In Defense of Nietzschean Genealogy[1]

Though it would be anachronistic to say Nietzsche is a pragmatist of the post-Quinean sort (or possibly of any sort), there is much in his work that indicates he would approve of this twentieth century turn in Anglo-American philosophy. This view needs defending as many readers (some sympathetic, some not) consider Nietzsche an a-rationalist, an ir-rationalist or even a nihilist. In the first part of this paper I argue against one such writer. That this writer is one of the most respected thinkers of our day shows how pervasive this view is; it also provides—and this is the impetus for its inclusion here—a venerable single opponent for a Nietzschean defense. In discussing (and dismissing) the opponent, we can come to better understand a Nietzschean view.

In his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Alasdair MacIntyre claims that genealogists are committed to the view that rationality requires neutrality and that as there is no neutrality, there is no rationality. Though this charge may succeed against some genealogists, it does not succeed against all. Importantly, MacIntyre's attack fails against Friedrich Nietzsche, the father of genealogy. I also believe it fails against Michel Foucault, the greatest recent genealogist, but I shall concentrate the debate between MacIntyre and Nietzsche, only using Foucault to elucidate Nietzsche. What makes both Nietzsche and Foucault genealogists, though, is their shared belief that there is no absolute or eternal Truth and that what knowledge we have is created in human society through history and passed down, improved upon, and amended from generation to generation.

In what follows I show that MacIntyre's reading of Nietzsche is misleading and mistaken. As he often seems to realize that genealogy does *not* assume that rationality requires neutrality, much of MacIntyre's argumentation will be of assistance in this

endeavor. The first part of this paper will be an examination of MacIntyre's arguments. We will see that his views do not differ from Nietzsche's as much as his rhetoric implies. The second part will be something of a reconstruction of Nietzsche's view, designed partly to clarify the error pinpointed in MacIntyre's arguments, but primarily to amplify the Nietzschean solution.[2] This reconstruction will involve claiming that Nietzsche is committed to three different senses of "truth."

Before continuing, I should note that although I believe the following works *as a defense for Nietzsche* and for genealogy in general, my fundamental concern is not to defend exegetically any single author (although much of what follows will be exegetical) but to develop and defend a particular view, a view that I take to be Nietzschean if not Nietzsche's. That said, I turn to the critical attack on his views.

I. MacIntyre

MacIntyre claims that Nietzsche

> takes there to be a multiplicity of perspectives within each of which truth-from-a-point-of-view may be asserted, but no truth-as-such, an empty notion, about *the* world, an equally empty notion. There are [for Nietzsche] no rules of rationality as such to be appealed to, there are rather strategies of insight and strategies of subversion (1990a, 42).

This short passage incorporates MacIntyre's mistake. Though he is clearly right that Nietzsche is a 'perspectivist' and that for Nietzsche there is no "truth-as-such," his next step, that for Nietzsche there are no rules for rationality, is suspect. When MacIntyre claims that the genealogist is committed to the view that reason is not "impersonal, universal, and disinterested," but "the unwitting representative of particular interests" (1990a, 59), we find the ambiguity. In the first quotation, MacIntyre indicates that for

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[2] Kaufmann warns that most "writers on Nietzsche tend to fasten on a few snippets from his works, heedless of the fact that scores of other snippets might be used to support very different exegeses" (Kaufmann, vi-vii). I will be as guilty of this charge as anyone, and have only the length of this treatment as an excuse.

Nietzsche rationality requires neutrality—by which I mean, roughly, equally accessible to all perspectives. Seventeen pages later he rightly (though loosely) indicates that for Nietzsche reason does *not* require neutrality. Nietzsche's perspectivism, in fact, *can't* require neutrality as it is, roughly, the view that all that is known by finite beings is necessarily known from a finite perspective and therefore that even if there is a non-finite being with a neutral perspective, humans have no access to such a perspective. We should also note that so defined, perspectivism is a theory about knowledge, not truth. This is opposed to relativism, which claims that some value—here, truth—is relative to some X that is taken as given. For example, extreme (hyper) relativism or subjectivism (equating these) takes X to be the individual subject and cultural relativism takes X to be a culture.

The confusion from which MacIntyre suffers regarding genealogy is continuous throughout three of his latest (and most prominent) books. In *After Virtue*, he discusses Nietzsche's emotivism (35) and "prophetic irrationalism" (114) as if these were valid and substantial parts of Nietzsche's philosophy but then contradicts (or *corrects*) that view (partially) by noting that Nietzsche rejects emotivism (as well as Kantianism) (113).[3] Further, in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, he states that "Nietzsche is of course not the only intellectual ancestor of modern perspectivism and perhaps not at all of modern relativism" (368). Clearly, MacIntyre is aware that perspectivism is not equivalent to relativism.[4] We can also assume he realizes it is not equivalent to anti-rationalism or irrationalism. Indeed, one gets the impression that MacIntyre's argument with Nietzsche is not based on Nietzsche's supposed relativism, but simply on a desire to defend a tradition Nietzsche vehemently rejects. MacIntyre says "[m]y own argument obliges me to agree with Nietzsche that the philosophers of the Enlightenment never succeeded in providing grounds for doubting his central thesis." That central thesis is "that all rational

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[3] MacIntyre notes particularly *Gay Science*, §335.

[4] See 1988, 352-3 and 367-9 for a comparison.

vindications of morality manifestly fail and that *therefore* belief in the tenets of morality needs to be explained in terms of a set of rationalizations which conceal the fundamentally non-rational phenomena of the will" (MacIntyre 1984, 117).

