomy: "I believed that, when the time came, I would discover a philosopher to educate me, a true philosopher whom one could follow without misgiving because one would have more trust [vertrauen] in him than one had in oneself." While he does not go so far as to say that he mistrusted himself, Nietzsche does suggest that trusting others more than one trusts oneself is deeply problematic. Against this tendency, he endorses the following imperative: "Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself." And of course, this is a

theme to which he returns in many other passages, perhaps most notably the subtitle of *Ecce Homo: How To Become What You Are*. To accomplish this task, one must trust oneself to a significant extent.

Nietzsche returns to this idea in the free spirit works. For instance, in HH 141, he says, "Everything natural to which one attaches the idea of the bad and sinful [...] oppresses the imagination and makes it gloomy, because frightening to look upon, causes men to haggle with themselves and deprives them of security and trust [*Vertraue*]." Evidently, one thing that is natural is the fixed aspects of oneself, so the doctrine of original sin, which attributes such badness to the essential self, is calculated to destroy self-trust.[6] Or consider WS 278, where Nietzsche says that a noble person ought to go out of his way "to notice everything good about other people and after that to draw a line." He goes on to suggest that one can deal with oneself similarly: "whether or not he has a courteous memory in the end determines his own attitude towards himself; it determines whether he regards his own inclinations and intentions with a noble, benevolent or mistrustful [*Misstrauen*] eye; and it determines, finally, the nature of these inclinations and intentions themselves." As I pointed out above, Nietzsche thinks that instincts and other drives (what he here calls inclinations and intentions) become vices when their expression leads their bearers to condemn fixed aspects of themselves. One way in which such condemnation may manifest is through self-mistrust, as this passage illustrates.

Nietzsche's reflections on the value of self-trust continue in his mature and late works. For instance, in GM 1.10, he says, "While the noble man lives in front of himself with trust [*Vertrauen*] and openness (γενναῖος 'noble-born' underlines the nuance 'sincere' and probably also 'naive'), the man of resentment is neither sincere nor naive, nor honest and straight with himself." The man of resentment, as Nietzsche puts it here, is driven to undermine the values of healthier, more noble people, but he also needs to think of himself as morally upstanding, which makes it difficult or impossible for him to admit his true motives, even to himself (Katsafanas 2013). Whereas the noble trusts his own drives and evaluative dispositions, the man of resentment cannot do so without losing the benefits that expressing those drives and dispositions deliver. Worse still, Nietzsche suggests that the self-flagellating self-mistrust of the resentful can spread through emotional contagion. He voices this worry most vividly in GM 3.14, saying, "The *sickly* are the greatest danger to man: *not* the wicked, *not* the 'beasts of prey'. [...] most undermine life amongst men, who introduce the deadliest poison and skepticism into our trust [*Vertrauen*] in life, in man, in ourselves." As we saw above, Nietzsche had already affirmed in the *Untimely Meditations* that "nothing is so beneficial to the soul and body of man" as a sense of "trust [*Vertrauen*] in the future" (WS 190). The resentful, by contrast, spread mistrust in life, in humanity, and in the self. They do so by spreading negative sentiments about essential aspects of the self. Nietzsche ventriloquizes their grievance later in GM 3.14: "'If only I were some other

[6] Nietzsche levels the same accusation against the doctrine of original sin in his last writings: "The concept of 'sin' invented along with the associated instrument of torture, the concept of 'free will', in order to confuse the instincts, in order to make mistrust [*Misstrauen*] of the instincts second nature!" (EH Destiny.8).

person! [...] but there's no hope of that. I am who I am: how could I get away from myself? And oh — *I'm fed up with myself*!'"

The functions of mistrust

As we've already seen in the previous section, Nietzsche contrasts trust and mistrust. While he is especially worried about self-mistrust induced by the Christian revaluation of values chronicled in the *Genealogy* and elsewhere, he also seems to think that being universally mistrustful is a sign of bad character (HH 614, D 407, BGE 260). But he also has a lot to say about mistrust of Christian morality itself, as well as the way in which scientific inquirers can harness mistrust in their pursuit of truth and eradication of error. In this section, I catalog Nietzsche's remarks on these two, partially-overlapping functions of mistrust.

