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NIETZSCHE VS. HABERMAS: EMANCIPATION, TRUTH, AND ETHICS

Dean Pickard

Jürgen Habermas tells us that Nietzsche abandons the pursuit of emancipation.¹ On its face, this is deeply ironic. If there is any single theme that runs throughout Nietzsche's writings, it is *emancipation*. But *from* what, and for Nietzsche, the question is always "*for what?*"² The notion of human emancipation has long been associated with the pursuit of truth. Nietzsche does not abandon the pursuit of truth. But after the death of God and the terrible truth about truth itself, namely that it has been a fiction without which we could not live, this pursuit must be radically transformed. If Nietzsche's writing seems to suggest something utterly inconsistent with any former standards of intelligibility for the ideas of emancipation and truth and yet they are still at the heart of Nietzsche's pursuit, and provide a basis for his conception of ethics, how are we to understand these ideas? In his writings, Nietzsche revealed the basic reflexive nature of reason and language. When we use language and reason to scrutinize language and reason far enough, we are thrown back on and make explicit the otherwise implicit conditions that make such ordering and intelligibility possible. Habermas, like Kant and Frege before him, has mistaken this unavoidable reflexivity of language and reason, which shows itself as transcendental necessity, as a basis for *grounding* claims to truth. I will argue that in light of Nietzsche's understanding of truth, knowledge, and reason, Habermas's attempt to ground morality in discourse ethics cannot succeed and, further, that morality grounded in rational necessity is inconsistent with the individuality that it is supposed to uphold. Nietzsche's ethical ideal provides a model for concrete individuality that offers the most powerful contribution to social solidarity.

The Question of Emancipation

Habermas thinks that the central problem of modernity, how to achieve individual autonomy and social solidarity, cannot be approached from the implications of Nietzsche's writing. Habermas thinks that these issues are abandoned, not if we take the linguistic turn, which he thinks is necessary,

but if we take the Nietzschean turn into a world without certainties, a world without absolutes, a world in which reason is an interpretive instrument of our needs. For Nietzsche, reason is a moment of our aesthetic, creative, fictive capacity that serves vitality. Habermas believes that without the safety of rational absolutism, now in linguistic rather than metaphysical or subject-centered epistemological form, there will be no legitimate constraint on the excesses of power, caprice, and prejudice. He pursues the Enlightenment ideal of human emancipation through discourse ethics based on the security of necessary conditions of communication true for all people at all times. In contrast, Nietzsche's work reveals the paradoxical nature of such an enterprise as well as the motives underlying it. This frees him to investigate the possibility of an "authentic" emancipation.

Rather than a political or social condition, Nietzsche focuses on emancipation primarily as a psychological and cultural one made possible via a kind of high culture and individual excellence that can emerge only in an unpolitical or anti-political environment.³ The kind of emancipation Nietzsche is concerned with is deeply individual and personal. He views emancipation as a prelude to and necessary condition for a transformation in consciousness, a kind of *gestalt* shift in the way one sees and experiences life that gives rise to authentic sovereign individuality.⁴

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes of the possibility of "a kind of second innocence" (GM II: 20) and a "great Health" (GM II: 24)⁵ made possible by both the death of God/Truth and a different implementation of the human propensity to "active forgetting" (GM II: 1) which serves life and health. At its crudest level, this propensity to active forgetting is simply a kind of unconscious psychological digestion that eliminates psychological obstructions to bodily health. In contrast, its most cultivated and spiritualized manifestation is in the *authentic individual*, one who is supremely responsible, one who *remembers* best, who "keeps promises" (GM II: 1-8). Nietzsche's genuine ethics arises in an individual who has overcome the moralization of consciousness and becomes truly self-directed. The moralization of consciousness imposes on the healthy human animal drives and instincts a memory that serves the collective, but it also causes the disease of *ressentiment*, a guilt ridden, self-hating, life-hating bad conscience.⁶ This moralization is instilled as a "must," violated on pain of punishment. Philosophers have made this more subtle by making the moral law a matter of rational necessity. To be immoral is to have also violated the demand of rational coherence and consistency. Habermas's discourse ethics is one more attempt at this.

Nietzsche's second innocence, in which *ressentiment*, the desire for

revenge and punishment, is overcome, is possible only in a moralized reflective consciousness that has a heightened memory, but that also has reasserted the healthy drive of forgetting [*aktiv Vergessenheit*], but now in the form of revaluing rather than forgetting what has made it sick.

Of this long moralization of consciousness that has produced the illness of a bad conscience, Nietzsche says: "we should have profoundest gratitude for that which morality has achieved hitherto: but now it is only a burden which may become a fatality! Morality itself, in the form of honesty, compels us to deny morality" (WP 404).

Nietzsche asks, what would it be to live with this supremely sophisticated ability and strength to remember and keep promises, but as if God had never existed, as if the condition in which the "guilty feeling of indebtedness to the divinity" is erased "as if this moralization had not taken place at all" (GM II: 21). What would it be to live *not* beyond good and bad, beyond esteeming, beyond ethics, but beyond good and evil? What kind of sovereign emancipated individuality would this be?

Such a spirit who has *become free* stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — *he does not negate any more*. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysus*. (TI, p. 554)

It has been asked whether this transformed consciousness of the *Übermensch* is intelligible at all and whether there is a way to preserve rationality under the aegis of the creative-artistic?⁷ Further, Nietzsche's view of transformation, a second innocence, and ethics based on genuine individuality seem implausible if *aktiv Vergessenheit* is taken as a kind of literal forgetting of one's history rather than a change in how one *feels* about that history, how one appropriates it in the service of life.⁸ How could one *actively* forget anything and how much of one's past could one "forget" without losing oneself altogether in personal if not cultural amnesia? Further, would not such a forgetting entail a loss of responsibility, the very thing with which Habermas is concerned? "Forgetting," however, describes a change in *attitude*, not a selective loss of memory, not an edited version of oneself.⁹ It is a renewal, a rebirth in which the significance of our past is radically transformed and obstructions to the "great health" are dissolved.¹⁰ *Übermenschlichkeit* can be intelligibly distinguished from the "human, all too human" pursuit of salvation through faith in "Truth," not by the lack of an historical sense or even the absence of metanarratives, but by a transformation in consciousness, in the attitude with which one lives. The

primary issue is not *what* one believes, though that is certainly a way of diagnosing an unhealthy conscience, rather it is the *attitude* which *motivates* belief and from which one acts and lives.

