NIETZSCHE

AND THE ANCIENT SKEPTICAL TRADITION

JESSICA N. BERRY

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Nietzsche

A	*The Anti-Christ*, translated by Judith Norman, in Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Judith Norman, in Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (eds.), *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
D	*Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, in Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Daybreak* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
EH	*Ecce Homo*, translated by Judith Norman, in Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
FS	*Frühe Schriften Bds. 1–4*, edited by Hans Joachim Mette and Karl Schlechta, and *Bd. 5*, edited by Carl Koch and Karl Schlechta (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994).
GM	*On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

GS *The Gay Science*, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, in Bernard Williams (ed.), *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

HH *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

KSA *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

PPP *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, translated by Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

PTG *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, translated by Marianne Cowan (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1962).

TI *Twilight of the Idols*, translated by Judith Norman, in Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

TL "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," translated by Daniel Breazeale, in Daniel Breazeale (ed.), *Philosophy and Truth* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

UM *Untimely Meditations*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

WP *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, translated by Adrian del Caro, in Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (eds.), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Other Works

DL Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Vol. 2, translated by R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

Essais Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1985).

M I Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*, translated by D. L. Blank (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

M XI Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*, translated by Richard Bett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

PH Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, translated by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition

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Introduction

Reading Nietzsche Skeptically

"Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die."[1] The outright derision with which Nietzsche treats the concept of knowledge throughout his productive career is crystallized in this parable, which introduces the unpublished 1873 essay "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense." It is a commentary on the perceived value of knowledge and suggests a corrective to human pretension and to the grossly inflated sense of satisfaction we clever beasts derive from the exercise of our own alleged special powers of rationality. Beyond exposing our proud attachment to knowledge and delivering his own deflationary assessment, however, Nietzsche has no account of knowledge, systematic or otherwise, in this work or elsewhere, to offer—any more than he has a systematic ontology

1. TL 79; "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense" will hereafter be cited in the text as 'TL', with page numbers referring to the Breazeale volume, as indicated in the list of abbreviations. Although Breazeale translates Nietzsche's title as "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," the first footnote of his version suggests that "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense" would be a "more literal, less English" title; here and throughout, I have preferred his more literal suggested translation.

or a systematic account of the metaphysics or semantics of truth.[2] Nevertheless, he has long been singled out for his many provocative claims about both knowledge and truth, and a number of attempts have been made in recent years to connect those claims systematically on his behalf.

Elsewhere in "On Truth and Lie," for instance, Nietzsche claims flatly that "truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions" (TL 84). In *The Gay Science* he denies that we have "any organ for knowledge, for 'truth'," and claims that "we 'know' (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as is *useful* to the human herd, to the species" (GS 354). "Actually," he asks, "why do we even assume that 'true' and 'false' are intrinsically opposed?" (BGE 34). Much later, he declares in a now-infamous notebook fragment that "facts are precisely what there are not," but "only interpretations" (KSA 12: 315, WP 481). Over the years, such pronouncements have caused Nietzsche to be identified variously as a "postmodernist," a "pragmatist," a "relativist," a "pessimist about truth," and even an "epistemological nihilist," and frequently—sometimes by the same figures who have cast him in the above terms—as a *skeptic*. But almost without exception, the connection between Nietzsche and skepticism has been alleged without any head-on engagement with philosophical skepticism, its history, or its methodological commitments. Indeed, most interpretations of Nietzsche's work employ "skepticism" in a wholly colloquial sense, as a nontechnical term requiring no special treatment or explanation. It is used to indicate little more than a mostly negative attitude toward the existence of truth or the possibility of human knowledge, and so the question, "What *kind* of skepticism?" has not yet been raised. But it needs to be raised: the term "skepticism" has not always described (and does not now describe) a homogeneous position. In particular, there are rich and substantive philosophical differences between skepticism in antiquity and its modern, post-Cartesian derivatives that have been neglected almost entirely in the literature on Nietzsche's thought.[3]