Mistrust of Christian morality

As early as *Human, All-too-human*, Nietzsche explicitly says that his writings aim to induce mistrust of morality — especially of Christian morality. Note that is not so much aiming to *disprove* the premises of Christian morality as to weaken the affective bonds that his readers have to it.[7] The goal is to replace blind trust with caution, suspicion, mistrust. But mistrusting Christian morality does not necessarily entail rejecting all of its premises and claims outright. Instead, Nietzsche seems to want to free up his readers to question their default moral assumptions. What they do next is then up to them. For example, in HH P 1, "What? *Everything* only – human, all too human? It is with this sigh that one emerges from my writings, not without a kind of reserve and mistrust [*Misstrauen*] even in regard to morality." In HH 36, he speculates, "perhaps belief in goodness, in virtuous men and actions, in an abundance of impersonal benevolence in the world has in fact made men better, inasmuch as it has made them less mistrustful [*misstrauisch*]." It's important to understand the sarcasm in this passage. Nietzsche is saying that belief in goodness and virtue has made people morally better only in the sense that makes them less mistrustful and therefore more naive. Once people start to pay more attention to the reasons for and against belief — including religious belief — such naivety becomes impossible: "the growth of the Enlightenment undermined the dogmas of religion and inspired a fundamental mistrust [*Misstrauen*] of them" (HH 150).

Turning next to *Daybreak*, in the second section of the preface, Nietzsche characterizes his own project thusly: "I commenced an investigation and digging out of an ancient *trust* [Vertrauen], one upon which we philosophers have for a couple of millenia been accustomed to build as if upon the firmest of all foundations." Which ancient trust does he have in mind? "I

[7] For more on Nietzsche's use of affective induction to shake loose dogmatic assumptions in his readers, see Alfano (2018b).

commenced to undermine our *trust in morality*."[8] Later, in the second section of the preface, Nietzsche returns to the same theme, saying that "*this* book is pessimistic even into the realm of morality, even to the point of going beyond trust in morality [...] in it morality is denied trust—why is it? *Out of morality!*" Again, it's important to understand the sarcasm in play here. Nietzsche says that he denies trust in morality out of morality itself because his own will to truth is ultimately grounded in a commitment to inquiry even at great cost. That he is willing to give up so many of his positive illusions about humanity is evidence that, for him, the will to truth is a fundamental commitment.

Mistrust of morality, especially of Christian morality, is also prominent in *The Gay Science*. For instance, in the very first passage, Nietzsche says, "One might quickly enough, with the usual myopia from five steps away, divide one's neighbors into useful and harmful, good and evil; but [...] upon further reflection on the whole, one grows mistrustful [*misstrauisch*] of this tidying and separating and finally abandons it." This idea — that a manichean divide between good and evil is untenable and oversimplifying — is common in Nietzsche's mature writings and reflected in the title of a later book, *Beyond Good and Evil*. And of course, this is precisely the dichotomizing perspective he criticizes in Christian morality. Later, in GS 214, Nietzsche remarks, "Virtue gives happiness and a type of blessedness only to those who have not lost faith in their virtue — not to those subtler souls whose virtue consists in a deep mistrust [*Misstrauen*] of themselves and of all virtue." No doubt Nietzsche considers himself one of those subtled, mistrustful souls. But does his mistrust himself? Given his criticism of self-mistrust as we saw it above, one might find this passage puzzling. However, this apparent tension can be resolved if we bear in mind that when Nietzsche objects to self-mistrust, he does so because it leads to condemnation of fixed aspects of the self. Milder self-mistrust that simply leads one to be more cautious in drawing inferences is not problematic in the same way.

Next, in GS 343, Nietzsche explains what he means by the notorious phrase "God is dead": "the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable." He then goes on: "To those few at least whose eyes — or the suspicion in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some kind of sun seems to have set; some old deep trust [*Vertrauen*] turned into doubt: to them, our world must appear more autumnal, more mistrustful [*misstrauischer*]." Importantly, Nietzsche here points out that what has happened is not simply that mistrust has arisen. Instead, "some old deep trust" has been *replaced* with mistrust. Given that, the object of the old deep mistrust can finally be called into question, as it is no longer protected by a positive affective halo. The destruction of this barrier, the affective protection afforded by trust, opens up space for new questions and inquiries. Nietzsche goes on to say that "we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation [...] every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies

[8] Note that the Cambridge University Press translation here translates *Vertrauen* as 'faith', rather than 'trust'. But if Nietzsche had wanted to talk about faith, he could very easily have used *Glaube*, a word he uses plenty of times elsewhere.

open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea'."[9] In this metaphor, the sea represents a domain of inquiry that had previously been off limits. Nietzsche uses related imagery to describe the *terra incognita* opened up by mistrust in BGE 12: "By putting an end to the superstition that until now has grown around the idea of the soul with an almost tropical luxuriance, the *new* psychologist thrusts himself into a new wasteland and a new mistrust [*Misstrauen*]."