MacIntyre also admits at one point—in a largely ignored recent work—that "a theory about the predicaments of contemporary philosophy … requires the construction of something akin to what Nietzsche called a genealogy" even though this has "hitherto been unThomistic" (1990b, 57 and 58; see also 1984, 119). It is a genealogical project—or something similar—that

> enables the adherents of a tradition of enquiry to rewrite its history in a more insightful way [when it passes through an epistemological crisis successfully]. And such a history of a particular tradition provides not only a way of identifying the continuities in virtue of which that tradition of enquiry has survived and flourished, as one and the same tradition, but also of identifying more accurately that structure of justification which underpins whatever claims to truth are made within it (MacIntyre 1988, 363).

Of course, the genealogist often attacks the truth claims made within the traditions she examines; it is this MacIntyre finds inimical. It is not genealogy MacIntyre despises but the fact that it has been used to attack the authority of the traditions he endorses.[5]

MacIntyre's own view has been criticized as being relativist in nature; his turn (in 1988 and later) to a more theistic theory may be a response to such criticisms and may help to explain his motivation in attacking Nietzsche. On MacIntyre's view, rationality is defined by a tradition in a community (and thus seems relative to that community).[6] This view may seem to be at odds with Nietzschean thought. Thus, MacIntyre writes:

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[5] MacIntyre, though, sometimes talks like a perspectivist: "Progress in rationality is achieved only from a point of view" and he admits that power can be a source of concern: "the general rule accepted by the Athenians: the stronger may and always do impose their will upon the weaker" (1988, 144 and 52).

[6] MacIntyre writes that "reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested, that membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry" and that "genuinely to adopt the standpoint of a tradition thereby commits one to its view of what is true and false and, in so committing one, prohibits one from adopting any rival standpoint" (1990a, 59-60; 1988, 367). It follows that when MacIntyre criticizes other traditions, he does so as an outsider looking in from his own (Thomistic) tradition. He cannot, by his own lights, criticize them from within. I should note that throughout when I talk of a "Thomistic" position, it is to MacIntyre's version that I refer.

> Any notion that I can only think adequately by and for myself insofar as I do so in the company of others, to some of whom authority must be accorded, is quite alien … to the genealogist, who cannot but see in such authority the exercise of a subjugating power which has to be resisted (1990a, 64).

The genealogist is certainly wary of authority. Nietzsche is concerned to reject any insistence that reason requires granting one's community authority over oneself. Nonetheless, his individualism does not require a complete absence of community (rather it requires a community that does not wield subjugating authority). Indeed, in the above passage, MacIntyre does not say that any notion that thought requires community is alien to the genealogist; he says only that any notion that thought requires a community *where others are accorded authority* is alien to the genealogist.[7]

MacIntyre also gives a fair reading of contemporary genealogy when he explains that Foucault allows for an underlying set of relations that unify (and govern) discourse in a given time and place (1990a, 52). That Foucault is often critical of that unifying whole ('*episteme*') is irrelevant, the point remains that he sees it as providing standardization (and with it the possibility for genuine communication and knowledge)—even if such standardization is something to be wary of and even if that standardization can change with time.[8] For the genealogist, MacIntyre tells us,

> The ruptures in that history [of science] … moments in which a transition is made from one standardized understanding of what is to be rational to some other, sometimes incommensurable standardized understanding of rationality, are also secondary phenomena. For they, like the standardized orders which they divide and join, are the outcome of assemblages and confluences in the making of which distributions of power have been at work. … Truth and power are thus inseparable (1990a, 52).

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[7] (a) Even this is perhaps too strong. Genealogists recognize the importance of power in society and can accord the community authority. They urge us, however, to be wary of that power. (b) For my purposes, "according authority to X" means accepting X's view on some specified matter even where that view contradicts and perhaps stifles one's own innermost belief.

[8] Foucault, of course, does not claim that there is a single unifying structure at any one time (hence my "in a given time *and place*"); such standards may be local and may be in conflict. Nor does Foucault assume all unifying standardizations are necessarily pernicious. He merely warns us that they may be and that we should be alert to this.

Like Kuhn in the second edition of his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the genealogist realizes that despite ruptures (or paradigm shifts), there is some continuity between a displaced standardization and its replacement and that the seeds of any such rupture are present in the displaced order. The genealogist recognizes the importance of history or tradition in determining accepted standardizations (indeed, necessarily so). As already mentioned, MacIntyre's own favored position—that of the Aristotelean-Thomist "craft" tradition—embodies a comparable thesis that reason is determined by tradition. What then is the central difference between the two views?

The difference lies in the attitude of the thinkers toward tradition and the powers embodied therein. For the MacIntyrean traditionalist

> The authority of a master within a craft is … most importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others toward going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move towards the *telos* of fully perfected work. … And the central symptom of the sickness of this type of social existence, from the genealogical standpoint, is that, despite its recognition of the historical situatedness of all reason-giving and reason-offering, it understands the truth to which it aspires as timeless (MacIntyre 1990a, 65-6).

For the genealogist, the power (im)balance present in traditions is something to be wary of, if not outright feared. MacIntyre correctly characterizes this when he says the genealogist would consider it a *sickness* of the Thomistic tradition that it views the "truth" as timeless. Of course, MacIntyre is not afraid of such a view: "The concept of truth … is timeless. To claim that some thesis is true is … to claim for all possible times and places that it cannot be shown to fail to correspond to reality" (1988, 363). For a Nietzschean genealogist, such a view all-to-easily leads to abuse by those in the tradition-community who supposedly know the "truth" of those who don't—thus Derrida's concern with the marginal and with La Différance.[9]

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[9] See his "Différance" (Derrida 1982, 1-29).

Foucault can be of assistance in better understanding this difference between Nietzschean genealogy and MacIntyrean "traditionalism."

> Nietzsche's criticism … always questioned the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself … a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development. The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgements on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth (Foucault, 152).