The overcoming of irredeemable guilt, does not entail a post theistic, post moral irresponsibility. Authentic individuality is characterized by a heightened integrity, responsibility, and honesty, without nausea at the truth of the actual world. It is the condition of saying yes to all of life, without losing an extraordinary ability to judge, to esteem, to say yes *and* no to the particular, while having an unqualified attitude of acceptance toward the whole. Nietzsche recognized Spinoza's *amor dei* as a precursor in this fatalistic love of the whole (*amor fati*). Our task, then is to love our fate, our necessity. "What is the seal of liberation? — No longer being ashamed in front of oneself" (GS 275). The paradox in both Spinoza and Nietzsche is how you could *choose* to "become who you are" if everything is necessary. For Spinoza this is a metaphysical paradox. But for Nietzsche it is no more or less troubling than any of his reflexively self-undermining ideas. Such thinking in Nietzsche is instrumental, not explanatory. His goal ultimately, like Spinoza's (but without the baggage of rationalist metaphysics), is a transformation in consciousness, a way of living.¹¹

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this new vitality and new beginning is represented with the metamorphosis from camel, to lion, to child. Only one who has been a "camel," who carries, embodies, and cherishes our cultural traditions, one who remembers best, can become the "child," a revitalization, a phoenix arising from the ashes of itself. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is replete with such metaphors of transformation. He calls it his greatest book, the one that expressed this possibility for transformation best. It was also a parody on the struggle to find truth and salvation. Truth and salvation are no longer found in a relief from history, an escape to an otherworldly denial and degradation of history and the transitory.

At the core of this transformation to a this-worldly post nihilistic healthy consciousness is the overcoming of *ressentiment* (desire for revenge and punishment) and chronophobia (fear of time and change).

For *that man be delivered from revenge*, that is the bridge to the highest hope for me, and a rainbow after long storms...Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. (Z, "On The Tarantulas,")

This indeed, this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its "it was." ...

... How could it ever come to pass that one has "unlearned the spirit

of revenge," achieved "reconciliation with time and something higher than any reconciliation...the will to power must will something higher than any reconciliation, but how shall this be brought about? Who could teach [the will] to will backwards?" (Z II, "On Redemption")

Nietzsche sees the possibility of living without the motive of revenge, the possibility of seeing through the self-deceptive fictions that sustain us in the face of impermanence and the challenge and struggle of life. It is the possibility of overcoming the desperate desire for salvation from suffering, insecurity, and uncertainty. The overcoming of such motives is troped in the transforming idea of eternal recurrence and its post nihilistic correlates, the *Übermensch* and the attitude of *amor fati*. These are signifiers of a possible type of consciousness, a way of living in which we have a radically different relationship to our beliefs, and are no longer trapped by turning them into "truths." There is a renewal, a rebirth in which we do not literally forget, but the significance of our past is radically transformed.

Nietzsche is suggesting that the past *can* be changed, not the literal facts of the past, but our relationship to it, how we value it. It is a new beginning made possible by a transformed relationship to the past which is possible *only through a profound historical sense*. The "murderer"¹² does not kill his historical sense, his past. What must die is the prison of his "ego," his self-image, his relation to his past that binds him to an image of a past that makes him sick and world weary. A "second innocence" is the means to this revitalization. The revaluing of an *aktiv Vergessenheit* does not obliterate or distort the facts of life, but takes a different attitude toward them. It is a forgetting of the old *feeling* of guilt and the desperate desire to be saved via some "Truth" of faith and/or reason.¹³ This is in keeping with Nietzsche's claim that facts never come uninterpreted, never without being valued, and these interpretations that have been taken as truths and what motivates them are what is being questioned, revalued. In this sense, the past is never fixed. This however, entails a radical change in the attitude that motivates our valuations, our "truths." In revaluing our past, we become different, renewed, healthy.

Emancipation is achieved neither merely through freedom from the oppression of others, nor by overcoming thoughtless superstitions, but by recognizing and coming to terms with (via self-overcoming) the constraints imposed by our own psychological make up. Completed nihilism is the condition of seeing (and feeling) the possibility of this new vitality that is the heir of all the collective struggle that has made authentic sovereign individuality possible.

Habermas looks to the constraints, the "must," of necessary conditions of speech to ground moral obligation and social solidarity. Nietzsche's "must" arises from the liberated authentic individual who has brought supreme self-imposed artistic/intellectual order to the passions. This seems an entirely implausible basis to those who fear the worst case scenarios manifested in examples such as Stalin and Hitler, despite the fact that neither of them showed any sign whatever of the qualities of Nietzsche's sovereign individual. Nietzsche's notion of ethics is based on the idea of power over oneself, not others, and this self-overcoming bears a striking resemblance to the Buddhist idea of self-overcoming that leads to a lived, felt sense of compassion and toleration for one's fellow humans, not their subjugation and destruction. Like Buddhist ethics, Nietzsche's ethics grows out of a kind of consciousness and a way of living.¹⁴ Thinkers from Kant to Habermas, who can no longer appeal by faith or reason to a God-centered religion for an absolute distinction between right and wrong, look to the necessity of reason, and emancipation is viewed through the prism of this need to ground morality and truth in rational necessity.

If such truth and necessity are no longer plausible as grounding for our moral claims, as Nietzsche asserts, the opportunity for emancipation is not lost, but enhanced. Freedom from such expectations is a prelude to genuine emancipation and a transformation in the way we live and are attached to our beliefs. The first step is to rid oneself of such illusions and expectations about truth. Reason is a valuable tool in undoing the expectations that an over abundant faith in reason has led us to.

The Question of Truth and the Problem of Reflexivity

The pursuit of truth, for Nietzsche, must have these elements: severe honesty and the courage to follow one's most rigorous use of reason and creative insight wherever it may lead, including the most disturbing insights about truth, language, and reason themselves. Nietzsche does tell us everything is interpretation, but not all interpretations are equally rigorous, well-informed, or honest. The following passage from Nietzsche is often quoted:

Against positivism, [emphasis added] which stops before phenomena, saying "There are only *facts*" — I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing...It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to

accept as a norm. (WP 481)

Two central ideas here are that all our claims involve interpretation and that they are inseparable from what motivates them. But Nietzsche does not deny that there is a real world of facts, only the idea of "any fact 'in itself'" (WP 481). He is speaking to the *excesses* of positivism here and should not be read without keeping this in mind. If we take this hyperbolic claim together with his less often quoted admonishment of theologians for their exceedingly poor philological skills and who are incapable "*of reading facts without falsifying them by interpretations*" (A 52, emphasis added), we get quite a different, more balanced view of what Nietzsche is saying:¹⁵ To believe that there are "facts in themselves," on the one hand, or to bury the facts under interpretations, on the other, are excesses that arise from the same motive to lie, to deny the actual world, its impermanence, and uncertainty, in the service of our insecurities and needs.

The inseparability of facts, interpretations, and motives does not mean we cannot decipher them. There is the art of interpreting interpretations (a reflexive activity), what we might call *philological psychology*.

Philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers. (*Daybreak*, Pref. 5)

This is Nietzsche's approach to knowledge in which reflexivity of the process and the absence of closure is fully recognized and in which the ability to suspend judgment is essential. Nietzsche sees knowledge as "a form of asceticism" (A, 57) in pursuit of which we must deny mere impulse. But knowledge is itself the highest passion, "the *most powerful affect*,"¹⁶ according to Nietzsche, which requires extraordinary rigor and discipline. The pursuit of knowledge requires skepticism as an antidote to our convictions, which Nietzsche calls prisons.¹⁷ Nietzsche's writing has the potential for emancipating us from these prisons in the service of a profound transformation in the way we live. He does not struggle, as his near contemporaries Frege and Husserl do, to find a foundation for certainty. Rather, he undermines any such attempt, particularly with the use of seemingly problematic notions, such as perspectivism, eternal return, *amor fati*, etc., that continually undermine themselves. This is not a flaw as Habermas would have it. That Habermas sees it as a flaw and as a threat to the project of enlightenment and human emancipation indicates that, in Nietzsche's terms, Habermas is still suffering from the "demand that one wants by all means that something should be firm...the demand for a

support, a prop" (GS 347), for a "thou shalt," the "thou shalt" of reason.

When subject-centered rationality and the standards of logic are decentered and seen as creative fictions in the larger context of imagination and creativity, or as useful in the pragmatism of the everyday, there is a radical "gestalt" shift, a different way of seeing things. Old problems about "the way things are or ought to be," in any foundationalist universal sense, are not solved but dissolved, rendered impotent to exercise any influence on us. They have no control over a thinker who has shed the use of language that led to the problems from the beginning. These problems and ways of using language that gave rise to them, become relics that may linger in our language, but do not exercise any power over us. This is not to say we do not think anymore or can not draw inferences, or that the word "truth" has no use. Rather, how all this is understood has radically changed. The language of transcendental metaphysics and traditional empiricist epistemology lingers only as a manner of speaking.

The claim Russell makes in his introduction to *The Tractatus*, ("the essential business of language is to assert or deny facts"), is no longer true or false, just no longer an issue. Claims are still "true" or "false" but only in the context in which they are made. One no longer thinks of "independent" facts to which statements correspond. "Facts" are now context dependent. The "context" is itself a variable which has enough fixity to render claims true or false and meaning possible. Literal discourse is no longer that which either does or does not conform to the "real," understood as "the facts," but is that part of our language which is for the moment providing the fixity any discourse and way of life require in order to function. As Wittgenstein says of truth and language, "If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false."¹⁸ It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.¹⁹

One of Wittgenstein's central purposes was to expose the widespread misuse of transcendently necessary conditions, rules, and fixity, and to dissolve the philosophical problems that led to such thinking. Wittgenstein's method of description²⁰ offers an alternative non transcendental view in which meaning and the rules we follow in language use can fluctuate with circumstances, yet retain enough fixity for our purposes. Wittgenstein is not skeptical about the connection between rule and application. Rather, he is skeptical about a certain kind of *explanation* we give to ourselves in understanding such connection, i.e., empirical and

essentialist explanations.²¹ The implications of this for any attempt to show an ideal standpoint which provides the necessary preconditions for rational discourse, such as Habermas's, is that no such standpoint is fixed or ideal, and that it is not needed at all. It is language "gone on holiday," doing no work. In Nietzsche's language, it serves a need but is mistakenly taken as logically rather than psychologically necessary.

The real value of transcendental arguments is not what they have *proven* but what they have *shown* us. They have not proven that there are absolute limits of thought or communication as Kant, Frege, and now Habermas have tried to show. But they have shown something about the nature of thought and language when it tries to reflect on itself. The orderliness of any system of language and thought can be distilled and expressed by logical rules that are necessary to that system, and can be turned back upon that system to show this very necessity. Any system of knowledge and meaning, insofar as it achieves its aim of providing fixity and coherence, can be shown to presuppose some set of categories and rules, some conception of truth and consistency that would make that system of knowledge or meaning possible in its own terms. Self-reference is the key to the process of justification in any transcendental arguments about necessary conditions and is unavoidable. Kant and Frege were looking for fixed absolute limits, the necessary conditions of language and knowledge. But the limits of language and knowledge they sought to expose depended upon those very limits themselves.

What the deeply insightful failures of Kant and Frege have shown is that no limit is absolute, but they have also shown us that limits are absolutely necessary. Limits or rules, though not absolute, are "necessary" for order and coherence and can be "read off" or distilled from that order as "preconditions." They *can* be conceived in the form of logical and transcendental requirements for thought, knowledge, and communication. But in a post Nietzschean world we now realize that no such limit provides a "grounding" for anything. It merely reflects the reciprocal relationship between ordering and what is ordered, between interpretation and meaning. Habermas does not yet seem to realize that reflexivity does not provide any objective grounding conditions. Its unavoidability is mistaken for a kind of necessity that he thinks could serve as a basis for ethical and social solidarity. He fails to see that Nietzsche has used this unavoidability to advantage in the service of emancipation rather than to undermine it.

The problem of self-reference or of reflexivity in Nietzsche is well known, for example, if Nietzsche's perspectivism is true then it is a counterexample to itself. Nietzsche's ideas seem to force thinking into such conundrums:

Will to power, as an explanatory principle, is so wide as to be vacuous, it tells us nothing, or it is altogether incoherent.²² If eternal recurrence were true, one could never know it, since each cycle is identical. What would distinguish them? It is an unprovable hypothesis if taken literally. *Amor fati* is also "problematic." How could one choose to love one's fate if one is already fated to do so or not? And as we have seen, the very idea of an "active forgetting" is a self-contradiction on its face.

But of course Nietzsche did not intend any of these as truths or explanations to supersede previous ones.²³ They are aimed at undermining (and freeing us from our addiction to) conceptions of absolute truth and the pursuit of certainty. They facilitate a shift in perspective and feeling about life, a "gestalt shift" whereby we are emancipated from the prison of our convictions. They are purposely self-undermining and aim to "show" something about language, consciousness and our motives for the artful fictions we live by.²⁴ The question becomes which interpretations do not bury the facts and are most life enhancing.

Reflexivity is a feature of all language and thought, if deconstructed far enough. Nietzsche's riddles are not to be solved but are to elicit transformation. His readers must read slowly, carefully, thoughtfully because they are finding themselves. Nietzsche is a catalyst for this. Nietzsche seems to be consciously putting reflexivity to a particular use of destabilization. He is not merely committing serious errors in thought that lead to incoherence which undermine any attempt at fixing limits and foundations. That one inevitably arrives at such incoherence in any attempt to reason to some absolute truth is a major, if not utterly transforming, insight. Nietzsche's work only seems self-destructive when it is read from a standpoint which aims at, demands, or presumes foundationalism, absolutism, or universalism. This would seem to distinguish it from problems of self-reference found, for example, in certain famous paradoxes such as the liar's paradox, Russell's contradiction that undermined Frege's logicism, or the Logical Positivists' principle of verification which cannot be verified by itself. Such problems of self-reference are devastating when they undermine some kind of foundationalist project, i.e., the attempt to find a basis by which truth, knowledge and reality claims can be legitimated.