Although recent years have seen a number of clear and illuminating commentaries on the themes of truth and knowledge in Nietzsche, and although the difficulty of rendering some of his most opaque remarks on them intelligible and coherent is not to

2. Gemes 1992.

3. Bett 2000a is a notable exception; see also Conway and Ward 1992.

be underestimated, this particular oversight is significant, since Nietzsche's early scholarly work reflects a familiarity with, interest in, and positive assessment of ancient skepticism that persisted throughout his productive career. The consequences of Nietzsche's engagement with these skeptics have not yet received sustained systematic treatment—an inattention that among other things belies the interpretive weight now attributed to his early career as a professor of classical philology and to his enduring preoccupation with Greek thought and culture. The ambition of the present book is to fill this gap in the literature on Nietzsche by demonstrating how an understanding of ancient skepticism promises to illuminate his thought. In so doing, it aims to settle the question of whether and in what sense Nietzsche is a skeptic by taking Pyrrhonism, a powerful form of skepticism that originated in ancient Greece, as a model for understanding his philosophical project.

A growing interest in Nietzsche's philosophy and its enduring significance has generated a substantial and diverse literature, and many contributions to it have tried to come to terms with his vast and apparently protean body of work by identifying the one text, the one idea, or the one doctrine that might serve as a focal point and provide a fundamental organizing principle for the rest. The "will to power" has plausibly been nominated as a candidate,[4] as has Nietzsche's "perspectivism";[5] some commentators have focused on his "immoralism,"[6] on the idea of the eternal return,[7] and even—though with markedly less success—the ephemeral image of the *Übermensch*.[8] Other systematic interpretations have organized

4. E.g., in Richardson 1996.

5. Notably by Nehamas (1985), who argues that "a single view that Nietzsche holds" is the key to understanding a philosophical corpus that is otherwise fraught with paradox and recalcitrant to analysis by any traditional means; also by Hales and Welshon (2000), who introduce a multivalent reading of "perspectivism" that they claim informs all of Nietzsche's substantive views.

6. As in Berkowitz 1995.

7. In his chapter 3, Löwith (1997) treats it as "The Unifying Fundamental Idea in Nietzsche's Philosophy"; see also Loeb (2010), who argues more persuasively for the centrality of eternal return.

8. The seamy and speculative Köhler 2002, e.g., opens with an eyebrow-raising description of the "Superman, a throbbing creature of health and pulsating *joie de vivre*, a creature for whom [Nietzsche] yearned as the lover yearns for his distant beloved," and advances the audacious claim that "Nietzsche's passion for this masculine idol became the core of his thought" (10).

Nietzsche's thought with respect to a central problem rather than a central doctrine, proposing to treat his philosophical corpus as an extended response to a particular crisis (e.g., the looming threat of nihilism and cultural decadence).[9] The reading on offer here is systematic in the latter sense: it takes seriously Nietzsche's concern with the corrosive effects of morality upon culture, with the epidemic spread of nihilism in contemporary Europe, and ultimately with the health and sickness—the flourishing or foundering—of human beings. These worries stayed with Nietzsche throughout his life, and though his responses to them became more refined over time, my interpretation will suggest that the basic outlook they reflect and the methodological constraints on what could count as good responses to these worries did not change substantially. Though the variety of skepticism I take to inform this outlook and shape these constraints cannot be characterized as a doctrine, I shall argue that it does provide a sort of structure and systematicity to Nietzsche's philosophy. It will reveal that there is a greater degree of coherence among Nietzsche's various interests and, I believe, a greater degree of continuity in Nietzsche's philosophical vision over the course of his career than has often been recognized.