The destruction of trust and its replacement with nuanced mistrust lifts the embargo to this sea. To venture into such forbidden inquiries requires intellectual courage, curiosity, and a willingness to mistrust where long tradition has inculcated trust. Such dispositions might be seen by defenders of Christian morality as evil, but they are precisely the Nietzschean virtues (Alfano 2019a, chapters 6-10). Or, as Zarathustra declaims:

> Everything that the good call evil must come together, in order to give birth to one truth; oh my brothers, are you also evil enough for *this* truth?
>
> Audacious daring, long mistrust [*Misstrauen*], the cutting into what is alive — how rarely *this* comes together! But from such semen — truth is begotten!"

While it is always fraught to interpret the sayings of Zarathustra as the unfiltered thoughts of Nietzsche, this passage is from the third book of *Zarathustra*, where the character has reached his full maturity. Moreover, the interpretation is borne out by later passages in which Nietzsche speaks with his own voice. For instance, in GM P 6, he says, "This problem of the *value* of compassion and of the morality of compassion [...] seems at first to be only an isolated phenomenon, a lone question mark." But, he goes on "whoever pauses over the question and *learns* to ask, will find what I found: – that a vast new panorama opens up for him, a possibility makes him giddy, mistrust [*Misstrauen*], suspicion and fear of every kind spring up, belief in morality, all morality wavers." The wedge of mistrust expressed by questioning the value of compassion opens the door to a whole range of further questions. Eventually, Nietzsche says, "a new demand becomes articulate. So let us give voice to this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these should itself, for once, be examined*." Later, in GM 3.20, Nietzsche says that there's reason enough "why we psychologists of today cannot get rid of a certain mistrust [*Misstrauen*] *towards ourselves*" Why? "Probably we, too are still 'too good' for our trade, probably we, too, are still the victims, the prey, the sick of this contemporary taste for moralization, much as we feel contempt towards it, – it probably infects *us* as well." As before, the self-mistrust advised in this passage is not one that induces negative emotional evaluations of fixed aspects of the self. Instead, it is a sort of caution, an insistence on double-checking the deliverances of intuitions that might be overly generous and thereby lead one astray. Nietzsche goes on: "What warning did the diplomat give when he spoke to his peers? 'Above all,

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[9] Dawn is of course also the metaphor behind the title of *Daybreak*. Reflecting on that book in EH Books.D1, Nietzsche asks where the dawn alluded to in the book's title is to be found and answers "In a *revaluation of all values*, in an escape from all moral values, in an affirmation and trust [*Vertrauen-haben*] in everything that had been forbidden, despised, cursed until now."

gentlemen, we must mistrust our first impulses!' he said, '*they are nearly always good.*'" In the very next passage (GM 3.24), Nietzsche remarks, "We 'knowers' are positively mistrustful [*misstrauisch*] of any kind of believers; our mistrust [*Misstrauen*] has gradually trained us to [...] presuppose, wherever the strength of a belief becomes prominent, a certain weakness, even *improbability* of proof." Once again, Nietzsche advocates replacing dogmatic belief and deep, long-held trust with mistrust. He does so especially when such trust is bound up with Christian morality, which entices people with a range of positive illusions. He goes on: "Even we do not deny that faith 'brings salvation': *precisely for this reason* we deny that faith *proves* anything."

Finally, in A 13, while talking about "we free spirits," Nietzsche says, "We have had the whole pathos of humanity against us — its idea of what truth should be, of what serving the truth should entail: so far, every 'thou shalt' has been directed against us… Our objectives, our practices, our silent, cautious, mistrustful [*misstrauische*] nature." As before, Nietzsche associates cautious mistrust, especially mistrust of what has been traditionally been considered good in Christian morality, with his own epistemic dispositions, his own pursuit of truth. As we will see in the next section, in other passages he turns this cautious mistrust into a scientific methodology that, in his view, harnesses motivated reasoning in the service of inquiry.