MacIntyre has been called the "philosophical historians' historian of philosophy" and here we see the import of that description.[10] MacIntyre is looking for what Foucault calls the "historian's history." Meanwhile, Nietzsche is not opposed to 'doing history'—indeed, such is required for genealogy. The error, Nietzsche indicates, occurs when the historian or philosopher assumes that his time is the end-point of all that has occurred or simply views all of history as leading to one final end (in which is learned the "timeless truth"). This is the "philosopher's stone," as it were, by which all of history (or all of philosophy) is justified. This is (broadly construed) a foundationalism (either where the final product serves as a foundation or where history is seen as progressing up firmly laid steps) the genealogist must reject as her search is not an "erecting of foundations," but rather "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (Foucault, 147).

In contrast to requiring firm foundations—the constants required by traditional philosophy—genealogy recognizes the absence of such foundations and realizes that knowledge is 'interpretation all the way down.' Thus, genealogy's "'*[e]ffective*' history differs from traditional history in being without constants" (Foucault, 153; emphasis

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[10] NY Times Book Review; cited on the back cover of MacIntyre 1990a.

added).[11] This lack of foundations or constants is indicative of what Foucault calls the "final trait of effective history"—"its affirmation of knowledge as perspective" (156). As already noted, perspectivism is not relativism. For the genealogist, human history and development is a series of interpretations she seeks to record (Foucault, 152). Interpretations are necessarily perspectival and though they are made to appear as stages of historical progress, the genealogist realizes that this is mere appearance—and one to watch vigilantly.[12] The MacIntyrean traditionalist, on the other hand, assumes that these stages are more than mere appearances or that they ultimately lead to some eternal reality or "timeless truth."

If it weren't the case that the MacIntyrean traditionalist assumes some form of timeless objectivity,[13] he would have no way to explain the importance of the *telos* to which the craftsman aspires. If the *telos* is itself determined by its historical situatedness and is not somehow outside tradition, one is forced over to genealogy. That is, if even the *telos* is determined by tradition within a historical community, there is no reason to assume that—or to behave as if—it were never-changing.[14] There would be every reason to be suspicious of the powers that are responsible for perpetuating the traditional beliefs. Thus, only if the *telos* is understood as timeless is there a substantial quarrel between the genealogist and the traditionalist.[15]

But what remains now of the original mistaken interpretation of Nietzsche? It is an odd story. Odd because MacIntyre feels himself capable of responsibly telling his audience both that to "the genealogist no tradition can be rational" and, in the very next

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[11] Though we may "want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon … immutable necessities," Foucault explains that "the true historical sense confirms our existence [only as one] among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (Foucault, 155).

[12] As such, the genealogist is necessarily a perspectivist. (I do not claim the reverse.)

[13] See MacIntyre 1990a, 65-6 (cited above) for MacIntyre's recognition that it does.

[14] None of this is to say that the truth as determined in a historical community is *not* genuinely timeless. It is to say there is reason to doubt this and that one should be distrustful of claims to the contrary.

[15] If one were to suggest that MacIntyre could claim that the *telos* need not be timeless so long as it were treated as such, the Nietzschean would respond by looking upon this as a philosopher's sickness.

sentence, that for genealogy, "[r]ationality is, and can be at best, no more than one of the provisional masks worn by those engaged in unmasking the pretensions to rationality of others" (1990a, 117). Apparently, the genealogist believes no tradition can be rational even though rationality is precisely something developed in a tradition. To read this generously, we may assume that MacIntyre means to say that for the genealogist the rationality of a particular time and place cannot be subject to some *eternal* rationality; that the tradition cannot be externally subject to reason because *it* determines what is accepted as reason.[16] So be it—that is precisely what rationality is, or should be, for the genealogist. But it also seems to be what rationality is for MacIntyre's version of the Aristotelean-Thomist tradition (and in the paragraph following the above passage (1990a, 117), he seems to recognize this). As we've seen, MacIntyre's only way out is to insist that the *telos* to be sought is, in fact, supra-traditional; that it is eternal or in some other way prior to all tradition. An argument that this is the case is conspicuously absent.[17]

If my argument so far is correct, MacIntyre fails to show that Nietzsche (and genealogy in general) should be rejected. He fails because he has not shown that reason is anything more than the result of power plays within a historical community.[18] The place for him to defend such a view is at the level of the *telos*.

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[16] (a) This does not mean that one cannot rationally criticize one's own tradition. One could perhaps criticize one component of the tradition in light of another component. It may be that a tradition does no more than set out *prima facie* grounds for rationality that can be refined as the tradition continues. This is indicated when MacIntyre says "a tradition is sustained and advanced by its own internal arguments and conflicts" (MacIntyre 1984, 260). Similarly, he has remarked that a tradition is something that gives us rules that must be accepted until such time as they are shown to be unacceptable (discussion, 11/3/95). (b) Note also that the just-cited passage counters that quoted at the outset of this section (MacIntyre 1990a, 42) where MacIntyre seems to claim that in Nietzschean genealogy rationality requires neutrality.

[17] Also missing (but necessary for fleshing out MacIntyrean traditionalism) is an explanation for how such a *telos* guides tradition. One complaint against the traditionalist is that the latter acts as if the *telos* somehow pulls the tradition onward without ever explaining how an eternal X can guide a finite and historical Y.

[18] I should point out that my earlier claim that Nietzsche is concerned to reject any insistence that reason requires granting one's community authority over oneself means that we should be wary of *anyone* claiming authority over us, regardless of what such power plays are based upon. The Nietzschean genealogist *is* wary of those that claim to have universal truth, but is wary of authority in general—and that includes any who's claim to authority is based on the (perhaps genealogical) claim that there are no universal truths or that reason and authority are simply results of power plays. As an anonymous reviewer put it, "suspicion cuts two ways if it cuts at all."

