

Nietzsche on Honesty and the Will to Truth

Penultimate Draft

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Abstract: Nietzsche values intellectual honesty, but is dubious about the what he calls the will to truth. This is puzzling since intellectual honesty is a component of the will to truth. In this paper, I show that this puzzle tells us something important about how Nietzsche conceives of our pursuit of truth. For Nietzsche, those who pursue truth occupy unstable ground, since being honest about the ultimate reasons for that pursuit would mean that truth could no longer satisfy the important human needs it satisfies at present. We can pursue truth, or be honest about what in us is served by such a pursuit, but not both. Nietzsche aims to show that understanding and owning up to this instability is the sort of affirmation of human life to which we ought to aspire, and is the price we pay for being free from otherworldly morality.

Keywords: Nietzsche; honesty; virtue; will to truth

Nietzsche clearly values honesty (*Redlichkeit*). In *Dawn*, he includes honesty among a list of his “good four” cardinal virtues.¹ In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he insists that “nothing today is more precious to me and rarer than honesty” (Z IV: “Higher Men” 8). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he

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¹ *Dawn*, 556. I cite the following translations of Nietzsche’s works parenthetically by book title, book or treatise number, section title and aphorism number as appropriate: *Beyond Good and Evil*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966); *Dawn*, (tr.) B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1979); *The Gay Science*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974); *Human, All Too Human*, (tr.) R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge, 1986); *On the Genealogy of Morality*, (tr.) M. Clark and A.J. Swenson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1954); *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, (tr.) R.J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin, 2003); *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, volume II part II of *Human, All too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

suggests that honesty is the sole remaining virtue of free spirits (*BGE* 227). In his praise of honesty, what Nietzsche values is not truth-telling but is rather a self-conception that is healthy because it works through self-deception towards an account of who we are, what moves us, and why we believe what we do that is rooted in our naturalness, and so is, for Nietzsche, true. So understood, this esteem for truth seems at odds with Nietzsche's criticism of what he calls the will to truth, a cluster of commitments organized around the claim that truth has unconditional value.

In this paper, I claim that this interpretive puzzle tells us something important both about how Nietzsche conceives of honesty and about his ultimate appraisal of the will to truth. Nietzsche argues that in their pursuit of truth, he and his contemporaries occupy ground that is unstable because being honest about that pursuit, namely which important needs in us it satisfies, might make it the case that truth can no longer satisfy those needs. It would seem that we can pursue truth, or be honest about what in us is served by such a pursuit, but not both. Our pursuit of truth, then, is inherently unstable. Since our pursuit of truth is crucial to who we are, its instability has important consequences for our self-understanding. Nietzsche aims to show that understanding and owning up to this instability would represent the sort of affirmation of human life to which we ought to aspire.

In part one, I discuss Nietzsche's use of *Redlichkeit* and related terms, and connect it to Nietzsche's exploration of the will to truth. In part two, I show that Nietzsche identifies a lack of honesty in many of those he criticizes, from Christians to atheists to philosophers. The dishonesty he has in mind consists in avoiding understanding of what motivates our actions and beliefs, and to be satisfied instead with a form of self-deception that enables a sense of security with respect to worries about the meaningfulness of existence. In the third part, I show how

Nietzsche praises honesty when outlining his ethical ideals, connecting honesty to courage and curiosity in pushing past this self-deception in search of a more truthful account of who we are. In the final part of the paper, I show that, despite Nietzsche's praise for honesty, he remains deeply unsure about the prospects for human beings really coming to know themselves, and to be honest about what, if anything, matters in life, an anxiety that is for Nietzsche inescapably self-referential. The upshot of this anxiety, however, is that the honesty Nietzsche champions is not one more manifestation of the will to truth, which values truth as a means to security, because an honest appraisal of human life leaves us feeling insecure. But that is the price we pay for being free from otherworldly morality.

I. Honesty and the Will to Truth

My concern in this paper is Nietzsche's *Redlichkeit*, which I translate throughout as honesty. *Redlichkeit* is one of a family of terms Nietzsche uses with some frequency throughout his writings, sometimes translated into English in overlapping ways, including *Rechtschaffenheit* (integrity), *Wahrhaftigkeit* (truthfulness), *Anständigkeit* (decency), and *Ehrlichkeit* (sincerity). *Ehrlichkeit* is commonly translated as honesty, and *Redlichkeit* is often reasonably translated as probity and sometimes as integrity or fairness. Not mentioned in noun form in Nietzsche's earliest works, honesty is so discussed at five places in *Human, All Too Human* and twelve times in *Dawn*. Honesty remains a concern in the works that follow, especially *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, and is an integral element in Nietzsche's late

discussions in *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* of intellectual conscience, a term which Nietzsche sometimes uses synonymously with intellectual honesty (see *BGE* 227-230; *GS* 335).²

