

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), a collection of material from Nietzsche's *Nachlass* published after his death by his sister.
19. Mazzino Montinari, *Nietzsche Lesen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982); published in translation as *Reading Nietzsche*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
20. Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche as Colleague," *International Studies in Philosophy* 22.2 (1990): 59–66; republished as "Beyond Scholasticism: On Dealing with Nietzsche and His *Nachlaß*," in Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, 117–28.
21. See my "Nietzsche's 'Will to Power,'" *International Studies in Philosophy* 32.3 (2000): 83–94.
22. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 182.
23. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 182, 183.
24. Richard Schacht, "Zarathustra/Zarathustra as Educator," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, ed. Peter Sedgwick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 222–49.
25. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 182.
26. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 184–85.
27. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 182.
28. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 181–82.
29. Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
30. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 184.
31. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 185.
32. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 185.
33. Clark, "Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 184.
34. John Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46.2 (2015): 198–206, 198.
35. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 199–200.
36. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 200.
37. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 200.
38. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 201.
39. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 200.
40. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 200.
41. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 201.
42. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 202.
43. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 202 (my emphasis).
44. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 202.
45. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 202.
46. Translations of Nietzsche's works in this article are my own.
47. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 203.
48. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 204.
49. Richardson, "On Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche*," 203.

## Nietzsche's Conception of Truth

### Correspondence, Coherence, or Pragmatist?

JUSTIN REMHOF

**ABSTRACT:** Nearly every common theory of truth has been attributed to Nietzsche, while some commentators have argued that he simply has no theory of truth. This essay argues that Nietzsche's remarks on truth are better situated within either the coherence or pragmatist theories of truth than the correspondence theory. Nietzsche's thoughts conflict with the correspondence framework because he believes that the truth conditions of propositions are constitutively dependent on our actions.

**KEYWORDS:** truth, ontology, correspondence, coherence, pragmatism

Nietzsche's conception of truth has received a lot of attention in recent decades. Unfortunately, there is no consensus about his position in the literature. Commentators have attributed nearly every common theory of truth to him, namely, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist, while some have maintained that he simply has no theory of truth.<sup>1</sup> My aim is to present passages regarding Nietzsche's understanding of truth that suggest his remarks are best situated within either the coherence or pragmatist theories of truth rather than the correspondence theory. Nietzsche's thoughts conflict with the correspondence framework because he holds that the truth conditions of propositions are constitutively dependent on our actions.<sup>2</sup> With these considerations, my aim is not only to call into question the interpretation that Nietzsche accepts the correspondence theory, but also to explore new ways in which his remarks support the coherence theory, as well as develop a novel approach for reading him as a pragmatist about truth.

Consider first the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theory holds that a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to the way things are and false if not. This theory assumes that something about the world, typically objects, determines the representational success or failure of propositions. Objects are often considered to be determinate with respect to their properties. That is, for every possible property F, an object must either have the property (be F),

or not have the property (be not-F). Objects with determinate properties form the truth conditions of propositions. On the correspondence theory, then, a proposition is true if there exists an appropriate object instantiating a property to which propositions correspond and false if not.<sup>3</sup>

It is helpful to distinguish two versions of the correspondence theory of truth. The metaphysical correspondence theory of truth, often associated with Kant, holds that objects have a determinate, fully mind-independent nature.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the neoclassical theory of truth, typically associated with Moore, Russell, and many recent analytic thinkers, only holds that objects have a determinate nature, not that they are fully mind-independent. Someone sympathetic to the neoclassical theory might contend that there is no use trying to utter true statements about a *fully* mind-independent world, such as Kant's noumenal world, but this does not mean that truth depends on our minds in any significant sense. We may need to be in some cognitive relation to trees, for instance, in order to utter true and false statements about trees, but this sort of dependence is relatively trivial: the truth conditions of propositions are not mind-dependent. According to the neoclassical theory, then, the truth conditions of propositions are cognitively accessible but mind-independent.

What is Nietzsche's relation to these theories of truth? It is widely accepted that he rejects the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth.<sup>5</sup> That theory posits objects that are in principle independent of our mode of cognition. Nietzsche holds that we can have no conception, or only a contradictory one, of something in principle independent of our mode of cognition. Thus, something "in itself," he remarks, is "unthinkable" (*GM* III:12).<sup>6</sup> The conception of objects posited by the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth is either empty or incoherent. This gives Nietzsche reason to reject the metaphysical theory. However, many of Nietzsche's remarks appear to assume the neoclassical correspondence theory.<sup>7</sup> For example, he often argues that religious people's beliefs about causality fail to correspond to features of reality (e.g., *A* 15). If Nietzsche were to accept the neoclassical theory, however, he would most likely deny that the truth conditions of propositions are mind-independent.