Nietzsche's perspectivism and antifoundationalism illuminates this self-referential or reflexive nature of reason and language is now supported by major advances in twentieth century logic and mathematics,²⁵ and exposes the false dichotomy of absolutism and relativism.²⁶ To speak generally of necessity and contingency, of absolute and relative, is to already have bought into dichotomous thinking that has gone beyond the bounds of its

contextual utility. What is the context of such claims and divisions? We cannot achieve an absolute orientation to everything else. We create the orientation. Accepting any rules of reason as absolute and universal is an orientation that attempts to step outside itself and proclaim itself "objective." But we can never outrun our orientation, our perspective, and can never achieve the objectivity of a view from everywhere, (which is nowhere). The attempt to prove this results in a regress of proofs of consistency and completeness exposed in contemporary philosophy of logic²⁷ and in postmodernists' exposure of the reflexive nature of any attempt at justification by appeal to a universal or generalized perspective. Any attempt at "closure" on this issue would itself be self-refuting in requiring an unsupported assumption at some point.

Nietzsche said, "What was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but something else — let us say, health, future, growth, power, life" (GS, Preface, 2). Nietzsche is concerned with truth in the service of life, truth understood as transitory boundaries or limits without which life is impossible. As esteemers, we always impose limits, constraints. Hence, limits are absolutely necessary, never absent, though never fixed and absolute. Temporary fixity is ensured and so is truth in this sense. Conflict is resolved not by "truth," but by the demands of life, in response to which "truth" has its meaning. It is through Nietzsche's interplay of philological rigor and interpretive play that we can avoid the result in which "the text disappears under the interpretation" (BGE 38). Everything can be a trope. But not at the same time. Within the life and use of a language the literal/figurative distinction is preserved, only to be rearranged, melted down to meet some need and recast by some brilliant deconstruction/reconstruction. It is possible to push any interpretation to the point of "a trembling" that reveals its own unsustainable presuppositions. But identity and meaning are not obliterated. They are always present. One *can* get things wrong! There would be no intelligibility without some fixity, though every interpretation is always open to revision. To reify or absolutize a perspective, a particular set of propositions, is a worn out habit. This "all or nothing" dichotomy constitutes the two poles that modernists seeking certainty and deconstructionists proclaiming a kind of linguistic nihilism are trapped in.²⁸ It does not follow that because the dogmatism of absolute foundational certainty fails that relativism is validated or that there is no meaning.

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind....Nihilism appears at that point...because one has come to mistrust any 'meaning' in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because

it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain. (WP 55)

Nietzsche rejects dichotomies throughout his work, for example: "The true world — we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one" (TI, p. 486). Nietzsche says of the tendency to divide things into opposites:

General inexact observation sees contradictions everywhere in nature (such as, for example, 'hot and cold'), where there are no contradictions but only gradations. This bad habit has induced us to wish to understand and analyze even internal nature, the intellectual-moral world, according to such contradictions. Untold pain, arrogance, rigidity, alienation, deathly coldness have thus suffused human feeling for the reason that one believed in seeing contradictions instead of transitions.²⁹

Nietzsche considers contradiction to be a construction of the understanding:

There are no contradictions: we acquire the concept of contradiction only from logic, whence it was erroneously transferred to things. Things do not mutually exclude one another, in thought also the principle of gliding and not of antithesis should dominate.³⁰

The Question of Ethics: Reflexivity and Habermas's Transcendental Argument for Social Solidarity

Habermas has not caught up with this post Nietzschean condition. He is still pursuing the goal of emancipation through rational grounding to solve the social, political, and ethical problems of late capitalism in the context of a postmodern world. But this new context changes everything. Any transcendental universalist approach to grounding truth is just another metanarrative. Given the conditions of postmodernism, until Habermas rids himself of the Kantian features of his view he will less likely be successful in combating the usurpation of one area of cultural activity (the life-world communicative reason) by another (economic instrumental reason).³¹

The notion of an ideal or unconditioned moment of communication is very Kantian and the distinction between life-world and system seems to be very similar to the Kantian dichotomy of reason and nature, the dichotomy of inside and outside, the realm of freedom and value versus necessity and fact. Parallel to Kant's scheme of reason, rationality divides into the spheres of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-practical. But we

can think of the division of rationality in another way using a quite different model to interpret our experience. The intrusion of instrumental reason into the life world is not the intrusion of one realm into another as Habermas sees it, but the splitting off of one social order that has become dominant, insulated and unresponsive to the others. There is not a lifeworld, but lifeworlds, not a communication community, but communities, and the individual is a crossroads of many communities. Freedom then is the availability of different perspectives. "A decrease in plurality of perspectives would tend to rigidify community, shrink individuality toward uniformity and unity and diminish or undercut query, social and even reflexive communication, and the possibility of rationality," i.e., freedom of choice.³²

One might admire Habermas' sustained attempt to carry forward the enterprise of always binding theory and practice together in the pursuit of human emancipation. But Habermas has certain assumptions about the fundamental status of politics and theorizing that lead him to conclusions that are critical of those who do not share these assumptions and he begs the question of the legitimacy of such assumptions in his criticism of postmodernists for committing a "*performative contradiction*."³³ Likewise, his assumptions about the fundamental nature of politics lead him to question begging criticisms of postmodernists for being "apolitical."³⁴

Habermas's failure to grasp adequately the significance of Nietzsche, as indicated in his chapter on Nietzsche in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, has prevented him from seeing that his own philosophy, in its struggle to ground a normative ethics in a theory of communicative action, still trades unnecessarily on universalistic dichotomous categories characteristic of pre Nietzschean philosophy. Worse, Habermas unwittingly and ironically commits a kind of "*performative contradiction*" in his own thinking by appealing to procedural rules that are reflexively self-undermining.³⁵ The issue of legitimacy and justification cannot be settled in advance and then be used to attack those who do not conform. Many "postmodern" thinkers question these very notions of legitimacy and justification even though they must use the language and conceptual framework that "presuppose" them in order to carry out their critique of reason and language. To attack postmodernists for "violating" these conditions in the form of "performative contradictions" begs the question of whether Habermas's assumptions about reason and communication can provide the grounding conditions he thinks are necessary. Any notion that requires itself as a precondition is suspicious to postmodernists, not to mention post Goedelian logicians. This necessity that is supposed to provide a ground for emancipation is only possible if one makes an initial leap of faith with regard

to reason. In Nietzschean terms, it makes a perspective into *the* perspective necessary to all perspectives. To make such a move is to presuppose what is at issue. The fact that such notions appear unavoidable is at the center of the question of the self-referential nature of reason and language and the misuse of transcendental arguments to ground and universalize truth.

To universalize any rule or truth is to ignore the context of particularity that gives rise to the desire to universalize in the first place. There is in fact always already a context of meaning in which we are operating. That context is inescapable if we are to be discussing anything at all. It is this obvious fact that is overlooked in the rush toward the fixity of universals arrived at by "pure reason" and transcendental arguments such as Habermas's.