Redlichkeit's root is *reden*, to speak, so it is tempting to think that what distinguishes honesty from related phenomena discussed by Nietzsche such as integrity and sincerity is its expression in frank or true speech.³ But this supposition is undermined by Nietzsche's twice-made claim that honesty is the youngest of the virtues (*D* 456; *Z I*: "Afterworldly"), and so presumably absent in the older Christian and Greek ethics to which his philosophy is a response and which did value honesty *qua* truth telling, even if it was not a cardinal virtue in either tradition.⁴ In *D* 456, for instance, he refers to honesty as a "virtue in the making" which is, "still quite immature, still frequently mistaken and misconstrued, still barely aware of itself—something in the making..." My view is that Nietzsche turns to honesty in order to work through a puzzle about our peculiarly modern valuation of truth. Nietzsche calls honesty one of the youngest virtues because its emergence and value for us are inseparable from its capacity to aid us in this particular historical moment, with this particular problem.

² My analysis relies on quoting from several of Nietzsche's works, the publication of which spans what was for Nietzsche a period of rapid intellectual development. Since many of Nietzsche's methods, aims, and commitments change over the course of his career, sometimes quickly and markedly, quoting widely from disparate sources runs the risk of being insufficiently sensitive to important changes in his outlook. However, in this case I believe my strategy is justified. The works I rely on most are *D*, *GS*, *Z*, *BGE*, and *GM*, published in succession in the 1880s. *D* is perhaps the first of Nietzsche's mature consideration of morality, since it is naturalistic and presages Nietzsche's genealogical method. The subsequent works, despite their differences, maintain Nietzsche's concern to explain present practices and values by connecting them to facts about drives, human types, and their connection and development across human history. Since my argument relies on precisely this picture of Nietzsche's aims and methods, relying on these texts seems appropriate. I leave it to the reader to make her own decision on this important interpretative question.

³ See, e.g., Melissa Lane, "Honesty as the Best Policy: Nietzsche on *Redlichkeit* and the Contrast between Stoic and Epicurean Strategies of the Self," in *Histories of Postmodernism*, eds. Mark Bevir, Jill Hargis, and Sara Rushing (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25–51.

⁴ See Alan White's discussion, "The Youngest Virtue," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63–78. In *GS* 329, Nietzsche distinguishes honesty from a gross obviousness and suggests that on his account, honesty is different from a simple matter of stating the truth and includes instead subtlety, and "being obliging in an indirect way".

First, we should say that Nietzsche, at least by the *Genealogy of Morality*, clearly believes in truth, puts forward truth claims, and decries the falsity of numerous widespread beliefs. Indeed, he believes that his philosophy tracks certain truths about human beings obscured by other philosophies. He states in numerous places that it often takes qualities he clearly admires such as strength, courage, and greatness to own up to the truth. In *Ecce Homo*, he writes, “How much truth can a spirit *bear*, how much truth can a spirit *dare*? That became for me more and more the real measure of value” (EH F 3). And in the opening pages of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche commits himself to the view that there are truths when he praises those who “have trained themselves to sacrifice all desirability to truth, to *every* truth, even plain, harsh, ugly unpleasant, unchristian, immoral truth...For there are such truths.—” (GM I:1)

Rather than questioning the existence of truth, Nietzsche questions its value. He asks, “*What* in us really wants ‘truth’?” and, “*Why not rather untruth?*” (BGE 1) With his first question, Nietzsche asks what is going on in a culture that stakes itself on truth, or in a person who maintains that truth has unconditional value. This attitude is quite separate from believing that some statements are true and others false. Nietzsche gives the name “will to truth” to a set of commitments over and above the claim that truth exists, namely that it is always better for human beings to know the truth, in every domain of life; that the way we discover the truth is through careful discovery and honest interpretation of evidence; and that truth has unconditional value, in the multiple senses that truth is valuable for every person whatever her interests, that the value of truth overrides the value of other ends, and that the value of truth is not conditioned by any further ends served by it.