He writes, "The will to truth is a *making* fixed [*Fest-machen*], a *making* true and lasting [*ein Wahr-, Dauerhaft-machen*] [...] a reinterpretation into something that is [or *has being*] [*eine Umdeutung desselben ins Seiende*]. 'Truth' is thus not something there that must be found out, discovered [*Wahrheit ist somit nicht etwas, das as ware und das aufzufinden, zu entdecken ware*], but something that *must be made* and that provides the name for a process—or rather for a will to overcome, a will that left to itself has no end: inserting truth as a *processus in infinitum*, an *active determining* [*actives Bestimmen*], not a becoming conscious of something that is 'in itself' fixed and determinate [*fest und bestimmt*]" (*KSA* 12:9[91]).<sup>8</sup> The activity of establishing truths brings determinate satisfaction conditions for propositions to correspond into existence. For a proposition to be

determinately true or false something must be *constructed*, that is, interpreted into "something that *is* [or *has being*]." The need to establish truth motivates this construction process. One might think that on Nietzsche's view we must construct the meanings of terms. After all, for a proposition to be determinately true or false its terms cannot be meaningless, altering meanings affects truth conditions, and we clearly create the meanings of our terms. However, the passage seems to target the objects of reference of true and false propositions. Truth, Nietzsche says, is "an *active determining*," which he contrasts to "something that is 'in itself' fixed and determinate." Meanings are not "fixed and determinate" apart from our "*active determining*," but it is commonly thought that objects have a "fixed and determinate" nature apart from our activities. Truth is not "out there" waiting to be "found out" and "discovered," but "something that *must be made*," Nietzsche says, since truth requires constructed objects. Constructing objects establishes truth because objects constitute the truth conditions of propositions.

Nietzsche claims that a "name" must be created for an object to be "*made*" (*KSA* 12:9[91]; see also 12:9[89]). This is explained in a crucial *Nachlass* entry: "A 'thing' is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept" (*KSA* 13:14[98]; cf. *GS* 58).<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche adopts Kant's view that concepts organize, or "synthetically unify," sensory information into objects. "Concepts," Nietzsche remarks, "are more or less definite image signs for often recurring and associated sensations, for groups of sensations" (*BGE* 268). While Kant argues that the concepts that structure experience are a priori and necessary, however, Nietzsche maintains that concepts are exclusively formed in relation to our contingent needs, interests, and values. On Nietzsche's view we fashion concepts that organize "effects," specifically *properties*,<sup>10</sup> and organized collections of properties form objects. Thus, "A thing = its qualities, but these equal everything which *matters* to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that *may be of some account* to us" (*KSA* 12:2[77]).

Nietzsche locates the view that we construct objects in history: "The reputation, name, and appearance, the worth, the usual measure and weight of a thing [...] has, through the belief in it and its growth from generation to generation, slowly grown onto and into the thing and has become its very body: what started as appearance in the end nearly always becomes essence and *effectively acts* as its essence! [...]—But let us also not forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and probabilities in order to create new 'things'" (*GS* 58). Elsewhere he ties this process of construction to truth: "'Thus and thus it shall be'—that stands at the beginning: later, often after a long series of generations, it becomes a 'thus it is.' Later it's called 'truth'; at first it was a will to see something thus and thus, to name it thus and thus, a saying Yes to a value-creation of one's own" (*KSA* 11:34[264]). According to Nietzsche we play an essential role in bringing objects into being by creating concepts that organize the world in experience in relation to our concerns. These efforts eventually

solidify referents that determine the truth conditions of propositions. The truth conditions of propositions are then constitutively dependent on our actions in the sense that our contributions are essential for providing the conditions that determine representational success or failure.

Nietzsche's view that we construct objects can be made consistent with the neoclassical correspondence theory, but only on the condition that objects are not conceived as having determinate natures independently of our actions. Those who embrace the neoclassical theory would likely deny the condition. Commentators who claim that Nietzsche embraces the neoclassical theory believe Nietzsche denies the condition as well. For instance, Robert Nola writes that on Nietzsche's account "correspondence truths" are "found or discovered,"<sup>11</sup> and Maudemarie Clark argues that Nietzsche adopts a "common sense version of the correspondence theory of truth" according to which true propositions correspond to objects that exist "independently of our representations of [them]."<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche certainly thinks truths correspond to "found or discovered" objects within established representational frameworks, but correspondence first requires us to "posit and arrange a world that shall be called true by us" (*KSA* 12:9[97]).<sup>13</sup> Objects independent of us do not determine which propositions correspond or fail to correspond.