The notions of emancipation, individuality, community, harm, and consensus all fail to have sufficient fixity that would allow any universal rational truth being asserted about them independently of the linguistic context in which they do their work. Habermas's discourse ethics is a requirement for all discourse under any conditions whatsoever. It imposes standards of rationality by which any discourse would be deemed acceptable and to which it must conform. But if these "rules" of discourse are truly universal, they must apply to any discourse about themselves and must themselves be arrived at by rational discourse. This, in turn, must be governed by these same rules which must already be operating in order to even have any rational discourse at all about the rules, *ad infinitum*.³⁶ If we attempt to impose this universal requirement then the issue of self-referentiality, which is a feature of all our language and reason, is made into a problem. Self-referentiality is only a problem for one who tries to outrun it and arrive at some independent standpoint which excludes itself in taking things into account, in providing THE way of seeing or judging things.

Habermas, nonetheless, persists in his pursuit of a universal, albeit "pragmatic," absolutism. From this standpoint, he wrongly lumps Nietzsche together with thinkers Habermas labels as relativists and whose thinking Habermas sees as pernicious forms of postmodernism. However, Nietzsche's works, especially his recognition and use of reflexivity, undermine bipolar dualities, such as the absolute/relative distinction, and he cannot be labeled modern or postmodern for similar reasons. If one gives up false hopes of universalism then one can give up the idea of relativism as well. There is no point trying to find shadings between the poles of relative and absolute. Relativism only makes sense in relation to absolutism. The distinction is a relic of a rationalist conception of truth that only serves to obscure rather than clarify anything. From a Nietzschean perspective, there is neither a unified epistemological subject nor object to provide an absolute point of

reference, so the absolute/relative distinction is dissolved along with anything supposedly absolute. The words relative and absolute do not have to disappear from our vocabulary. They obviously have some utility in some contexts. But they should cease to be a guide to our understanding of knowledge and truth. The pursuit of certainty and absolute foundations for truth is not only misguided and unnecessary, but also dangerous. Unrealistic and misguided expectations with regard to certainty and absolute and universal grounding of our moral judgments invites the unhealthy conditions of dogmatism and fanaticism, on the one hand, or nihilism, on the other.

We cannot live a coherent meaningful existence without "truth" or fixity in some sense. It is never the case that anything goes. A coherent, meaningful life requires imposing some order upon the flux of existence. What Nietzsche and many so-called postmodernists have seen is the self-deception of universal requirements of reason, but equally, the necessity of fixity and structure.³⁷ They believe we can have the latter without the former. Habermas, who is still short of this insight, attempts to do what, in light of postmodernism, is not feasible or desirable. Habermas can be the Deweyan democratic pragmatist he wants to be without resorting to the foundation of an ideal moment of communicative consensus.³⁸

Nietzschean Ethics: The Irony of Sovereign Individuality

The core problem of modernity may be seen as the problem of how to achieve both individual autonomy and authenticity together with social solidarity, personal freedom and an ethical life, enlightened self-awareness and self-satisfaction together with social order. We have striven for authentic and sovereign individuality that would also support collective solidarity by forcing upon the individual some external "thou shalt" of faith or reason. "Enlightenment" is supposed to be coming to see the necessity and/or wisdom of this external "must," thereby rationally identifying one's self-interest with the collective good. But there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea of sovereign individuality grounded in an external demand. For Nietzsche, the very notion of the sovereign individual precludes morality: "for 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive" (GM II: 2). A genuine ethics must be autonomous and cannot arise merely from an external demand. It requires real courage, not the courage of convictions, but the courage to question one's convictions, which leads to self-overcoming in which the moralization of consciousness is revalued and appropriated to free up creative individual sovereignty. Ironically, the supposition and demand that any collective solidarity that *could* do justice to

the individual *must* be based on something utterly *outside* the individual, that is, a transcendent God and/or transcendental truths of reason, ironically reflect a *mistrust* of the individual.

Nietzsche's conception of ethics requires that we *trust* the individual (once we have given her the means to achieve autonomy), in order to promote the authentic individuality upon which *genuine* ethics depends. *Morality*, in contrast, is based on *lack of trust!* It does not trust actual individuality. It wants to move *toward* trust by logically or otherwise forcing respect of an *ideal* or otherworldly individuality. Nietzsche's ethics begins with the *concrete achievement of the individual as the very basis of any ethics* (and if Nietzsche's genealogy is on the mark, has been the real source of moralities). Rather than obligation, this genuine ethics is based on respect for actually achieved sovereign individuality and recognizes this potential for self-overcoming in others. It is based on respect for life and its diversity, rather than on moral law and conformity. Values grow up out of forms of life and are grounded in these, not in some "thou shalt" of faith or reason that wishes to become orthodox and universally applied. Such absolutism invites tyranny and repression.

To be human is to be a being to whom things matter. Things matter. But they matter differently and conflict is inevitable. Nietzsche's ethics cannot require a world without risk and harm, a world without the risk of harm from other people pursuing their own interests. This is not a denial of the need for civil law. The idea that virtue has ever been a matter of legislation anyway, or vice versa, is highly suspect.³⁹ Why pretend that without the right laws morality would collapse and that having such laws guarantees anything in the way of virtue? This hope breeds deep reactionary disappointment. Both the political left and right today mistakenly want to legislate moral right. Genuine ethics cannot come from law. Successful contemporary politics would be to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect without letting conflict undermine social solidarity. Reason still prevails, but not from transcendental necessity or supposed transcendent decree.

Though he does not appear very optimistic about it, Nietzsche tells us that we are uniquely positioned in history to move away from morality toward a more genuine ethics and high culture.⁴⁰ Freedom from religious, moral, and scientific dogma after the death of God/Truth greatly enhances the possibility of genuine individuality, but only after the necessary pathology of the various forms of nihilism are completed. They must be completed in order to not go on recapitulating the illusions of a grounded "thou shalt" external to concrete individuality. Nietzsche's perspectivism

and ethics of authentic individual sovereignty is a vastly different pursuit of perfectibility than the absolutes of faith or reason. Nietzsche has much in common with Emerson's "self-reliance" and the American Pragmatist movement. One stops blaming the world and looks to oneself for solutions to problems and as the source of ethical strength and obligation.

Can such genuine individuality be taught? Can it be institutionalized (the problem of Plato's *Republic*)? This would seem doubtful in light of Nietzsche's view that "Culture and the state...are antagonists:...One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even *anti-political*" (TI, p. 509). Culture means the cultivation of genuine individuality, so the state and the individual are antithetical, though they coexist. With this basic antagonism and tension one would think that the dialectic between individual and collective is always in jeopardy. But the collective should not be thought of as the state or social institutions. When these serve rather than rule the collective, then the collective can more readily produce culture. The nobility of the spirit can be encouraged by enhancing the conditions of its emergence if there is a collective will to do so.