The skeptical reading I defend in what follows, though it aims first to grant us insight into his views on knowledge and truth, aims also to use that insight to illuminate his views on ethics and the good, since the Greek skeptics, like Nietzsche, take up their practice as champions of well-being and psychological health. Appreciating fully Nietzsche's relationship to the Pyrrhonian tradition will allow us not only to render clearer and more coherent his provocative but often opaque remarks on knowledge and truth, but also to clarify his relationship to the venerable philosophical tradition of ethical naturalism, to recover a portrait of Nietzsche as a philosophical psychologist that has too often been obscured, and to illuminate some of Nietzsche's most discussed ideas (e.g., his so-called perspectivism and immoralism), showing how they belong to a unified project.

9. Reginster (2006: 4) urges us to consider this crisis in order to understand "the nature and privileged standing of his doctrine of the affirmation of life," which he eloquently argues forms the basis for a rich and substantive ethics. See also Havas 1995.

The Danger of Skepticism

At first glance, philosophical skepticism might seem the *least* likely candidate for supplying a unifying framework for anything. The effect of such reasoning is supposed to be thoroughly corrosive and stubbornly opposed to our efforts to establish any firm and lasting solutions to philosophical problems. The skeptical arguments familiar to most professional philosophers these days are of the form: (1) In order to know that *p* (or, that *p* is true), *p* must be justified; however, (2) *p* is not justified; therefore, (3) we do not know that *p* (is true). The most ambitious philosophical skeptic takes it as his task to show that this argument ranges over as many statements in as many different areas of inquiry as possible, and a number of sophisticated defenses have been offered even of the position that this strategy can be used to show that "we do not know anything" to be true or that no proposition is epistemically justified for any person.[10] Sophisticated defenses notwithstanding, however, it is difficult (if not impossible) to take this worry very seriously. For, in this form, skepticism too readily becomes a "universal acid," ready to eat through any foundations that might support a useful methodological program or explanatory system. Moreover, even if its proponent can come up with a way to contain it, supposing he can make good on the claim that it is worthwhile to try, he immediately confronts the overwhelming implausibility of supposing that it is psychologically possible for anyone to maintain such a view and that it is not purely idle or perverse to do so. Contemporary philosophical skepticism too often looks like an exercise in thought-experiment generating and Gettier-problem mongering, its conclusions ever hovering somewhere between the obviously unsustainable and the astonishingly trivial.

Given that this is the form in which many professional philosophers recognize philosophical skepticism, it should come as no surprise that as Nietzsche has entered more and more into the philosophical mainstream his interpreters should sound a note of disappointment when confronted with the alleged connection between Nietzsche and skepticism. Some years ago, for instance, Brian Leiter sketched an interpretation of Nietzsche that he lamented as

10. Lehrer 1971: 347; Unger 1971: 317.

being "wildly skeptical at best and perhaps incoherent at worst"—suggesting that the distance is not so great between one and the other end of this spectrum. This reading, which has shown such popularity and such peculiar tenacity in the last half-century that he refers to it as the "Received View," attributes to Nietzsche the following claims:

1. the world has no determinate nature or structure;
2. our concepts and theories do not 'describe' or 'correspond' to this world because it has no determinate character;
3. our concepts and theories are 'mere' interpretations or 'mere' perspectives (reflecting our pragmatic needs, at least on some accounts);
4. no perspective can enjoy an *epistemic* privilege over any other, because there is no epistemically privileged mode of access to this characterless world.[11]

The urgency of preventing Nietzsche's "perspectivist" philosophy on this account from becoming its own universal acid would seem obvious; the proponent of such a view could not believe anything if he wanted to, since he would have rejected any basis upon which to ground beliefs. So what could he possibly have to tell us? What pronouncement could be consistent with this view (assuming anything could, consistency itself having been abandoned as a criterion of meaningful discourse) and still warrant the tone of urgency and deliberate provocation for which Nietzsche is so well known? Yet the friends of this interpretation have not demonstrated any deep concern over its threat of self-refutation or its total lack of fundamental guiding principles. On the contrary, those who have embraced the "wildly skeptical" Nietzsche that Leiter describes have shown a peculiar determination to make the most of Nietzsche's comment that "the will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI 'Arrows' 26); his opposition to "systematicity" is taken not only to grant him license to be disorganized and inconsistent, but practically to oblige him to be so.