In his critique of the will to truth, Nietzsche suggests that his contemporaries misunderstand themselves in their pursuit of truth: insofar as they think they are interested in truth for its own sake, they have deceived themselves. They are instead interested in the kind of security gained by the certainty of belief that they are in possession of the truth.⁵ Importantly, in order for truth to serve this particular purpose, truth has to be conceived of as something otherworldly such that contact with truth is something like contact with the divine.⁶ This, in turn, has required the devaluation of the everyday world:

those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science thus affirm another world than the world of life, nature, and history: and insofar as they affirm this ‘other world’—look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, our world? (*GS* 344)

Nietzsche thinks that the will to truth must ultimately negate or devalue the everyday world since the will to truth is a manifestation of the ascetic ideal, indeed “the most recent manifestation of the ascetic ideal,” and any manifestation of the ascetic ideal must devalue the everyday world (*GM* III: 23). Most generally, the ascetic ideal is the view that the best life for human beings is an ascetic life, so one organized around self-denial, and not for prudential reasons but rather because in denying our natural impulses we align ourselves instead with those capacities taken to make human beings more than merely animal, such as reason or the love of God. According to the ideal, such capacities alone, since they have non-natural sources, can confer value on human

⁵ See Bernard Reginster’s discussion of fanaticism in, “What is a Free Spirit? Nietzsche on Fanaticism,” *Archiv für Geschichte de Philosophie* 85 (2003): 51–85.

⁶ Scott Jenkins writes, “Thus Nietzsche is maintaining that modern philosophers have not really been lovers of the truth. What we really want when we aim at truth is relief from anxiety, and the assumption that our will to truth is well-grounded yields this relief through enabling us to regard our lives and our suffering as having a sense.” Jenkins, “Nietzsche’s Questions,” 281.

existence because what is natural has no value. It is because our will to truth is ascetic that we believe, for instance, that we should deny ourselves comforting illusions, no matter how prone we are to them or how helpful they might be for creatures like us in coping, simply because they are untrue.⁷ Nietzsche writes, for instance, that, “we would all prefer the demise of humanity to the regression of knowledge” (*D* 429).

With his second question, “why not rather untruth?”, Nietzsche is suggesting that once we answer the first question concerning what in us wants truth, conceptual space opens within which we can question whether the values nourished by the will to truth are the values we, upon reflection, want to nourish, or whether we might organize our inquiry and exploration of the world along different lines. Nietzsche understands part of the import of his own philosophy as doing just this, namely calling the will to truth into question, convinced not that there is no truth, but that our faith in it has been serving as one more manifestation of our unfortunate proclivity for finding our lives meaningful only in virtue of a connection to a beyond. Nietzsche is interested in what happens now that, with his philosophy, “the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question...*” (*GM* III:24). The language of experimentation is important, for it marks the provisional status of Nietzsche’s investigations. He is not stating that he has correctly discerned the value of truth where others have erred. Instead, he is signalling that questioning is possible with respect to our relation to truth, where others have seen only an unquestionable commitment.⁸ Truth is something the value of which can be debated, and forms

⁷ What’s more, for Nietzsche the ascetic scientist defines truth in opposition to values of natural life such as interpretation and flux (see *GM* III 24). If life essentially involves interpretation, then in defining truth in opposition to interpretation and valuing truth above all else, the ascetic scientist cannot value life. See Jeremy Page, “Nietzsche on Honesty,” *The Monist* 102 (2019): 349-368.

⁸ Rebecca Bamford writes of experimentation in Nietzsche that, “our efforts at experimentation lead us away from dogmatism, especially of the sort engendered by customary morality, and toward more critical, reflective, and creative or imaginative engagements with how we acquire knowledge of the world, and with the moral values that we accord to our actions and behaviors.” Rebecca Bamford, “The Ethos of Inquiry: Nietzsche on Experience,

of life can be organized around different answers to the question of truth's value, forms of life which might serve as useful experiments in living, showing what sorts of new lives are possible for human beings.⁹ For Nietzsche, the central question here is: what would it be like to live otherwise than under the comforting but ultimately unhealthy belief that what makes us matter is that we are not merely of this world?

Questioning the will to truth will require a form of honest self-appraisal that challenges comforting and enduring forms of self-deception that have become rooted in our understanding of ourselves and of what matters in life. Yet, this very sort of honest questioning, since it pursues truth above all else, seeking to dispel comforting illusions, and does so through a newly careful exploration of the available evidence, is paradigmatic of investigations guided by the will to truth, and so an interpretive puzzle presents itself: if honesty can be complicit with the will to truth, how can it also serve to question it? I return to this question below.