We will not achieve health through politics. That is beyond its capability. Politics is merely a pragmatic instrument for culture that is also a danger to it as is the institutionalization of the "lifeworld" generally. Nietzsche's "Grand Politics" that arises from great individuals is a symptom of health of a culture, not a cause. And this health is beyond religion and outmoded moralities as well. It is only through education in a strong sense, education of the spirit that engenders something like Nietzsche's powerfully ethical sovereign individual, that health is made more likely. Institutional education, today's cybernetic education, is marked by mediocrity and

an indecent haste...as if something would be lost if the young man of twenty-three were not yet "finished," or if he did not yet know the answer to the "main question": *which* calling? A higher kind of human being, if one may say so...takes time, he does not even think of "finishing": at thirty, one is, in the sense of high culture, a beginner, a child. Our overcrowded secondary schools, our overworked, stupefied secondary-school teachers, are a scandal: for one to defend such conditions...there may perhaps be *causes* — *reasons* there are none. (TI, p. 511)

True education, for Nietzsche, requires excellence in learning to see—and to think:

One must learn to *see*, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to

see — accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it; postponing judgment, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from all sides. That is the first preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control of all the inhibiting, excluding instincts. ...Learning to *think*: in our schools one no longer has any idea of this. Even in the universities, even among the real scholars of philosophy, logic as a theory, as a practice, as a *craft*, is beginning to die out ... there is no longer the remotest recollection that thinking re-quires a technique, a teaching curriculum, a will to mastery — that thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a kind of dancing. (TI, p. 112)

And there must always be a pathos of distance. "All higher education belongs only to the exception: one must be privileged to have a right to so high a privilege" (TI, p. 510).

Nietzsche said, "My style, which is affirmative...deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means" (TI, p. 511). It is a means for what cannot be easily captured in language, and certainly not in any set of logical inferences. Nietzsche's various uses of style aim to undermine dogmatic absolutism, to transform the attitude of *ressentiment* toward the challenge and struggle of life. He is attempting to overcome the desperate desire for salvation from suffering, insecurity and uncertainty, which is finally a desire for salvation from oneself and from life we attempt to gain through immutable "truth."

Nietzsche is no "linguistic nihilist," that is., he does not undermine the possibility of meaning nor proclaim its utter loss. He proclaims the loss of a very old and powerful meaning, the idea of an absolute objective ground for truth (e.g., Platonism, Christianity and more recently scientific positivism). He diagnoses the resulting illness of nihilism and aims to overcome it. He is a "deconstructionist" only in the sense that he uses self-undermining concepts as a means to clear away thinking that is habituated to traditional conceptions of absolute truth which stand in the way of an emancipation from the "human all too human." Nietzsche's vision of transformation and *Übermenschlichkeit* has something in common with modernist and Enlightenment ideals, but without the modernist attempt to ground knowledge and morality in absolute reason, knowledge and truth.⁴¹ Contrary to the criticism of Habermas, Nietzsche's message is clearly emancipatory. But it no longer seeks emancipation in or by means of something universal or absolute that is grounded in reason. Freedom is always freedom within limits, but these limits are not fixed and absolute.

The dialectic of individual and collective is an ongoing one and is not about something that can be finally achieved. But to the extent that a society tolerates, even encourages Nietzsche's ideal of self-discipline, self-overcoming, and self-reliance, it will be a healthier culture. Culture is the grand prize of the creative, destructive, and preservative movement and impulse of nature. Nietzsche forces us to ask the question far more penetratingly "What kind of culture will we be?" "What kind of nobility will we achieve, will we create?" And for each of us "What kind of person will I be, or more fittingly, am I?" To make oneself a task, a work of art, to love life and strive to be its highest expression, not merely in what one achieves but in one's life-affirming attitude, that is a noble goal. And to genuinely engage in this is to make the most ethical contribution to the collective.

Nietzsche's is a profound *ethical* philosophy. He does not prescribe abstract duties or grounded moral obligations, but sets a high ethical ideal in his perspective of human perfectibility. Self-overcoming is the key ethical idea. So in the real world of experience, we would do well to approximate Nietzsche's authentic ethics based on sovereign individuality, on the strength of character, the *ability* to keep promises, rather than producing and then coercing and condemning people who are incapable of responding to obligation except out of compulsion. Such coercion is supposed to be justified on the basis of something rationally and universally necessary. Thus, Habermas and all who seek a necessity outside the individual in transcendent or transcendental grounding, seek a kind of forced solidarity in an unnecessary attempt to abolish relativism. But this is ironically anathema to the idea of authentic individuality and therefore a genuine ethics. As Nietzsche predicted, in the name of individuality, we have moved instead in the direction of a great leveling, an inability for skill in judgment, toward an irresponsible license rather than responsible freedom. Nietzsche would tell us it is a failure in education and the effort necessary to hard won high culture, a failure in priorities, a failure in perspective, a failure in courage. No morality, no conviction, no dogma, no legislation will save us. Only the concrete achievement of authentic individuality and an ethics based on this can provide a basis for genuine social solidarity.

Endnotes

1. "With Nietzsche, the criticism of modernity dispenses for the first time with its retention of an emancipatory content...As a counter authority to reason, Nietzsche appeals to experiences that are displaced back into the archaic realm...liberated from

- all constraints of cognition and purposive activity, all imperatives of utility and morality. A breakup of the principle of individuation becomes the escape route from modernity." Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), p. 94.
2. For example, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I, "On the Way of the Creator" in W. Kaufman, *The Portable Nietzsche* (Viking: New York, 1954), and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM) I, 17, note. Hereafter Z.
 3. See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans Lack: 4" in Kaufmann. I discuss this in the final section below. Hereafter TI.
 4. Emancipation is but a prelude to something else and is a potential dead-end: Future philosophers, pursuers of truth and knowledge, will be skeptics and free themselves of traditional dogmas, but they "will not be merely free spirits but something more." (BGE 44). "First, one has the difficulty of emancipating oneself from one's chains; [from one's "Truths"] and, ultimately, one has to emancipate oneself from this emancipation too! Each of us has to suffer, though in greatly different ways, from the chain sickness, even after he has broken the chains." Letter to Lou Salome, end of August, 1882 in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. & trans. by Christopher Middleton, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 191. Nietzsche refers to the period of 1876-82 as his "*Freigeisterei*," a somewhat deprecatory term for "freethinking." He tells Lou Salome in a letter of July 2, 1882 to "look beyond it! Do not deceive yourself about me — surely you do not think that the 'freethinker' is my ideal!" (p. 185)
 5. See also GS 382.
 6. Primal innocence is that of the unreflective animal without a moral sense. "*Aktiv Vergessenheit*" is the normal human tendency of regaining health, sloughing off the "sins" and guilt of the past, a means of renewal and revitalization.. (See GM II:1-8). According to Nietzsche, the moralization of consciousness engenders deep guilt out of which arises self-hatred and an unhealthy sense of the injustice of the world which leads in turn to *ressentiment*, desire for revenge, in its deepest form, against life itself and all that is healthy.
 7. Stephen Erickson, says in "Nietzsche and Postmodernity," *Philosophy Today*, Summer 1990, pp. 175-78, the distinction between the *übermenschlich* and the "human, all too human" is impossible, at least in a way that preserves any traditional assumptions of rationality, because it requires a radical break with the "human, all too human" need to live and flourish by fictional narrative accounts of "Truth." The defining feature of the *übermenschlich*, for Erickson, its transhistorical postnarrative consciousness, is incomprehensible. Erickson asks, what would, what *could* such a postmodern, post-narrative, transhistorical consciousness be? Isn't consciousness essentially temporal and therefore narrative in form? The answer, of course, is yes it is. The crucial difference, however, is not having or not having a temporal narrative consciousness, but whether one is trapped in this, what kind of narrative it is, what motivates it, and what one's relation to it is.
 8. Robert Pippin finds Nietzsche's transformation to be impossible because Pippin takes this forgetting as a kind of "*historical amnesia*." He says, "Innocence, once lost, is never regained." Pippin goes on to say that we cannot decide to forget our traditions, language, the critical temperament of modernism that promote doubt and nihilism. "We would always remember what we are doing." (Robert Pippin, "Nietzsche and the Origin of the Idea of Modernism," *Inquiry*, 26, 1982, p. 174. See also *Modernism As a Philosophical Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.) However, transformation is not