Mistrust as an scientific methodology

In the previous section, we saw that when mistrust displaces long-held trust in dogmas such as Christian morality, it opens up new domains of inquiry that were previously under embargo. In this section, I argue that Nietzsche envisions an even more dynamic role for mistrust in the context of science (*Wissenschaft*, so including not just natural sciences such as physics, but also social sciences such as psychology and even humanities such as philosophy). In particular, he adopts a proto-, quasi-Popperian position on severe testing.[10] Nietzsche denies the possibility of disinterested inquiry. In its stead, he suggests taking advantage of motivated reasoning. Those who promulgate a theory are positively encouraged to trust their intuitions and cognitive abilities, with the result that they are disposed to find evidence and make inferences that support their theory. But this is only one step in the process. Either they at a later time, or other inquirers in their field, are encouraged to approach the same theory with deep mistrust, with the result that critics are disposed to find counterevidence and draw inferences that contradict the theory. When this diachronic, socially-distributed process is complete, both the evidence in favor of and the evidence against the theory should be available to all parties. It is only then that a firm, though still tentative, judgment can be made about the theory.

Nietzsche first formulated this view in *Human, All-too-human*. In HH 22, he contrasts religion, which as we saw relies only on deep trust of traditional dogmas, with science, which he "needs doubt and mistrust [*Misstrauen*] for its closest allies." But he does not stop there. Instead, he goes on to suggest that "the sum of unimpeachable truths — truths, that is, which have

[10] For more on Nietzsche's interest in harnessing emotions such as trust and distrust as aids in systematic inquiry, see Alfano (2017, 2019b chapter 6, 2019c).

survived all the assaults of skepticism and disintegration — can in time become so great [...] that on the basis of them one may resolve to embark on 'everlasting' works." Thus, scientific conclusions remain tentative, but they are still a firm enough foundation on which to attempt to build. Much later, in HH 633, Nietzsche says that, since the Enlightenment, "we no longer so easily concede to anyone that he is in possession of the truth: the rigorous procedures of inquiry have propagated mistrust [*Misstrauen*] and caution, so that anyone who advocates opinions with violent word and deed is felt to be an enemy." A couple passages later, in HH 635, he says that there are "people of intelligence who can *learn* as many of the facts of science as they like, but [...] lack the spirit of science: they have not that instinctive mistrust [*Misstrauen*] of devious thinking that [...] has put its roots down in the soul of every scientific man." What distinguishes the scientist from the non-scientist, on this understanding, is not whether their theories are falsifiable, but whether, motivated by mistrust, they go out of their way to try to falsify theories. Those who lack the scientific spirit, by contrast, are too easily satisfied and become lackadaisical as soon as they have a half-plausible solution. "For them," he says, "it is enough to have discovered any hypothesis at all concerning any matter [....] To possess an opinion is to them the same thing as to become a fanatical adherent of it and henceforth to lay it to their heart as a conviction."[11] True scientists, by contrast, "know what is meant by method and procedure and how vital it is to exercise the greatest circumspection."

In the books subsequently appended to *Human, All-too-human*, Nietzsche returns to these themes. Perhaps the most impressive statement of his philosophy of science is AOM 215, which I quote in full:

> Regular and rapid progress in the sciences is possible only when the individual is not obliged to be *too mistrustful* [misstrauisch] in the testing of every account and assertion made by others in domains in which he is a relative stranger: the condition for this, however, is that in his own field everyone must have rivals who are *extremely mistrustful* and are accustomed to observe him very closely. It is out of this juxtaposition of 'not too mistrustful' and 'extremely mistrustful' that the integrity of the republic of the learned originates.