II. Dishonesty in Christians, Atheists, and Philosophers

Nietzsche claims that much human misery is rooted in the fact that we are generally poor guides to human motivation as it bears on action and belief, in others and especially in ourselves. This is the case not chiefly due to an inability to know, but instead because we are adept at deceiving ourselves on these questions in ways that serve to ease our concerns about the meaningfulness of

Naturalism, and Experimentalism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47.1 (2016): 25. See also my discussion of experimentation in Daniel I. Harris, "Nietzsche on the Soul as a Political Structure," *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 23.1 (2019): 260-280.

⁹ Katrina Mitcheson argues that the will to truth, more than a theoretical commitment, is inextricably tied to our practical lives, since "being a perspective itself, truth has an existence as a cultural practice and habit within us." Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 59. Overcoming or transforming the will to truth, then, is less a matter of changing our beliefs than it is about re-imagining the practices that attend the belief in truth.

existence. Nietzsche thinks that this is most obviously true of Christians, who have the beliefs they do not because those beliefs are true, or have been vindicated by experience or experiment, but because they fulfil important human needs to belong, to feel secure, and to believe that life has meaning. “One sort of honesty,” he writes, “has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge [...] On the contrary, they thirst after things that go against reason, and they do not wish to make it too hard for themselves to satisfy it” (*GS* 319).¹⁰ Consider as well *D* 215:

“Enthusiastic devotion,” “self-sacrifice”—these are the buzzwords of your morality, and I readily believe that, as you say, you “mean them honestly and truly”: only I know you better than you know yourself when it comes to your “honesty” with its ability to walk arm in arm with such a morality...For by devoting yourselves enthusiastically and sacrificing yourselves, you enjoy that intoxication stemming from the thought that you are now at one with the powerful being, whether god or human, to whom you have consecrated yourself: you feast on the feeling of his power...In truth you only *seem* to sacrifice yourselves: instead, in your thoughts you transform yourselves to gods and take pleasure in yourself as such.

Note that honesty here is only apparent. The people described only appear to be honest with themselves; what is lacking is real understanding concerning what moves them to believe as they

¹⁰ Elsewhere, he writes, “Assertions and promises such as those made by ... the Christian ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God: and all these things shall be added unto you!’”—have never been made with complete honesty and yet always without a bad conscience” (*D* 456). There is no bad conscience, presumably, because the deception practiced by the Christian is so deeply rooted as to be unavailable to her. The best explanation of why she holds the beliefs she does involves the claim that she is deceived about her own reasons. In *D* 68, Nietzsche discusses the dishonesty of Christianity’s unwillingness to engage with Paul’s monumental role in shaping Christ’s message and so the Church itself. *D* 84 makes similar claims about Christianity’s lack of good philology. Interpretations of religious texts are, for Nietzsche, often laughably self-serving and selective rather than honest.

do. So, part of the harm of Christianity is that it involves a deeply rooted self-deception about what Christianity is for, which needs it satisfies. Christians misunderstand who they are and why they value the way they do, and they do so because such self-deception has the benefit of making their lives appear secure and meaningful.

Likewise, Nietzsche argues that atheists fail to understand their own predicament. In *GS* 125, a madman enters a marketplace carrying a lantern and seeking God. Like Diogenes and his lantern, the madman is looking for people who will be honest, in this case about the death of God. However, the atheists don't fully understand the magnitude of what has happened, and so greet with mindless laughter the news that that force which formerly lent significance to their existence is no longer credible, no longer worthy of belief. Nietzsche's concern is that the atheists don't understand that human beings require some source of meaning, some answer to questions concerning the ultimate significance of existence, and so without a God to believe in they are untethered, no longer able to root their values in the kind of foundation that human beings have up to this point required.¹¹

Philosophers, too, are described by Nietzsche as lacking honesty. In *BGE* 5, Nietzsche writes that what motivates his suspicion towards philosophers is that:

they are not honest enough in their work, although they do make a lot of virtuous noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched even remotely. They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure,

¹¹ The madman says of God's murder at the hands of human beings, "This deed is still more distant from [the non-believers] than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves" (*GS* 125). In *GS* 343 Nietzsche writes again of the death of god that, "much less may one suppose that many people know as yet what this event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it."

divinely unconcerned dialectic...while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of “inspiration”—most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract—that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact.

Philosophers claim to reach their conclusions through careful consideration, but the truth is that they have a point of view from the very beginning, and use their powers of reasoning to dress up and justify more basic commitments. That, for Nietzsche, is not in itself objectionable. What is objectionable is that they lack the self-knowledge really to explain what moves them towards this or that philosophy, or to recognize that they are moved at all by anything other than reason.