When MacIntyre tells us that for Nietzsche all historical stories within the Aristotelean-Thomist tradition "are misuses and abuses of the historical imagination, a misunderstood reification of masks" (1990a, 145), he implies that on his view such stories are *proper* uses of the historical imagination, *proper* understandings and reifications of those very same masks.[19] The only difference between the genealogist and the MacIntyrean traditionalist (playing on the quotation just cited) is the use of the prefix "mis" and the word "abuse" instead of "proper." To the latter, such uses are proper specifically because they accord with (are pulled along by) the ever-mysterious *telos*. To the former, it is indicative of a sickness of spirit to accept such authority.

MacIntyre's inability to defend the supra-historical nature of the *telos* is not surprising considering that his broader theory is in rather astonishing agreement with the genealogists' views up to this point. It is only here where the traditionalist tries to insist on an encyclopaediast's view of truth (to use MacIntyre's language in 1990a; roughly, an "encyclopaediast" accepts the foundationalist project). Up to this point he has agreed with the genealogist that such a rationality or truth is not to be had.[20] Here he wants to have his cake and eat it too. Or, more appropriately, he doesn't want to have his cake, but wants to be able to eat it anyway. Unlike the encyclopaediast, who would insist that the cake is to be had and eaten from, and unlike the genealogist who insists that it is not to be had and not to be eaten from, MacIntyre's traditionalist insists that it isn't to be had, but can be eaten from anyway.

If the characterizations of Nietzsche as anti-rationalist are wrong—as they are—the question remains as to what rationality *is* on his schema. How, the genealogist must answer, can we continue our sojourn through life and the dialogue it requires if (to revisit the metaphor) we can neither have nor eat the cake from which we feed our knowledge?

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[19] Susan Okin makes a similar point (Okin, 70 n).

[20] See particularly 1984, 113 where MacIntyre actually praises Nietzsche for understanding "that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will."

In the rest of this paper, I turn my attention to Nietzsche in an attempt to find an answer to that question. If the first section is considered negative philosophy—doing philosophy with a hammer, as Nietzsche would say—what follows is the positive theory. Where before I attempted to hammer away MacIntyre's theory, here I try to use the hammer to build a positive doctrine.

<p style="text-align:center">II. Nietzsche</p>

A. Nietzsche, Truth and Knowledge

As Kaufmann notes,[21] "Zarathustra does not preach universal anarchy," he claims only that "the creator [or übermensch] must break with ancient norms." In addition, Zarathustra clearly believes that life has meaning—or at least must be *understood as* having meaning; thus, in a cryptic passage he says: "if life had no sense and I had to choose nonsense, then I too should consider this the most sensible nonsense" (TSZ, 142).[22] Though this is far from conclusive with regard to Nietzsche's epistemology, it is telling. Either universal anarchy or meaninglessness as a fact of life would suggest a hyper-relativism (defined early in § I); denial of either thus casts some doubt upon such a view. Indeed, one should wonder why Zarathustra would leave his mountain and carry his "fire into the valleys [where he might] be punished as an arsonist" if he thought he had nothing to offer (TSZ, 122). If Nietzsche thought there was no truth to be had, there is little reason to think he would send Zarathustra into the valley. As it stands, he does think Zarathustra has a gift to offer mankind (TSZ, 123).

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[21] In his edited *Portable Nietzsche*, p. 120 # 17.

[22] References to Nietzsche's work are as follows:

Thus Spoke Zarathustra	TSZ	The	Gay	Science
GS				
The Genealogy of Morals	GM	Beyond	Good and	Evil
BGE				
The Will to Power	WP	Twilight	of the	Idols
TI				

References to TSZ and TI are by page numbers; those to GM are by Essay and section numbers; those to GS, BGE, and WP are by section numbers only.

Perhaps this seems too quick. As others have noted, Nietzsche does call into question (and denies) the very existence of truth (see, for example, Gemes, 47-49). Furthermore, Nietzsche does say things such as "Only man placed values in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning" (TSZ, 171). Though this can be read as hyper-relativist, to do so would be to ignore the importance of the words "to preserve himself." If self-preservation is a guide to meaning—humanly devised meaning—there *is* a guide and the existence of such a single unifying guide limits any relativism. Human meaning may not be eternal, but this does not mean that it is without reason or that it is irrational. Indeed, Nietzsche is likely talking of "man" in general—as a mass noun—and saying that preservation guides humankind with regards to (or towards) knowledge—not each man individually, but all together as a species.[23]

The preceding paragraph helps us to see why some interpreters have taken Nietzsche to be in need of a distinction between two concepts of truth, roughly corresponding to Kant's noumenal/phenomenal distinction, one that would be eternal (and which Nietzsche denies exists) and one that is not (Gemes, 48-49).[24] There is no paradox in accepting that Nietzsche denies the existence of truth in one sense, while continuing to talk of it (or knowledge) in another. Such a view, in fact, will help us to understand how it is that Nietzsche might explain rationality or the possession of justified belief.

Alexander Nehamas has astutely recognized that in rejecting the existence of truth, Nietzsche implicitly assumes a correspondence theory of truth.[25] That is, the truth he believes cannot exist is the truth of correspondence theories; in discussing the

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[23] See, for example GS, 110; in any case, what is self-preserving for one is at least likely to be self-preserving for another.

[24] Gemes refers to Schacht and Wilcox. Following Gemes, I shall refer to these writers and their view (that Nietzsche needs and has two conceptions of truth) as "cognitivist."

[25] (a) See especially Nehamas 1985, chapter 2. In contrast, Havas claims that regarding "substantive accounts of truth," "in Nietzsche's view, there is nothing for such theories to be *of*" (108). (b) I take correspondence theories of truth to require that for a proposition to be true it must properly correspond to Reality.

impossibility of truth, he assumes it is correspondence. The cognitivist approach to Nietzsche interpretation agrees with this analysis but insists that there is another (perhaps phenomenological or empirical) sense of truth for which Nietzsche believes the necessary conditions can be met. There is also a third reading of Nietzsche—which Nehamas rejects and Gemes accepts—whereby we might say that Nietzsche is, in important respects, a pragmatist.