In this passage, Nietzsche makes clear that scientific inquiry is essentially a distributed social process. Those close enough to a given topic are the only ones who are well-positioned to evaluate and criticize a given piece of work. If it passes muster through this peer-review, then others with less expertise in the relevant field are licensed to accept and build on it. Of course, this process is not infallible, but it is the best that can be achieved by finite creatures such as ourselves. Whether actual scientific practice adheres to this idealized methodology is another question — one which the ongoing replication crisis calls into doubt. In any event, in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, Nietzsche offers further thoughts on the emotional attitudes of practicing scientists. In WS 145, he points to the "aversion to images and similes within science." Such images and similes are all too "persuasive and convincing," which is why they

[11] This distinction is borne out by recent work in the field of vice epistemology (Meyer et al. 2021a, 2021b).

find a home in religious discourse. By contrast, in science "that which makes *credible*, is precisely what is *not* wanted; one challenges, rather, the coldest mistrust [*Misstrauen …*] because mistrust is the touchstone for the gold of certainty." Nietzsche puts the point even more starkly (and, ironically, again with a metaphor) in WS 319: "we mistrust [*mistraut*] everyone who believes in himself; in former ages it sufficed to make others believe in us. The recipe for obtaining belief *now* is: 'Do not spare yourself! If you want to place your opinions in a believable light first set fire to your own house!'"

Nietzsche continues to associate the scientific spirit with a calculated mix of trust and mistrust in *The Gay Science*. For instance, in GS 33, he asks "why should man be more mistrustful [*misstrauischer*] and evil now" than ever before? The answer: "Because he now has a science — needs a science." Later, in GS 110, Nietzsche claims that only in recent history has it become the case that "not only faith and conviction, but also scrutiny, denial, mistrust [*Misstrauen*], and contradiction were a *power*." Note, again, that he is not advocating unconditional mistrust any more than unconditional trust (see also BGE 154). Rather, both attitudes are needed, and likely in a way that is socially or diachronically distributed. He goes on: "all 'evil' instincts were subordinated to knowledge and put in its service and took on the luster of the permitted [...] the innocence of the *good*." As we saw above, according to Nietzsche, mistrust has traditionally been regarded as an evil attitude. But in science, this evil is required, at least instrumentally. Finally, in GS 296, Nietzsche questions the value of demonstrating firm, unchanging character. As we saw earlier, he thinks that this is often treated as a sign of trustworthiness, even though it is not so reliable. However, when it comes to inquiry, rejection of those who are less rigid "is the most harmful kind of general judgment, for it condemns and discredits the willingness that a seeker after knowledge must have to declare himself against his previous opinion and to be mistrustful [*misstrauisch*] of anything that wishes to become *firm*." Here Nietzsche demonstrates his version of fallibilism. Someone who possesses a truly scientific disposition knows that he might turn out to be wrong, even if his inquiry was diligent; he also knows that others can turn out to be wrong, even if their inquiries are diligent. For this reason, he must be willing to change his mind and also to mistrust those who dogmatically refuse to admit that they could ever be wrong.

Nietzsche's association of mistrust and science also continues into his mature works, especially *Beyond Good and Evil*. He begins in BGE 1 with a discussion of the will to truth, saying, "questions this will to truth has already laid before us!" Nietzsche associates asking questions with mistrust. After all, if one were trusting and confident, many questions would not arise. He then asks, rhetorically, "Is it any wonder if we finally become mistrustful [*misstrauisch….*] That we ourselves are also learning from this Sphinx to pose questions?" Continuing this line of thought, in BGE 34 Nietzsche admits that in bourgeois society "a mistrustful [*Misstrauen*] disposition might be a sign of 'bad character'." But, he asks, "what is to stop us from being unwise and saying: 'As the creature who has been the biggest dupe the earth has ever seen, the philosopher pretty much has a *right* to a 'bad character.' It is his *duty* to be mistrustful these days." Again, not everything that the philosopher mistrustfully questions is

guaranteed to turn out to be false, though much will. Nietzsche recommends mistrust because it is the best way to test claims and opinions that have hitherto enjoyed only blind trust. It is a way to, as he puts it in the subtitle of *Twilight of the Idols*, pose "questions with a *hammer* and, perhaps, [hear] in reply that famous hollow sound" (TI P). Later still, in BGE 192, Nietzsche claims that in the history of science, as in all cognition, "there as here, rash hypotheses, fictions, the dumb good will to 'believe,' and a lack of mistrust [*Misstrauen*] and patience develop first — our senses learn late and never fully learn to be refined trusty, careful organs of knowledge." Note again that Nietzsche does not recommend replacing all trust with mistrust. Instead, he suggests that what is needed is a balance between these two, and that striking this balance actually results in "trusty, careful organs of knowledge." Far from being a skeptic, then, Nietzsche appears to be a realist who thinks that we need to harness the motivated reasoning characteristic of both trust and mistrust to reveal as best we can the true nature of things.