Here, Nietzsche stresses that the lack of knowledge is neither incidental nor blameless.

Philosophers lack the courage to own up to the real springs of their action and belief, namely the feeling of power involved in imposing their partial view of things on others by systemizing it, and like the Christian and atheist, rest content in cultivated and so culpable ignorance.

III. In Praise of Honesty

If Nietzsche diagnoses a lack of honest self-appraisal in figures he criticizes, we should expect to find invocations of genuine honesty in his positive ideals, and we should expect to see honesty linked with the courage and related virtues lacking in those he criticizes.¹² And we do. In *D* 482, Nietzsche outlines the kind of company he seeks, men who are “earnest in their passion for knowledge and honesty.” Writing of Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says, “the species of man [Zarathustra] delineates reality *as it is*: he is strong enough for it” (*EH* “Destiny”

¹² Mitcheson includes courage and an honesty that goes beyond ascetism among the virtues Nietzsche puts forward to guide healthy practices of truth seeking. See Mitcheson, “Transformation,” 94.

5). And Dionysus is described in terms of his “courage, his daring honesty, truthfulness, and love of wisdom” (*BGE* 295).¹³

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche insists that the myth of an afterlife has been invented by “the sick and decaying,” in order to find comfort in life’s apparent meaningfulness (Z 1: “Afterworldly”). In response to the dishonesty of proponents of an afterlife, Nietzsche writes instead of Zarathustra’s body and ego, which he calls “this most honest being” (Z 1: “Afterworldly”). He continues, “A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one’s head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth” (Z 1: “Afterworldly”). Instead of the dishonest world-denial of belief in an afterlife, Nietzsche suggests that a better, more honest, approach is to ground ideals in the real conditions of our earthly lives. However, attempts to find meaning in everyday life offends old ears. “Many sick people,” Nietzsche writes, “have always been among the poetizers and God-cravers, furiously they hate the lover of knowledge and that youngest among the virtues, which is called ‘honesty’ ...” (Z I: “Afterworldly”).

In *GS* 335, Nietzsche connects a lack of self-observation with ignorance about ourselves, and contrasts such a condition with a form of honesty that would help us to better know ourselves so that we might, as he puts it, become who we are. He asks first, “How many people know how to observe something? Of the few who do, how many observe themselves?” (*GS* 335). To illustrate his point, Nietzsche turns to popular conceptions of morality. Where many rest content with equating morality with the demands of our conscience, Nietzsche asks what

¹³ In *WS* 37, Nietzsche writes about the project of rescuing the passions and the body from their devaluation by religion and philosophy, suggesting that this devaluation has made us ignorant “through lack of self-observation,” of all those “small facts” about ourselves the possession of which might allow us to care for ourselves better. “Let us rather,” he writes, “work honestly together on the task of transforming the passions (*Leidenschaften*) of mankind one and all into joys (*Freudenschaften*).”

right we have to do so, and wonders what we really know about our conscience. He writes, “Your judgment ‘this is right’ has a pre-history in your instincts, likes, dislikes, experiences, and lack of experiences. ‘How did it originate there?’ you must ask, and then also: ‘What is it that impels me to listen to it?’” (GS 335). That is, we need to explore more fully what really moves us in exhorting ourselves or others in the language of morality.¹⁴ We remain strangers to ourselves insofar as we leave unexplored the depths of instinct, desire, and experience that move us this way or that. In response to this widespread and regrettable situation, Nietzsche advocates instead a careful self-exploration on the model of physics, an exploration that would more accurately identify what in fact moves us, who we in fact are:

We, however, *want to become those we are*,—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves. To that end we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world; we must become *physicists* in order to be able to be creators in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on *ignorance* of physics or were constructed so as to *contradict* it. Therefore, long live physics! And even more so that which *compels* us to turn to physics—our honesty! (GS 335)

With his ideal of becoming who you are, Nietzsche has in mind a sense of self that one must grow into through a process of self-creation that he here roots in honesty. The person it is in us to be is too often buried beneath self-deception. It takes the clear, honest eye of the physicist, who sees the lawful and necessary, who sees human beings as one part of nature, to correct for

¹⁴ For further connection between honesty as intellectual conscience and becoming who you are, see also GS 2, GS 270, GS 344.

the distorting lens of our long experience in choosing not to see, know, and so become ourselves.¹⁵

IV. Honesty and Anxiety

We can see that Nietzsche laments ignorance about the real and natural conditions of human beings, an ignorance fueled by a belief that human beings are special in virtue of a connection to the beyond. The passages surveyed above tempt one to think that Nietzsche, after diagnosing a lack of honesty in others, shows his readers the route he himself has discovered towards genuine honesty, a vital and courageous owning up to reality. But the truth is not that simple; although Nietzsche does put forward ideals through which we might work through our present situation, and he does see honesty as figuring in these ideals, Nietzsche consistently implicates himself and his readers in his worries about ignorance and self-deception. For Nietzsche, although we might try to have courage, might try to be honest with ourselves, it is difficult or perhaps impossible to be certain that we are ever seeing ourselves clearly.