I would suggest that Gemes, Nehamas and the cognitivist interpreters have all contributed reasons to accept that Nietzsche is a pragmatist. Gemes has suggested that Nietzsche was just uninterested in theories of truth (Gemes, 48); Nehamas has suggested that Nietzsche believes truth cannot exist because he accepts a correspondence theory of truth; and the cognitivists have suggested that Nietzsche believes there are two types of truth (one that accords with a correspondence theory, one that is more adequately considered phenomenological). Gemes's views imply that if he is interested in theory at all, Nietzsche is interested in a pragmatic "theory" of knowledge and not truth. The cognitivists' approach implies that Nietzsche would do well to incorporate such a view explicitly into his works as such a view is implicit when he rejects truth but continues to preach (and preach he does). Even Nehamas's view that Nietzsche is accepting a correspondence theory of truth when he rejects the existence of truth leaves room for a pragmatic theory of knowledge.[26] What then might we make of a pragmatic theory of knowledge being found in Nietzsche?

My suggestion is that the cognitivists are right that Nietzsche accepts two types of truth. The first is the Truth of correspondence theories and the second is

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[26] (a) In any case, Nehamas only insists that there can be no pragmatic theory of truth in Nietzsche, not that there is no such theory of *knowledge*. Havas, though, insists that "Nietzsche had no real interest in the nature of knowledge per se" (Havas, 105). Perhaps Havas is not far from correct. Certainly, Nietzsche does not offer a *clear* epistemology—indeed, he likely wants us to drop our concern with it altogether. Nonetheless, I believe (obviously) that an epistemology can be gleaned from his works—the one I develop here. Nietzsche is not considered the father of genealogy for no reason. (b) Arthur Danto is the most forceful author of this (pragmatist) bent of Nietzsche interpretation. For further bibliographic information regarding this interpretation, see Nehamas, page 242 note 10.

phenomenological.[27] For Nietzsche, the first is non-existent, but of the second, we have pragmatic knowledge. This second form of truth is of the realm of phenomena only and is thus not concerned with Truth or reality. But this language is strained—we have "truth unconcerned with Truth." Maintaining the label 'truth' is taxing; one faces an uphill battle to replace a firmly entrenched theoretical and intuitive definition of the term. I would suggest, therefore, that we would do better to talk of Nietzsche as rejecting Truth, but not knowledge.[28] This way we can make full use of a distinction between correspondence theories of truth and pragmatic theories of knowledge. Though Nietzsche would not have expressed it in this way, we will see evidence that suggests this is an accurate portrayal of his views. A first example is Nietzsche's declaration that "Our apparatus for acquiring knowledge is not *designed* for 'knowledge'" (WP, 496). Nietzsche puts the second occurrence of 'knowledge' in scare-quotes because it is not knowledge in the current sense, but Knowledge of Truth, which he rejects. My suggestion, then, is that when he talks about (and accepts the existence of) truth (not Truth) he is, speaking more accurately, accepting the existence of knowledge as (roughly) a coherent system of justified belief about the world of phenomena, a system that is beneficial to human survival. It is this that I consider a pragmatic account of knowledge.

B. Nietzsche and Science

Support for the view I am advocating can be found in a brief exploration of Nietzsche's statements about science. At one point, Nietzsche claims that "science at its best seeks most to keep us in this *simplified*, thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified world" (BGE, 24). For Nietzsche, science (and thus, knowledge) is

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[27] For the duration of this paper, when I use 'Truth' (capitalized), I refer to the truth of correspondence theories. (I will alter translations accordingly.) Such Truths correspond to Reality and Knowledge.

[28] To the objection that pragmatism needs to offer a replacement definition of truth, I note only that other pragmatists have thought there was no point to discussing Truth at all, that we must be content to talk of 'taking-true,' 'warranted-assertability,' or simply, knowledge. I believe Nietzsche, like Peirce, is in this boat.

not at odds with unTruth. Indeed, he claims that "[t]he falseness of a judgement is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgement" (BGE, 4) and that "the *strength* of knowledge does not depend on its degree of Truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life" (GS, 110).[29] This last requirement of knowledge, that it be a "condition of life," seems to indicate a belief that knowledge just *is* what promotes life. Indeed, Nietzsche says "The value for *life* is ultimately decisive" (WP, 493). This thesis is readily assimilated into a pragmatism.[30]

Further evidence is found at GS, 354, where Nietzsche states that we "simply lack any organ for knowledge, for 'Truth': we 'know' (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful*." Included in this denial that we can know Truth or reality, is a recognition that "it would be possible that the true constitution of things was so hostile to the presuppositions of life, so opposed to them, that we needed appearance in order to be able to live" (WP, 583 A). He tells us bluntly that

> *Life [is] no argument.*—We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error (GS, 121).

On the reading I am presenting, these "articles of faith" constitute knowledge, though obviously not Truth.

Nietzsche's insistence that we cannot know Truth is not an insistence that we cannot *know*. As such, he must believe that our knowledge is independent of Truth (correspondence). The basis of our knowledge must lie elsewhere; for Nietzsche, it lies with a belief's "value for life," with the accidental "conditions of existence." Nietzsche

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[29] See also GS, 265 and WP, 493.