Finally, let's return to *The Gay Science*, specifically to a section that Nietzsche added in the fifth book of 1887: GS 344 (though see also GS 375). In this famous passage, Nietzsche begins by saying that, "In science, convictions have no right to citizenship." Instead, "only when they decide to step down to the modesty of a hypothesis, a tentative experimental standpoint, a regulative fiction, may they be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge – though always with the restriction that they remain under police supervision, under the police of mistrust [*Misstrauens*]." As we've seen above, this is an expression both of fallibilism and of the need for both trust and mistrust in scientific inquiry. Nietzsche then asks whether this means that "a conviction is granted admission to science only when it *ceases* to be a conviction? Wouldn't the cultivation of the scientific spirit begin when one permitted oneself no more convictions? That is probably the case." Nietzsche then turns a reflexive, mistrustful eye on the very practice he just described, saying,

> we need still to ask: *in order that this cultivation begin*, must there not be some prior conviction — and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself? We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science. The question whether *truth* is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer 'yes', and moreover this answer must be so firm that it takes the form of the statement, the belief, the conviction: '*Nothing* is *more* necessary than truth.'"

He goes on to ask whether this unconditional will to truth is the will not to let oneself be deceived or the will not to deceive even oneself. Then his mistrustful skepticism prompts two new questions: "But why not deceive? But why not allow oneself to be deceived?" As he notes, the reasons for these two imperatives are very different. "one does not want to let oneself be deceived because one assumes it is harmful, dangerous, disastrous to be deceived; in this sense science would be a long-range prudence, caution, utility." But, he follows up, this is an assumption that has not yet been supported. He then asks, "Is it really less harmful, dangerous, disastrous not to want to let oneself be deceived? What do you know in advance about the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the

unconditionally mistrustful [*Unbedingt-Misstrauischen*] or the unconditionally trusting [*Unbedingt-Zutraulichen*]?" As we saw above, Nietzsche rejects both unconditional trust *and* unconditional mistrust. And in this passage he again does so explicitly, saying that both are necessary "a lot of trust *as well as* a lot of mistrust [*Misstrauen*]." In the remainder of the passage, Nietzsche suggests that there are multiple reasons why someone might adopt this unconditional will to truth. One, which he associates with his own "gay science," is "a quixotism, a slight, an enthusiastic folly." But another, which he associates with life-denial, is the affirmation of truth at any cost, including the condemnation of fixed aspects of oneself that he associates with vice and life-denial. Science, then, turns out to be a dangerous endeavor that only those lucky enough to have no immutable despicable traits should engage in.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I offer the first systematic review and interpretation of Nietzsche's thinking on trust and mistrust. He turns out to have a range of views about both attitudes. In *Human, All-too-human*, he discusses how interpersonal trust can be built up and undermined. In later works, he discusses the sometimes-unreliable heuristics that people use to assess others' trustworthiness. And across his philosophical career he is concerned to foster self-trust and dispel self-mistrust, especially when it is directed at fixed or immutable aspects of the self. But Nietzsche doesn't condemn all mistrust. In many passages, he promotes mistrust of the Christian morality that tends to undermine self-trust. It's a matter of mistrust versus mistrust. And in his reflections on the psychology of scientific inquiry, he recommends a perspectivist approach that harnesses mistrust in the pursuit of truth and eradication of error.

List of abbreviations of Nietzsche's works and translations

A *The Antichrist*
AOM *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (in part two of HH)
BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*
BT *The Birth of Tragedy*
CW *The Case of Wagner*
D *Daybreak*
DS *David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*
EH *Ecce Homo*
GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*
GS *The Gay Science*
HH *Human, All-too-human*
HL *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*
KSA *Kritische Studienausgabe*
NCW *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*
RWB *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*
SE *Schopenhauer as Educator*
TI *Twilight of the Idols*
WS *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (in part two of HH)
Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

I have used the following translations of Nietzsche's works:

Nietzsche, F. (1986). *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Edited by M. Clark & B. Leiter. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by D. Breazeale. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.

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Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs*. Edited by B. Williams. Translated by J. Nauckhoff. Cambridge University Press.

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Nietzsche, F. (2006). *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by K. Ansell-Pearson. Translated by C. Diethe. Cambridge University Press.

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