In the preface to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche suggests that the investigation he and his readers are embarking on is one of self-discovery. We read, “We are unknown to ourselves, we

¹⁵ R. Lanier Anderson argues that honesty is a central feature of Nietzsche’s project of life affirmation, where affirming one’s life in the spirit of eternal recurrence requires that one affirms every moment of her past and every element of her character. Honesty figures here insofar as it is only in being frank with ourselves about who and what we are that we might meaningfully affirm our existence. Any self-deception or self-interested selectivity with respect to the aspects of our lives we are willing to affirm precludes genuine affirmation, which must be total. Anderson claims that, for Nietzsche, honesty is in tension with illusion or artistry, since life affirmation also requires a kind of artistic self-creation that remodels and reshapes the self. Healthy life affirmation, then, involves harnessing the competing demands of honesty and illusion. GS 335, however, calls this account into question, since the relationship claimed between honesty and illusion is one of harmony rather than tension. There, self-creating artists are honest, and their artistry is a branch of physics. We become ourselves through artistic processes, the terrain of illusion, but rather than being in tension with honesty, it is a possible expression of it. R. Lanier Anderson, “Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13(2) 2005: 185-225.

knowers: and for a good reason. We have never sought ourselves...” (*GM P*: 1). In the book’s closing aphorisms, Nietzsche undercuts the claims of atheism, philosophy, science, and his own figure of the free spirit to have broken new ground in the realm of human possibilities, to have erected new ideals. Instead, Nietzsche urges, each remains mired in the devaluation of the everyday world definitive of modern morality. Writing of his former ideal of the free spirit, Nietzsche says:

In fact they believe themselves to be as detached as possible from the ascetic ideal, these “free, *very* free spirits”: and yet, to divulge to them what they themselves cannot see—for they stand too close to themselves—this ideal is precisely *their* ideal as well, they themselves represent it today, and perhaps they alone... These are by no means *free* spirits: *for they still believe in truth.* (*GM III*: 24)

A few lines later, almost as an afterthought, Nietzsche adds: “I know all of this from too close a proximity perhaps” (*GM III*: 24). That is, the criticism is a self-criticism; in the penultimate sections of the *Genealogy*, where we might expect a triumphant finale, a grand escape from the history of guilt, bad conscience and the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche instead worries that he and his readers are only the latest entry in that history, still unknown to themselves, having deceived themselves about the real roots of their worldview without the courage to search out a more honest account.

As an aspect of his search for a more honest account of themselves, Nietzsche is asking his readers to believe something different about truth: to say not that there is no truth, but that the truth will not set them free. The truth is not an appropriate vehicle for otherworldly hopes, for nothing is. The point is not to give up the truth, but to give up those hopes. In *BGE* 230

Nietzsche depicts what he calls an “extravagant honesty,” as an ascetic cruelty we practice insofar as we train our intellectual conscience on ourselves, shedding comforting illusions. There, however, Nietzsche cautions against terms such as “honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for knowledge, heroism of the truthful,” because such ideals are too often “verbal pomp,” and “flattering colours and make-up” that cover over the “basic text of *homo natura*.” Nietzsche is warning against hoping that our honesty, because it leads us to truth, sets us apart from the everyday world. Such an honesty would say “you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!” (BGE 230). The call is for a this-worldly honesty, but Nietzsche worries that in their esteem for honesty and love of truth he and his readers have been caught up with the same former constellation of world-denying values, have been trying to believe themselves more than, higher than, and different from the everyday world.

Consider as well GS 344, entitled “*How we, too, are still pious.—*” Nietzsche writes that science possesses value for its practitioners, Nietzsche’s ‘we’, by virtue of an underlying commitment to the unconditional value of truth, a commitment that is deeply world denying:

But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is truth, that truth is divine. (GS 344)

Again, although the will to truth understands itself as a corrective to metaphysical and religious wishful thinking about the place of human beings in the universe, it has turned out to serve those same human purposes. Plato’s view was that philosophers can attain contact with the universal;

the Christian's faith is that she can attain contact with the divine; and our will to truth has similarly led us to think that when we have the truth we have at the same time contact with a world other and higher than the everyday world of human life.