[30] (a) It's worth stressing again that Nietzsche's pragmatism is of knowledge only; this is supported when he says that "a belief, however necessary it may be for the preservation of a species, has nothing to do with Truth" (WP, 487; see also GS, 121 cited below). (b) Although I take it Nietzsche is referring to the continued life of the species—which importantly includes both free spirits or übermenschen and herd-members—my argument should go through however "life" is cashed out.

regards beliefs and knowledge pragmatically, claiming that what knowledge we do have is "determined by the instincts of self-preservation."[31]   He insists that if there is such a thing as Truth, we have no access to it, but that we "regard as true, good, valuable that which serves the preservation of the species" (WP, 583 A).[32]

We have seen that Nietzsche rejects "the Real world" as a foundation for knowledge and insists that what we know is only the world of appearances. Clearly, Nietzsche believes that what Kant most succeeded in providing, with his noumenal-phenomenal distinction, was reason to reject that we can know anything about the noumenal realm (*a fortiori*, that belief in such a realm is unwarranted). Nietzsche also attacks Kant's reliance on the *a priori* when he declares:

> it is high time to replace the Kantian question … by another question, 'why is belief in such [*a priori*] judgements *necessary*?'—and to comprehend that such judgements must be *believed* to be true, for the sake of the preservation of creatures like ourselves; though they might, of course, be *false* judgements for all that! (BGE, 11; again, cf. GS, 121).

For Nietzsche, the Kantian project has been rendered impotent. Presuppositionless suppositions that can ground all of Knowledge (i.e., of Truth)—and which Western philosophy has long sought—are not forthcoming. Nietzsche thus asks why we believe in the *a priori* and his answer is pragmatic: the belief in such judgements is necessary for our preservation. When he adds that though necessary for our preservation, these judgements may well be false, he is again indicating that Truth has nothing positive to do with our preservation or with what we accept as knowledge and that he is concerned with

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[31] It may be that "to say that something contributes to the preservation of someone's life is to say that it contributes to the sense he or she makes" (Havas, 90).

[32] (a) Several of the quotations regarding the life of a species come from WP. Although this might seem an improper reliance on Nietzsche's unpublished notes, as (i) this is less the case with the quotations regarding the preservation of life in general, (ii) the evidence from *Gay Science* is also extensive and (iii) I do not try to determine what life it is (the individual, the übermensch, the herd, or the species) that Nietzsche holds valuable (see footnote 30 b), this should not be problematic. (b) I want to be clear that pragmatic knowledge is not merely information that has evolved through human history. On the interpretation I offer, Nietzsche can consistently claim that Christianity is wrong. Despite its evolving in our history, he need only explain why it is *not* conducive to continued survival.

pragmatic—survival-aiding—knowledge alone—not Truth. For Nietzsche, what man seeks is knowledge that is life-preserving, but whether such knowledge corresponds to 'reality' or 'Truth' is not of concern. Indeed, if a Truth were hostile to our preservation, Nietzsche believes it would be rejected.[33] For Nietzsche, there is a divorce between the knowledge we live with and the Truth of correspondence theories. Indeed, even asking about such Truth is, for Nietzsche, an indication of a philosopher's sickness.

> Sections 496 and 497 of *Will to Power* offer further evidence for this view.[34]

> The way of knowing and of knowledge is itself already part of the conditions of existence: so that the conclusion that there could be no other kind of intellect (for us) than that which preserves us is precipitate: this actual condition of existence is perhaps only accidental and perhaps in no way necessary (WP, 496).

Nietzsche clearly believes that we can acquire *knowledge*, but only in a non-correspondence, pragmatic sense. The point here is that our intellect and the knowledge we *can* have are made up of those beliefs that are "life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating" (BGE, 4). "Of course, they are!," Nietzsche might exclaim, "if our ancestors held species-harmful beliefs we wouldn't be here!"[35] Of course, the beliefs they do hold need not be True in the sense required by correspondence theories. Indeed, even those beliefs we consider 'a priori' are, Nietzsche claims, less than necessary.

> The most strongly believed a priori 'truths' are for me—*provisional assumptions*; e.g., the law of causality, a very well acquired habit of belief, so much a part of us that not to believe in it would destroy the race. But are they for that reason

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[33] In "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873; hereafter, "TL-EMS"), Nietzsche tells us that "In a … limited way man wants the Truth: he desires the agreeable life-preserving consequences of Truth, but he is indifferent to pure knowledge, which has no consequences; he is even hostile to possibly damaging and destructive Truths" (45). "Pure knowledge," like "pure reason" and "absolute knowledge" is rejected by Nietzsche.

[34] Again, given the ample support from other of Nietzsche's work, I do not think this use of the WP problematic.

[35] I thus suggest that when Nietzsche claims that the Eastern invincible order of Assassins were "the order of free spirits *par excellence*" because they knew that "nothing is true, everything is permitted" and that this remains foreign to Europeans (GM, III 24), he means to endorse the view that because "nothing is True, anything we can do is permissible" where "anything we can do" is going to be—*de facto*—species preserving.

Truths? What a conclusion! As if the preservation of man were a proof of Truth! (WP, 497).[36]

To belabor this point any longer would be odious.

It might now be asked if the claim that certain beliefs are life preserving is itself a Truth-claim, requiring correspondence to the world. It does not. Nietzsche is quite clear on this. After explaining that we have no "organ for Knowledge, for 'Truth'" and that "we 'know' just as much as may be *useful*," he tells us that "even what is here called 'utility' is ultimately also a mere belief, something imaginary" (GS, 354). The statement "we take as true those beliefs that are long-standing and (at least seemingly) life-(species-)preserving" need not be True by correspondence. It can be taken as true (i.e., accepted as knowledge) in virtue of the very requirement it specifies.

There are at least three areas that require investigation at this point. We must investigate Nietzsche's perspectivism, his supposed rejection of reason and the degree to which knowledge is or is not embedded in or determined by a (linguistic) community. We turn now to the first two of these topics.

C. Nietzsche's Perspectivism and his supposed Rejection of Reason

In a famous passage, Nietzsche tells us that "pure reason" and "absolute knowledge"

> presuppose an eye such as no living being can imagine, an eye required to have no direction, to abrogate its active and interpretive powers—precisely those powers that alone make of seeing, seeing *something*. All seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing (GM, III 12).