Nietzsche's view that we construct the truth conditions of propositions is better situated within the coherence theory of truth than the correspondence theory. According to the coherence theory, the truth of a proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions. Coherence at least requires consistency, though it typically indicates something stronger, such as mutual explanatory support between propositions.<sup>14</sup> The candidate for the specified set of propositions for a proposition to cohere is often the largest set currently accepted by the best sciences. Nietzsche appears sympathetic to the coherence theory when he remarks, "An isolated judgment is never 'true,' never knowledge; only in the connection and relation of many judgments is there any surety" (*KSA* 12:7[4]; cf. *GM* III:12, *GS* 260).<sup>15</sup> The "connection" and "relation" between propositions appears to signal mutual explanatory support.<sup>16</sup> For example, Nietzsche maintains that science operates with various "magnitudes" that are held "constant" by inquirers such that "the conclusions of science acquire a complete rigorousness and certainty in their coherence with one another; one can build on them" (*HH* 19).<sup>17</sup> Scientific representations about phenomena such as magnitude have strong explanatory power if they cohere with one another.

The coherence theory of truth differs from the correspondence theory in at least one important respect. This difference provides reason to believe that Nietzsche's thoughts on truth are better understood through the lens of the coherence position. On the coherence theory the truth conditions of propositions consist in other propositions rather than mind-independent objects. The coherence theory holds that a true proposition consists in its coherence with a system of beliefs,

not in its relation to objects that exist independently of our representations of them.<sup>18</sup> The coherence theorist need not deny that propositions are made true or false by objects, however. It could be the case that objects are *constituted* by the coherent system of beliefs and true propositions are those that correspond to objects so constituted.<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche's view that we cannot make sensible judgments about fully mind-independent objects, in conjunction with his position that constructed objects render propositions true or false, indicates that he might accept the coherence theory.

Importantly, the coherence theory is consistent with Nietzsche's view that truth claims require empirical justification (see *BGE* 134). For Nietzsche it could be the case that coherence is that in which truth *consists*, while sense data are an essential *criterion* of truth. Sense data are "evidence" because they are the test of truth. To judge whether something is the case, Nietzsche thinks we must consider the various ways in which our senses are affected. However, the various ways in which we are affected is inseparable from our conception of how we are affected (see, e.g., *KSA* 11:38[10]; *GS* 57). Nietzsche says, "'Truth' is the will to be master over the multiplicity of sensations:—to classify phenomena into definite categories" (*KSA* 12:9[89]).<sup>20</sup> Our being affected by a "multiplicity of sensations" provides a criterion of truth, and being "master" over the ways we are affected requires conceptual organization. If Nietzsche were indeed a coherence theorist about truth, he could maintain that truth and falsehood consist in whether or not the various ways we represent how are affected makes our best system of beliefs coherent.

Whether Nietzsche accepts a correspondence or coherence theory of truth, he seems to believe truth and falsehood are products of our practical engagement with the world. "An arranged and simplified world," he writes in the *Nachlass*, "is perfectly true for us; that is to say, we live, we are able to live in it: proof of its truth for us—" (*KSA* 13:14[93]).<sup>21</sup> This suggests Nietzsche is a pragmatist about truth. The pragmatist theory of truth holds that a proposition is true if and only if it is useful. Commentators claim that for Nietzsche a useful belief "works,"<sup>22</sup> provides "utility,"<sup>23</sup> ensures "happiness, satisfaction, or practical benefit,"<sup>24</sup> whatever is "valuable to the human species,"<sup>25</sup> or whatever is "the criterion of survival and, at best, the increase of power of individuals or species."<sup>26</sup> These glosses are not very helpful, especially because they occur independent of the context of any pragmatist position. To clarify the meaning of usefulness it is best to discuss one such position.

In "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," the sixth lecture of *Pragmatism*,<sup>27</sup> William James applies the pragmatic maxim to truth. The pragmatic maxim is a methodological principle used to make our concepts clear. It holds that the content of a concept is identified in the consequences of what accepting it entails. James first agrees with the intuitive view that a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to reality and false if not. The problem is that proponents of

this position often desire a semantics that renders truth “static,” meaning that if a proposition is true, it is presumed to be true at all times.<sup>28</sup> James believes this conception of truth does not adequately capture the role of truth in inquiry. Concepts change and develop over time, and thus the truth conditions of propositions may alter as experience grows. James’s lecture uses the pragmatic maxim to clarify the role of truth in inquiry.