Thus, Nietzsche is working towards greater self-understanding, but only by catching himself in the act of self-deception. So, there is an anxiety in Nietzsche's treatment of honesty. Although we might try to be honest with ourselves, try to get out from under the long shadow of ideals like God which have served to estrange us from the everyday world, those ideals are so well rooted in us that new seedlings pop up here and there, seemingly independent but still in reality tangled up with the same root system, nourished by the same constellation of world-denying values. While science or the free spirit seem like escapes from faith, they are in the end only further manifestation of the same old belief in something otherworldly that we can hitch our wagons to.

Importantly, this anxiety is especially prominent in discussions of the will to truth, since in those discussions honesty is partly constitutive of the very attitude it is being called on to investigate. Exploring honesty, then, allows Nietzsche to exemplify the anxiety-inducing and unavoidable instability of his own project of accounting for what matters in life. *BGE* 230, discussed above, ends with an attempt to convey this instability:

To translate man back into nature...to see to it that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the *rest* of nature...that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a *task*—who would deny that? Why did we choose this insane task? Or, putting it differently: “why have knowledge at all?”

The task of knowledge is strange and insane insofar as it is potentially harmful to the life we have carved out of existence, which often relies on the very sorts of things that better knowledge of our situation serves to displace, namely the simplification and falsification of reality. Nietzsche insists that we have chosen the task of knowledge not because we are lovers of truth, but simply because it is a task, or goal, an answer to the question of why our projects matter. Insofar as we choose it *qua* task, its functional role is not different from that of the task of, say, pleasing God. Nietzsche writes of, “the basic fact of the human will,” namely that “it needs a goal—and it will rather will *nothingness* than *not* will” (*GM* III: 1). We will knowledge not for the sake of the truth, but for the sake of willing, for it is by willing that we bestow value on our ends, and it is only by seeing our ends as valuable that life seems meaningful to us and we escape the despair that attends the opposing thought, that existence is meaningless. The instability of this project is palpable, for if we are honest with ourselves about what we have been doing in pursuing truth, then truth will no longer be able to serve the same function of making life seem meaningful. We can will truth, or be honest about that will, but not both; yet since the will to truth demands honesty, even about itself, the entire cultural project of valuing truth, of pursuing knowledge, seems irretrievably unstable.

Importantly, Nietzsche doesn't see a clear way out of this predicament. The future, our future, is uncertain. We might create new values, or we might perish by the old ones. We might attain clarity about our situation, only to agree with Schopenhauer that an honest appraisal of human life, of its potential, possibility and value, shows life to be really and truly meaningless. “*Honesty*,” then, “would lead to nausea and suicide” (*GS* 107). One sign of this pervasive anxiety is Nietzsche's penchant for leaving his readers with questions rather than answers. He ends both *D* and *GS*, for example with question marks. In *D*, Nietzsche ends with a discussion of

open seas, a metaphor he returns to often in discussing the sense of possibility opened up by the disappearance of former candidates for ultimate value:

And where, then, do we want to go? Do we want to go *across* the sea? Will it perhaps be said of us one day that we too, *steering toward the west, hoped to reach an India*—that it was, however, our lot to shipwreck upon infinity? Or, my brothers? Or?”
(D 575)

GS ends similarly, with a question. Writing of the sense common to him and his readers that new horizons are open, that the future is still to be created, Nietzsche cautions that this might invite either gloominess, because of what has been lost, or joy, because of what might be gained. Nietzsche wishes that we choose joy, ending the book by asking, “Is that your *will*?” (*GS* 383).

Importantly, the instability highlighted by Nietzsche turns out to be a feature of his account, rather than a bug, for it helps us to understand that being honest for Nietzsche is not about the achievement once and for all of complete knowledge of our situation but instead describes a kind of process of searching underwritten by life-affirming values such as courage and curiosity, a process which, so motivated, escapes Nietzsche’s critique of the will to truth. If the will to truth is objectionable because it values truth only insofar as truth provides a sense of security and respite from an otherwise valueless everyday world, then Nietzsche’s honesty will have to be, instead, a this-worldly caring about the truth, a desire to see the world as it is rooted in the affirmation of that world rather than in an attempt to be set free from it.¹⁶