Though this is clearly a rejection of "pure reason" or "absolute knowledge," it does not entail a rejection of reason or knowledge *per se*. "Pure reason" is meant to allow access

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[36] Just as Quine believes analytic statements are no more necessary than synthetic statements, Nietzsche believes that *a priori* judgements are not necessary but based on habit. Foucault mimics this: "Truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history" (144). Similarly, William James: "The principle of causality … what is it but a postulate"? (James, 147).

to things as they are in themselves—to Truth. "Absolute knowledge" is Knowledge of such Truth because given by pure reason. As Nehamas explains, rejecting these may actually be necessary for a theory that is compatible with human knowing: "a perspective that is best of all [that is, a universal perspective] is not a perspective at all" (Nehamas, 49). Nehamas's point is simply that human knowing requires human perspective; absolute Knowledge or a view from nowhere, if there were such, would be incoherent to humans—it would not be knowing *something*. Again, as Nehamas makes clear, this does not prohibit human knowledge.

> Perspectivism … is not equivalent to relativism. But perspectivism does imply that no particular point of view is privileged in the sense that it affords those who occupy it a better picture of the world as it really is than all others. Some perspectives are, and can be shown to be, better than others (Nehamas, 49).

Indeed, when Nietzsche continues the passage cited above (GM, III 12), it is clear that he believes there is a weaker form of objectivity than that associated with a God's eye view: "the more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conception of it, the greater our 'objectivity'." Within our necessarily perspectival knowing, we can obtain non-relativist—at least non-agent-relativist—knowledge and some form of intersubjective "objectivity."[37]

The objectivity allowed for in Nietzsche's perspectivism is obviously not the objectivity sought by Descartes and Enlightenment philosophers. For most of these thinkers (perhaps best characterized as "encyclopaediast" in MacIntyre's work), not only is there an absolute Truth—a Truth independent of all perceivers and perspectives—but

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[37] It might be questioned how we could know that multiple perspectives give different views of a single thing rather than views of different things that are more or less similar (say Quinean "unattached gavigai parts"). Paralleling Hume's claim that we confuse diversity for continuity when diverse objects (or time-slices of objects) run together too quickly for us to differentiate them, a Nietzschean may claim that the human mind can only understand the many perspectives as being of one object, that conceiving of infinitely many similar objects is impossible given the constraints of human psychology. As such, as a practical matter, we take the multiple perspectives to be of one object (of course, it's an empirical question if there is such a limit to human psychology). Nietzsche, of course, would not be concerned that "in fact" the multiple perspectives are of many different (but suitably similar) objects; as I've argued Nietzsche is not interested in what is "in fact" True.

humans are thought to have access to it. Even *skeptical* Enlightenment philosophers who believe that humans might be incapable of accessing such Truth (e.g., Hume), believe it exists. It is this view—whether found in Hume's empiricism or Kant's transcendental idealism—that Nietzsche attacks when he declares "The height of sadistic pleasure is reached when reason in its self-contempt and self-mockery decrees that the realm of truth does indeed exist but that reason is debarred from it" (GM, III 12). Nietzsche wants to overturn any Kantian belief in a noumenal realm that can ground all knowledge. For him, Truth (and the noumenal) is not relevant to knowledge or reason.

It is worth clarifying an earlier point in relation to this Kantian question. On the view I am presenting, Nietzsche recognizes (and is sometimes trapped by) the intuitive appeal of defining Truth as correspondence to Reality. He nonetheless thinks we can have no access to such Truth, whether it exists or not (and he obviously doubts that it does). On this reading, Nietzsche wants us to make due with (pragmatic) knowledge claims and to do away with truth-talk. It is not that Nietzsche wants to disprove the existence of the noumenal realm, but that he wants to persuade us not to look for or rely on such a posited realm. He claims that he "suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish" (GS, 54). All of life is like a dream—it is all appearances or phenomena—but this is hardly something to be bemoaned, for there is nothing else it could be—no Real noumenal realm underlying it all. Life is not mere illusions created by or hiding something Real. It is all there is.

In my introduction, I said that according to MacIntyre, Nietzschean genealogy claims that rationality requires neutrality, that there is no neutrality, and thus that there is no rationality. We have just seen the inaccuracy of this claim. Nietzsche specifically rejects the idea that rationality requires the neutrality of perspective-free truth. This perspectivist view of rationality, reason and knowledge in no way commits Nietzsche to a rejection of any of the three. It in no way commits him to a relativist position that he

explicitly rejects (in morality), in one location, as being as "childish" as absolutism (GS, 345). The MacIntyrean challenge has thus largely been answered. It is, though, worth carrying this exploration a step further.

The question we must now face is how Nietzsche's perspectivism can succeed in being both anti-absolutist *and* anti-relativist. Fortunately, we have had clues throughout the preceding discussion. Nietzsche specifically says that we can have a form of objectivity—by taking on various perspectives—that is not the same sort of objectivity one achieves in a God's eye view. But how does this help his case? Nietzsche claims that

> 'truth'; that is, a regularly valid and obligatory designation of things is invented, and this linguistic legislation also furnishes the first laws of truth: for it is here that the contrast between truth and lie first originates. The liar uses the valid designations, the words, to make the unreal appear as real … He abuses the fixed conventions by arbitrary changes or even by reversals of the names (TL-EMS, 44-45).

The 'truth' discussed here (in scare-quotes) is not the Truth of correspondence. It is, rather, simply that which is taken-as-true by the many, perhaps unreflectively. As unreflectively-taken-as-true, it may not even be the pragmatic knowledge necessary for survival that we identified as the second sort of 'truth' in Nietzsche's writings. This is why when Nietzsche claims that "we 'know' … as much as may be *useful*," and adds that "what is here called 'utility' is ultimately also a mere belief" he continues by saying that this utility-belief is "perhaps precisely that most calamitous stupidity of which we shall perish some day" (GS, 354). What is taken as "true" because it *seems* to be useful for our survival may, in fact, not be. It may merely be that which is "familiar" (GS-355). Nonetheless, pragmatic knowledge (beliefs that aid our survival) is important as a guiding force for this lessor (and third) sort of "truth." In elaborating this further, we are led to the third topic I mentioned at the conclusion of the last subsection. The question

now to be examined is "how are the 'truths,' or more properly, 'accepted beliefs,' made valid and obligatory when they are merely invented?"