James finds that truths yield satisfactory results when acted upon.<sup>29</sup> Truths are useful in the sense that they “help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.”<sup>30</sup> A proposition functions satisfactorily when it can be integrated into the stock of accepted belief, confirmed, and checked: “True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify.”<sup>31</sup> Truths then tend not to conflict with subsequent experience. They “lead to consistency, stability and flowing human intercourse.”<sup>32</sup> James’s view does not imply that a proposition is true if a person simply derives satisfaction upon believing it, or feels, as one commentator on Nietzsche puts it, “happiness, satisfaction, or practical benefit.”<sup>33</sup> James rejects the position that the pragmatist regards “everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant.”<sup>34</sup> Assimilation, validation, corroboration, and verification are tests for truth independent of any individual’s personal happiness.

James also embraces the “humanist” view that truths are “man-made products.”<sup>35</sup> Truths are “man-made” because true propositions reference constructed objects. “We break the flux of sensible reality into things [ . . . ] at our will,” he claims. “We create the subjects of our true as well as our false propositions.”<sup>36</sup> Sensory information, which we have no control over, provides an essential criterion of truth, while truth consists in representing selected portions of sensory input.<sup>37</sup> Selected portions of sense data form objects. For James a “thing” is something we “carve out” of sensory experience “to suit our human purposes,” particularly to employ true and false evaluations.<sup>38</sup> In this manner, “Man engenders truths upon [the world].”<sup>39</sup>

The preceding discussion suggests two ways James thinks truth is useful. Although he sometimes advances them in tandem, neither implies the other. The first is that true propositions lead to satisfactory results in inquiry. On this view truth conceived as a first-order evaluation is inseparable from usefulness. But what constitutes the truth conditions of propositions is also inseparable from usefulness. The ability to employ determinately true and false evaluations depends essentially on objects constructed in accordance with satisfying our interests. The controversy over whether Nietzsche accepts pragmatism about truth focuses on the first of these two positions. But commentators have overlooked that Nietzsche accepts the second. Nietzsche’s understanding of how constructing objects establishes truth and falsity agrees with James’s view. For Nietzsche descriptive representations are organizational instruments that render the world in experience manageable. Rendering the world in experience manageable is

partly accomplished by constructing objects. Constructing objects establishes truth conditions of propositions. This construction process is vital for both James and Nietzsche because, as Nietzsche writes, “we can comprehend only a world that we ourselves have made” (*KSA* 11:25[470]); cf. *GS* 301).

Three passages in Nietzsche’s texts are often cited to support the view that he rejects pragmatism about truth. It will emerge, however, that each is consistent with at least one of the two ways James thinks truth is useful. Most importantly, all passages are consistent with the second way, according to which the truth conditions of propositions are essentially connected to our interests. This should prompt a reexamination of Nietzsche’s relation to pragmatism about truth.

In the first passage Nietzsche remarks, “Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous to the highest degree” (*BGE* 39). If a true proposition is “dangerous to the highest degree,” the objection goes, truth is not always useful.<sup>40</sup> This objection targets James’s view that true propositions yield satisfactory results. Nietzsche continues by saying that because there are dangerous truths, “the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure—or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would *require* it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified” (*BGE* 39). The claim that truths are “harmful” and “dangerous” does not imply that truths fail to deliver successful results—they do so all too well! If truths did not so deliver, then for one to “endure” them they would not need to be “thinned down.” Nietzsche thinks some truths need to be “shrouded” or “sweetened” because they may negatively impact a preconceived understanding of the world, but this is not in conflict with James’s position.

In the second passage Nietzsche comments, “A belief, however necessary it may be for the preservation of a species, has nothing to do with truth” (*KSA* 12:7[63]).<sup>41</sup> Assuming a belief that allows for “the preservation of a species” is useful, this appears to be a straightforward rejection of the pragmatic theory of truth.<sup>42</sup> This objection also targets James’s view that true propositions lead to successful consequences. Yet Nietzsche goes on to remark that a life-preserving belief “has nothing to do with truth” because, for example, “we have to believe in time, space, and motion, without feeling compelled to grant them absolute reality” (*KSA* 12:7[63]). Pragmatic beliefs have “nothing to do with truth” only if truth requires some “absolute reality.” For Nietzsche an “absolute reality” is a fully mind-independent world. Thus, life-preserving beliefs can be true provided that one rejects the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth, which Nietzsche does.