¹⁶Aaron Harper discusses honesty in connection to confrontation . Nietzsche praises honesty because it is through honesty that we meaningfully confront all of the relevant facts about our situation, and it is only following such a confrontation that we might meaningfully affirm that situation. What I have said above should cast doubt on the tenability of confrontation as an ideal. Confrontation is valuable for Nietzsche, but it is always and inescapably partial. We never confront fully, never have all the facts. And the pursuit of such a final accounting is not clearly

Nietzsche champions a way forward guided by an appraisal of human life that is honest not in order to feel secure and thereby to nourish otherworldly hopes, but to further our project of life affirmation. Decisive for this distinction will be the values that motivate our honesty. The question will not be whether we value honesty, but why we do so: will honesty be a way out of the world, or a way in? For help in distinguishing these two ways one might pursue the truth, we can look to where Nietzsche praises an honesty that seeks not security, but insecurity, not the harnessing of the world by truth, but its setting free. Bernard Reginster quotes Nietzsche as he praises a “seeker after knowledge” motivated not by “the passion for *possessing* the truth” but “the passion for seeking the truth” (*HH* 630).¹⁷ That is, what Nietzsche is after is a way of pursuing the world. He envisions an ethos of seeking knowledge, not in the final instance to have it, but to be continually in touch with the world, to see and affirm it as it is.¹⁸

Zarathustra asks his followers to be warriors of knowledge, rather than saints. Warriors seek enemies rather than friends, war rather than peace. “And if your thought be vanquished,” he says, “then your honesty should still find cause for triumph in that. You should love peace as a means to new wars—the short peace more than the long. To you I do not recommend work but struggle. To you I do not recommend peace but victory” (*Z I*: “Warriors”). In *BGE* 227 Nietzsche discusses honesty in connection to “our adventurous courage, our seasoned and

desirable, since it seems to re-enact the very demand for certainty represented by the will to truth. Aaron Harper, “Nietzsche’s Thumbscrew: Honesty as Virtue and Value Standard,” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46(3), 2015: 367-390. Harper’s analysis of honesty in Nietzsche includes *Redlichkeit* but also related terms.

¹⁷ Reginster, “Honesty,” 457. See Reginster, “Honesty,” 456-459, on experimentalism and curiosity as values that motivate a healthy pursuit of truth.

¹⁸ Herman Siemens and Katia Hay explore honesty in Nietzsche’s free spirit period, arguing that Nietzsche understands honesty solely in terms of what I have called its ascetic, world-denying sense, and suggest that Nietzsche thus turns to laughter as healthier and more profitable basis of our drive to knowledge. The sort of joyous approach to enquiry motivated by the values of life that they identify with laughter are, on my account, features of Nietzsche’s account of a healthy, this-worldly honesty. See Herman Siemens and Katia Hay, “Ridendo Dicere Severum: On Probity, Laughter, and Self-Critique in Nietzsche’s Figure of the Free Spirit,” in *Nietzsche’s Free Spirit Period*, ed. Rebecca Bamford (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 111-135.

choosy curiosity,” and cautions us to “see to it that out of honesty we do not finally become saints and bores. Is not life a hundred times too short—for boredom?” In both passages Nietzsche contrasts sainthood, a connection to the beyond, with a this-worldly honesty that, in eschewing eternal life, eschewing peace, chooses instead the very instability and unsatisfiable seeking of the everyday world. The goal of a complete accounting of the earth and heavens is problematic because success would render existence boring, since it would leave us with nothing to learn, discover, or attempt, nothing to be curious about. In pursuing truth we ought not to envision an end of inquiry, because that would represent a leaving off from everyday life. It is not the saintly achievement of perfection to which we aspire, but the earthly challenges of the unsatisfiable seeker. This means that we may not have final answers, we may never feel secure in our sense of the meaningfulness of existence, but, with earthly heads, we affirm this situation as ours.

This helps us to respond to our concern that honesty not fall victim to Nietzsche’s criticism of the will to truth. Where the will to truth values truth in order to make us feel secure, to ease our anxiety about life’s meaning, Nietzsche’s honesty leaves us unfulfilled, unsure of our place in the world. To be honest is to be upfront with oneself about one’s inability ultimately to answer questions concerning the value of existence, the direction we are heading, and whether we still might be deceiving ourselves in answering these and other questions, but still to pursue answers as we pursue life, with courage and curiosity. The peril of Nietzsche’s thinking is that there are no ready answers here, but the promise is that that very absence, if understood not as an error or black mark on existence but instead welcomed as a condition of the kind of life that is ours, is an opportunity. Even in its questionable character, Nietzsche writes, “love of life is still possible.” It is, though, like our love for a person “who makes us doubt” (*GS P 3*).