D. Knowledge as Individual but Created Within a Community[38]

In a passage reminiscent of recent work in pragmatism, Nietzsche tells us truth is:

A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms … a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished … and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that that is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins … to be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all (TL-EMS, 46-7).

The illusions that have become 'truths' accepted by the herd as obligatory beliefs are clearly not Truths in the sense required by correspondence theories. Indeed, just before the above quotation, Nietzsche clearly states that "The 'thing in itself' (for that is what pure Truth, without consequences, would be) is quite incomprehensible to the creators of language and not at all worth aiming for" (TL-EMS, 45). Nor is the 'truth' he is discussing here equivalent to the phenomenological sort that I have equated with pragmatic knowledge.

This third sort of "truth," derivative of pragmatic knowledge that fosters survival, also evolves in society. It evolves in society and may *seem* to help survival, but in fact may not. It is unreflectively accepted by the herd because of its long-standing place in the herd-culture's belief system—because of its "age." "Truths," in this sense, are those few errors that "proved to be useful" and which "over immense periods of time … became the norms according to which 'true' and 'untrue' were determined" (GS, 110).

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[38] My interpretation of Nietzsche here is influenced by, but at points in disagreement with, that presented by Robert Pippin (1991, 99-111). Pippin comes closest to the interpretation I give when he says: "The story … [German idealism has] been telling is of an attempt at radical self-sufficiency … Occasionally, in the story Nietzsche and Hegel … tell, this enterprise has led us to each other for some sort of support, suspended above the void" (99).

It may even help keep the herd content (just as Marx declared religion the "opiate of the masses"). It is not, though, necessarily conducive to life—of the free spirit or of the herd. If it is helpful for the life of the herd, it may be a detriment to the free spirit (which is thus damaging to the species). Because it generally is accepted unreflectively, it may be that only one who reflects on it (necessarily a free spirit) would realize it was harmful. It may be that no one reflects on it. Nietzsche's third use of "truth," we now see, refers to beliefs that have evolved in society and which seem to the herd to aid survival, but which may actually hinder survival (of the herd or the free spirit or both).

Zarathustra, of course, deplores those who "hold the opinion that is given to" them (TSZ, 207) even though he recognizes that the influence of society is pervasive: "There is a hidden mob in you too" (TSZ, 394-5). He recognizes the pervasiveness of such influence and insists that each individual must attempt to shed it; to do otherwise is indolent.[39] This third sort of truth (as metaphors and metonyms) is, for Nietzsche, socially created and largely a matter of superstition. This gives many of our so-called 'truths' their force, making them 'valid' and obligatory. Their acceptance by others before us gives them what authority they have (as herd-members do not question those that came before). Of course, Nietzsche does not endorse simple acceptance of such 'truths.' Zarathustra tells the supposed wise men of his age that "You have served the people and the superstition of the people … *not* Truth" (TSZ, 214), reminding us both that social constructs are not the Truth of correspondence and, because he opposes 'the people' to the free spirit, that true individuals need to look to themselves to determine truth and goodness, to determine what will aid their survival.[40] As these social constructs may hinder survival, they are also not pragmatic knowledge, though they may masquerade as such; the free spirit must attempt to determine which are which. This is

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[39] In *Human, All To Human* (482): "Public opinions—private indolence."

[40] Some of the herd-accepted "truths" may be beliefs the übermensch accepts as well. If so, she accepts them for her own reasons (perhaps having to do with her survival or good life) and not because the herd foists them upon her.

precisely why Nietzsche is wary of communal authority and why he champions the individual (and individual rationality).

One final note. Nietzsche claims "we have abolished the real world" and "*we have also abolished the apparent world*" (TI, 41). I suggest here that this may indicate that for Nietzsche the second form of truth (pragmatic knowledge) collapses into the third form (metaphors and metonyms seemingly, but not actually, species-preserving). Indeed, early in *Gay Science* (§1), Nietzsche claims that when he contemplates mankind, he always finds "them concerned with a single task … to do what is good for the preservation of the human race. Not from any feeling of love for the race, but merely because nothing in them is older, stronger, more inexorable and unconquerable than this instinct." He does not merely want us to believe that there is no Real world, no Truth— he wants us to get out of the habit of thinking there is even a valid distinction. So *all* that knowledge can be is what is passed down to us through history. Some free spirits may recognize, though, that some of that is not species-preserving and will thus reject it. The second and the third forms of knowledge come down to us in the same way with the only distinction between them being that propositions of the second sort *are* life-preserving while those of the third sort only seem to be. The third sort of 'truths' are *ostensibly* like the second sort (useful), but actually hinder survival. (One could say that those which aid survival are a subset of the broader set of humanly constructed 'truths.')

Conclusion

We have now seen both why MacIntyre's attack on genealogy fails and how a Nietzschean might respond. MacIntyre is simply wrong to claim—and sometimes realizes it—that genealogy requires neutrality for rationality. The Nietzschean response includes a rejection of Truth (in the sense of correspondence theories) combined with an acceptance of a pragmatic theory of knowledge and a recognition that much of what passes for "truth" is merely "metaphors and metonyms."

We have distinguished three forms of 'truth': the Truth of correspondence theories, socially constructed and pragmatically life-sustaining 'truth', and socially constructed but life-hindering 'truth'. Nietzsche presupposes the first when he argues that Truth is non-existent and irrelevant to human persons. He accepts the second as existent when he tells us that we would reject any 'Truth' that hindered our survival. Finally, in insisting that the free spirit may recognize that some herd-accepted beliefs are not useful, he accepts the third.

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