- a change in what one knows, the content of what one remembers. Thus any literal forgetting is not an issue. Forgetting describes an attitude, not an attempt at selective loss of memory. We are always tied to our past, our "it was." But how we see it, how we value it, how we feel about it and appropriate it can be very different.
9. Bernd Magnus has argued persuasively for the idea that Eternal Recurrence should be seen as a self-conscious myth employed by Nietzsche in the service of bringing about a change in attitude toward one's life. But he also seems to think such transformation is not feasible because accepting an "unedited" version of one's life is beyond human capacity. See, for example, "Eternal Recurrence," in *Nietzsche Studien*, 1979, vol. 8, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978).
 10. The psychic/bodily energy used up in the service of sick motives born of a deep sense of injustice about life, are freed up and all the self-deceptive fictions that grow out of and support this disease of *ressentiment* become superfluous and no longer obstruct the free flow of energy toward a healthy non self-deceptive creativity and way of living. The next to the last section of Book Five of *The Gay Science* added in 1887 is called "The Great Health" where Nietzsche speaks of an overflowing power and abundance that is possible when one is freed from these obstructions.
 11. For a discussion of Nietzsche's versus Spinoza's naturalism and vision of transformation, see Y. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), Ch. 5.
 12. See Z I, "On the Way of the Creator."
 13. See *Antichrist* in Kaufmann, 33 and 35. Hereafter A.
 14. Despite Nietzsche's usual antipathy toward Buddhism, though it is much less severe than his enmity toward Christianity, Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming has much in common with Buddhist writers such as Dogen. He judged Buddhism too much by the scholarship of the 19th century from which he drew the conclusion that it was basically a form of passive nihilism. But Buddhism is not merely a this-worldly Christianity. It is a profound psychology of self-overcoming based on practice. See Robert Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).
 15. Though Nietzsche especially singles out theologians for their outrageous distortion of the facts, Nietzsche also accuses scientists of bad philology, for example, in their use of "nature's conformity to law" (BGE 22). Speaking of what he considered the widespread misinterpretation of the French Revolution, Nietzsche says "*the text finally disappeared under the interpretation*" (BGE 38). There are numerous places in his works where he distinguishes facts and interpretations.
 16. For example, in a postcard to Overbeck, July 30, 1881, in C. Middleton, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press), 1969, p. 177.
 17. Cf. A 54.
 18. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), Section 205.
 19. L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright (New York: Harper, 1972), Sec 96.
 20. For Wittgenstein, description of how we actually do things within language is the proper course for philosophy. "The connection between rule and its application, intentional act and its object is grounded on a pre-philosophical 'trust' or 'bedrock' of action. It is the job of the philosopher to describe and elucidate the language games and forms of life that made this trust and action possible, not to question the validity of that trust or action, nor try to justify or ground it. It is our language games and forms

- of life that determine the nature of our 'logic' — a logic that is necessarily impure because its wellsprings are use and practice. The standard of logic or an ideal reason is not the measure of correct use and practice." Rather, the standard must be altered so as to conform to use and practice. "No course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action could be made out to accord with the rule" (PI, Sec. 201). A rule is not prior to its application. According to Wittgenstein, ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case. What constitutes correctness in any given case "will depend on the circumstances under which it is given, and on the person I give it to" (PI Sec. 29). "The ostensive definition explains the use — the meaning — of the word when the overall form of the word in language is clear" (PI Sec. 30). (First quote is from Henry McDonald, "Crossroads of Skepticism: Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Ostensive Definition" in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol XXI, No. 3, Spring, 1990).
21. We do not have to posit some fixed a priori basis by which language is connected to reality. Rather, we can and need only look and see the ways in which we act and speak, just see how we do things. There is no need for an explanation of how it is possible. Rules are read out of human activity. They are only secondarily distilled and then applied to such activity. "There is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying a rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (PI, Sec. 201). "We ought to restrict the term 'interpretation' to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another... Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts" (PI, Sec. 79). The facts are revealed in our behavior.
 22. Since Nietzsche did not intend it this way, the problem lies with readers who take such an interpretation seriously. The will to power is better seen as an organizing myth or countermyth that provides coherence without appeal to theories that involve causal or teleological accounts of the world. (See Maudmarie Clark, "Nietzsche's Doctrines of the Will to Power," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 1983, 12:458-68.) The former leads to determinism and the latter to either predestination or fatalism. Neither of these labels apply to Nietzsche's *amor fati*.
 23. Nietzsche's central notions though related, are *not* mutually implicative in a "system" that replaces older metaphysical accounts. Nietzsche is hostile to "systems" that overlook the irreducible plurality and particularity of the world. It is only in the actual acceptance and love of this actual condition that one finds *unity of feeling*. Rational attempts to impose systematic unity are always instrumental, an imposed interpretation, even if rigorous and powerfully explanatory.
 24. See GS 354 for an account of the relation between language, consciousness and communication. There, for example, Nietzsche calls language and consciousness "surface phenomena" (as opposed to the affects), and says "the development of language and the development of consciousness (*not* of reason but merely of the way reason enters consciousness) go hand in hand." See also BGE 20 on the origin and family resemblance of philosophies that share the same or similar grammars, and BGE 268 on words and concepts.
 25. The reflexive nature of all formal reasoning has been itself formalized in Goedel's theorems on relative undecidability and relative unprovability of consistency. See John Kadvan, "Reflections On The Legacy Of Kurt Goedel: Mathematics, Skepticism, Postmodernism," in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XX, No. 3, Spring 1989. For an historical overview of this development by an eminent mathematician, see Morris Kline, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980).