In the final passage Nietzsche claims, “The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment. [ . . . ] The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating” (*BGE* 4). This is incompatible with James’s view that true propositions generate satisfactory results. While James holds that it is

more advantageous to hold true beliefs than false ones,<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche disagrees (see, e.g., *GS* 344). Insofar as life-preserving beliefs may actually be false—and according to Nietzsche we must “recognize untruth as a condition of life” (*BGE* 4)—Nietzsche appears to side against pragmatism about truth. The objection depends on Nietzsche’s understanding of *false* in the passage. He continues, “Without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, man could not live” (*BGE* 4). The examples indicate that life-preserving beliefs involving *logic and mathematics* are false. Nietzsche’s reasoning is that “Logic (like geometry and arithmetic) [. . .] applies only to fictitious entities that we have created” (*KSA* 12:9[97]; see also *HH* 11, 19; *GS* 111; *BGE* 21).<sup>44</sup> Logical and mathematical propositions are false because they fail to refer in a world that exists independently of our contributions. This indicates that on Nietzsche’s view propositions expressed in life-preserving beliefs can be true if considered within domains of constructed objects. Life-preserving beliefs can be true, despite the fact that they may also be false. This agrees with James’s position that a proposition’s truth conditions are inseparable from usefulness.

In conclusion, I have suggested that Nietzsche’s remarks on truth are better situated within either a coherence or pragmatist theory of truth than a correspondence theory. The coherence theory supports Nietzsche’s view that truth consists not in correspondence to mind-independent objects, but in coherence with other propositions. The pragmatist theory agrees with Nietzsche’s position that the truth conditions of propositions are essentially tied to concerns that inform object construction. Moreover, I have suggested that the primary passages used to support the view that Nietzsche rejects pragmatism about truth do not necessarily do so. These considerations, I hope, reveal new ways of understanding Nietzsche’s conception of truth.

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## NOTES

1. For an extensive list of views attributed to Nietzsche, see Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 29 nn. 17, 18. Cox places himself in the “no theory” camp.

2. In what follows, I use *proposition* generally, to indicate bearers of truth values, whatever they may be. I do, however, have reservations about discussing Nietzsche’s view of propositions. Insofar as propositions are regarded as abstract objects that exist independently of the sentences that express them, Nietzsche is skeptical of propositions. Propositions are usually intended to capture the intuition that truths are eternal (see James Young, *Global Anti-realism* [Aldershot, UK: Avebury Press, 1995], 3), which Nietzsche denies (see *HH* 2).

3. For exceptions, see Donald Davidson, “True to the Facts,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 748–64, and Harty Field, “Tarski’s Theory of Truth,” *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 347–75. Davidson and Field take Tarski to be giving an account of the core elements of a correspondence theory without reference to entities in the world.

4. See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

5. Commentators who believe Nietzsche thinks the world is something like an unknowable “becoming,” however, often think he accepts a metaphysical correspondence theory of truth. See, e.g., Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 80, 96–97; Ruediger Hermann Grimm, *Nietzsche’s Theory of Knowledge* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 30; John T. Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche: A Study of His Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 132–33; Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-realism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 142.

6. I use the following translations of Friedrich Nietzsche’s texts: *Antichrist in The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 565–656; *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989); *Daybreak*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989); *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 121–439; *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); “On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 1979), 79–100; *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968).

7. See Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 1983), 112–15; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 53; Robert Nola, “Nietzsche’s Theory of Truth and Belief,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (1987): 525–62.

8. This translation is my own; cf. Kaufmann’s translation at *The Will to Power* §552. It is important to examine this *Nachlass* passage because Nietzsche’s published remarks on truth that appear to support correspondence theory do not often discuss the ontological commitments that inform correspondence.

9. Translated as *The Will to Power* §551. Nietzsche employs “name” (Name), “word” (Wort), and “concept” (Begriff) more or less interchangeably.

10. See *KSA* 12:2[85], 12:10[202]. Nietzsche seems to think that the effects of interacting forces at the basic level of reality give rise to the properties of the macroscopic world.

11. Nola, “Nietzsche’s Theory of Truth and Belief,” 551.

12. Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 40.

13. Translated as *The Will to Power* §516.

14. For discussion, see Nicholas Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), and Young, *Global Anti-realism*.