26. Nietzsche is famous for undermining such hierarchical dualities and rejects both absolutism and relativism. (See BGE I, 2-3 and TI "History of an Error," 6, GS 345, WP 12.) If absolutism is not a viable option, it does not follow that relativism must be accepted, even if seen as simply the denial of absolutism. Simply positing the A or not-A of any duality does not force us to accept the content of that duality. Further, this is not a genuine contradiction because there are alternatives on the basis of which both poles of this dichotomy can be left aside. The works of Emerson, Nietzsche and American Pragmatism are examples of such alternatives.
27. I refer here to developments such as the "diagonal problem" which arises in attempting to determine the set of infinite sets (denumerably infinite sequences of zeros and ones). Such a set would itself be infinite but could never include itself in the set, i.e., would always generate an additional infinite sequence that is not indexed. The diagonal sequence of these sequences is left over and does not correspond to a natural number and hence, is *not* denumerable. Likewise, the problem of decidability in the famous "Halting Problem" in logic is a way of demonstrating by means of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that there is no program that can algorithmically determine if something is an algorithm. So, deciding if something is an algorithm, is *not* itself an algorithmic task. Thinking is fundamentally a creative and intuitive task which can operate and self-regulate by algorithmic thought *only after the fact*.
28. See Michael Milam, "The Misuse of Nietzsche in Literary Theory," in *Philosophy and Literature*, October, 1992, p. 330. Milam says the deconstructive position is *ironical* and untenable because in spite of its attack on logocentrism, it insists on the dichotomy of either absolute correspondence of language *or* linguistic nihilism, and opts for the latter due to the failure of the former. Similar arguments are made in Chapters 5 and 8 of my doctoral dissertation *Nietzsche, Transformation and Postmodernism*, Claremont Graduate School, April 1992.
29. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (Edinburgh & London, 1911), Vol. VII, p. 231.
30. *Werke in drei Banden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich, 1956), Vol. III, p. 760.
31. I agree with Lawrence Cahoon who argues that if the most valuable components of Habermas's theory are to be preserved, the categories associated with the philosophy of consciousness dating back to Hegel and Kant which are still present in Habermas must be isolated and eliminated. The rationalist assumptions he still carries are not only unnecessary to account for the conditions of late modernity but unwarranted in the face of postmodern insights. See, L. Cahoon, "Buchler On Habermas On Modernity," in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4 (1989).
32. *Ibid.* p. 468
33. Habermas sees himself as "postmodern" in having taken the "linguistic turn" away from subject-centered epistemology to language as the appropriate place for grounding any claim and demand of rationality for a moral "ought." But he distinguishes himself from other "postmodernists," particularly poststructuralists, and argues that their radical historicism, relativism, and contextualism entails a *performative contradiction* in which the presuppositions necessary to what they *do* with language contradicts their radical stance about truth. He claims that without presupposing the possibility of universal assent (which their relativism denies), they cannot rationally attempt to make valid claims about things and their positions would not have any power to persuade others who share a different set of cultural assumptions. He argues that the use of speech acts to persuade others presupposes what these thinkers have denied. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

34. If the question being raised by postmodernism is about the very fundamentality of politics as well as the political/apolitical dichotomy, among others, then Habermas is begging the question by faulting postmodernists for being apolitical. His efforts to show that politics is grounded in a fundamental drive toward emancipation presupposes the centrality of political life, especially a Western form of political life. According to James Ogilvy, in *Many Dimensional Man: Decentralizing Self, Society, and the Sacred* (New York: Harper Colophon), 1979, the notion of "political" is an invention, a theoretical device that may well have outlived its usefulness and is now counterproductive. It is a linguistic tool that grew out of a way of life. It is not foundational. Even if emancipation is very basic, "politics" is not thereby implicated in this way as well. Ogilvy makes a very strong case against monism in favor of pluralism and multidimensionality. The old battle of man against nature has been essentially won by man thanks to the tools of politics and technology. Now our battle is with the uncontrolled wilderness of politics and technology, a battle to be fought with tools yet to be invented, tools postmodernists are attempting to develop and experiment with. The one dimensionality of our old monotheistic theology, the singular self, power politics, etc., is being replaced by the relational thought of pluralism. Even though communicative ethics marks an advance over many earlier attempts at ethics in some important respects, it fails because of its Kantian monistic a priori universalism.
35. See D. Pickard, "The Problem of Reflexivity in Habermasian Universalism," *Auslegung*, Vol. 19, Winter, 1993.
36. An additional problem of reflexivity for Habermas is that these procedural rules would turn out to be neither universal nor fixed, nor necessary, because they are open to change on the same basis as any of the content that they govern in the process of argumentation. Once these rules are subjected to their own scrutiny and self-maintenance, we introduce something evolutionary, not fixed. What rules would govern this change? The old ones? The new ones? For a pragmatist this would not be a problem as long as the change meets the pragmatic demands of new circumstances. But for Habermas, (and this is where his true Kantian universalist assumption is most apparent and vulnerable), the rules must govern *all* speakers *regardless* of time and place, otherwise, the rules are not truly universal.
37. Human beings cannot live without some fixity of meaning, in other words, truth. But any "truth," though it usually is an attempt to unify and achieve consensus, is also potentially divisive. We are not, however, left with an unbridgeable gap between people and cultures. There is a shared fraternity. However divided we may be by our "truths," however imperfect the generality of concepts is in conveying the uniqueness of our lived felt experience to each other, whatever incommensurability of meaning there surely is between cultures and individuals, we are all esteemers, valuers who judge and to whom things matter. If there is anything universal to humans it is their struggle with limits, and with vulnerability and suffering, but also the potential for a sense of wonder. It is the fraternity of this shared condition that unites us, not any necessity of reason, any universal religious faith or political ideology which can only inevitably make its truth a divisive tyranny.
38. See Habermas "Questions and Counterquestions," in Richard Bernstein, *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 198. "Like Rorty, I have long identified myself with that radical democratic mentality which is present in the best American traditions and articulated in American pragmatism." But unlike Rorty who appeals to the maturity of a "we" and can only recommend it, Habermas attempts to ground and justify it. Nietzsche, who was a life-long avid reader of Emerson, a well-spring for

- American Pragmatism, is closer to pragmatism than Habermas.
39. See Hans Sluga's *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1993) and *Existential Politics: From Nietzsche to Foucault*, forthcoming, for persuasive arguments on the distinct spheres of the political and the moral/philosophical. Sluga argues that political philosophy traditionally required a turning away from politics to the good, but that politics is "existential" and not subservient to morality. Politics is seen as the pragmatic task of dealing with the ineliminability of conflicting existential claims, rather than imposing some moral unity.
40. Cf., for example, GS 337, GM 1,7, GM II, 24, GM II, 21, GM II 2, and BGE Pref.
41. This would include, for example, the concept of substance, logical identity and necessity, absolute categories of mind, necessary conditions for knowledge, communication and truth, any "categorical imperatives," the inexorability of history in the service of some ideology, etc.. Nietzsche's works are filled with attacks on these and expose the motives for such beliefs.

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