15. Translated as *The Will to Power* §530.

16. See also Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 67.

17. The passage is a bit more complicated, since Nietzsche claims that the magnitudes are “false” (*HH* 19). Yet he seems to associate falsity with simplicity (see also *KSA* 11:34[46], 11:37[4], 12:7[54], 13:14[93], 11:26[61]; *HH* 11, 19; *GS* 110, 111, 354; *BGE* 24, 192, 230), and simplified representations can be accurate, or true, if evaluated within parameters that constitute representational success.

18. See also R.C.S. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth: Realism, Anti-realism, Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1989), chap. 2. One might argue that perceptual representation can be distinguished from descriptive representation. If so, then perceptions might serve a causal role in relation to propositions. Propositions made true by something perceptual in this causal way are not made true by other propositions, which is inconsistent with the coherentist position that only propositions can make propositions true. But for Nietzsche perceptual representation cannot be separated from descriptive representation. Conceptual organization appears to determinately structure perceptual representation (see, e.g., *KSA* 12:9[91]; *GS* 57). So, even when a proposition is made true by something perceptual, it is effectively other propositions that make it true.

19. See also Walker, *Coherence Theory of Truth*, 2–3, 28; Young, *Global Anti-realism*, 52.

20. Translated as *The Will to Power* §517.

21. Translated as *The Will to Power* §568.

22. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 72.

23. Cox, *Nietzsche*, 46.

24. R. Lanier Anderson, "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism," *Synthese* 115.1 (1998): 185–225; 213 n. 9.

25. Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 52.

26. Braver, *Thing of This World*, 129; see also Nola, "Nietzsche's Theory of Truth and Belief," 549.

27. William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), 91.

28. James, *Pragmatism*, 92. Nietzsche also rejects the static conception of truth. "There are no absolute truths," or truths fully immune to revision, he claims, because "everything has become" (*HH* I:2).

29. James, *Pragmatism*, 97.

30. James, *Pragmatism*, 30.

31. James, *Pragmatism*, 92.

32. James, *Pragmatism*, 92.

33. Anderson, "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism," 213 n. 9.

34. James, *Pragmatism*, 68.

35. James, *Pragmatism*, 110.

36. James, *Pragmatism*, 114.

37. James, *Pragmatism*, 111.

38. James, *Pragmatism*, 114.

39. James, *Pragmatism*, 115.

40. For a statement of this objection, see Braver, *Thing of This World*, 130.

41. Translated as *The Will to Power* §487. See also *KSA* 11:26[12], 11:34[81], 12:6[14], 12:9[38].

42. For a statement of this objection, see Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 53.

43. James, *Pragmatism*, 93.

44. Translated as *The Will to Power* §516.

## Genealogy and the Structure of Interpretation

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I consider how Nietzsche's history of morality in *On the Genealogy of Morality* is relevant to his critique of morality. I argue that, on Nietzsche's view, morality's history is a guide to whether and where we should expect to find coherence in our current moral practice. It helps us "structure our interpretation" of morality. History is relevant to critique because it reveals that morality is unlikely to have the kind of coherence required by many of its defenders. After defending this account of how Nietzsche's historical claims are relevant to his critique, I use the account to explain why Nietzsche's genealogy mixes fact and fiction.

**KEYWORDS:** genealogy, interpretation, moral philosophy

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche remarks that an interest in justifying morality has led moral philosophers to overlook an important question, the question of what morality is: "every philosopher so far has thought that he has provided a ground for morality. Morality itself, however, was thought to be 'given'" (*BGE* 186).<sup>1</sup> Part of Nietzsche's complaint in this passage seems to be that the judgments, affective states, and practices grouped together under the concept of "morality" do not possess the requisite unity to be evaluated as a whole, and that consequently a more fine-grained typology is required.<sup>2</sup> However, in *GM*, Nietzsche claims that understanding morality requires not only a more sophisticated moral typology but an examination of morality's *history*. He implies that such an understanding is an important prerequisite to the ultimate task of *GM*, assessing the *value* of morality.<sup>3</sup>

Yet it is not at all obvious why understanding morality's history should be helpful for understanding current morality, especially if one's ultimate aim is to assess morality's value. Would not a sophisticated typology be superior? After all, it is obvious why such a typology would be necessary to avoid evaluative errors—an overly simplistic typology may group together phenomena that differ in descriptive properties that make an evaluative difference, thus tempting one to draw false evaluative conclusions. But there is not an analogous story for why understanding morality's history is important for coming to an accurate assessment of it.