The commendable efforts to rescue Nietzsche from incoherence and the irrelevance that would almost certainly follow have lately rallied around the adoption of a more promising framework for interpreting his thought, philosophical naturalism. Indeed, it

11. Leiter 1994: 334.

can now be said with some confidence that most commentators on Nietzsche, in the English-speaking world at least, would agree that he is a naturalist.[12] Unsurprisingly, the term "naturalism" has meant different things to different people, but the core of what has been called Nietzsche's naturalism is generally agreed to be his anti-transcendentalism, his treating human beings as continuous with the rest of the natural world, and his undertaking a task "to translate humanity back into nature" (BGE 230).[13] Commentators disposed to read Nietzsche as a naturalist have devoted no small effort to the task of exonerating him from the charge that he is a skeptic.[14] In what follows, I shall argue that this is the wrong approach to take for at least two reasons. First, because Nietzsche's skeptical moments are more than "occasional prevarications."[15] They appear in Nietzsche's earliest writings and then steadily until the end of his productive career. Skeptics (or at least some of them) are, he says, "the decent types in the history of philosophy [whereas] the rest of them have no conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity" (A 12). The Greek skeptics "were the only *respectable* types among the philosophical tribes" (EH 'Clever' 3).[16] "Make no

12. Janaway 2007: 34.

13. Leiter (2008) complains that such a sketch amounts to mere "Laundry List Naturalism," since it fails to answer the question *why* these are the views a naturalist ought to hold; i.e., it fails to specify what is essentially naturalistic about these views. For such a specification, see Leiter 2002: 1–29, which has come to be the touchstone for discussions of naturalism in Nietzsche for both supporters and detractors. In chapter 3, I offer a different explanatory account of how Nietzsche comes to hold these views; for now, however, this brief sketch will suffice.

14. See, e.g., Clark 1990, esp. chap. 4; Leiter 2002; and Cox 2001.

15. As Poellner (2001: 115) describes them.

16. This remark appears in a discussion of his reading habits, in which Nietzsche praises Victor Brochard's seminal work on the history of skepticism, *Les Sceptiques Grecs*, which he says "puts my *Laertiana* to good use as well." The context is important for understanding Nietzsche's punning complaint about the general run of philosophers: most philosophers "talk out of both sides of their mouths," meaning that they equivocate on or occlude their views (whether intentionally or unintentionally) and therefore merit Nietzsche's frequent charge of dishonesty. The Greek skeptics, by contrast, were *known for* and *identified with* a sort of "talking out of two sides of their mouths"—i.e., their ability to marshal arguments on both sides of any dispute so as to bring about equipollence and suspension of judgment. (Kaufmann's translation brings this out more literally: "The skeptics, the only *honorable* type among the equivocal, quinquivocal tribe of philosophers!" [*Die Skeptiker, der einzige ehrenwerthe Typus unter dem so zwei- bis fünfdeutigen Volk der Philosophen!*]) Nietzsche's work on Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, to which he refers here, would

mistake about it," Nietzsche says, "great spirits are skeptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic. The vigor, the *freedom* that comes from the strength and super-strength of spirit *proves* itself through skepticism. Where basic issues about value or lack of value are concerned, people with convictions do not come into consideration. Convictions are prisons" (A 54). To neglect these passages or to make them consistent with a rigorous anti-skepticism simply strains interpretive credibility too much. Second, though (and happily), this approach rests on a largely unfounded, indeed a false presupposition about the antagonism between skepticism and naturalism. The present interpretation will not itself recommend the term "naturalism" as a description for Nietzsche (emerging orthodoxy notwithstanding), but I will take as part of my task to explain how Nietzsche's skepticism in fact leads him to the position now commonly referred to as "naturalistic" in the literature. Thus, the present reading will be in some sense reconcilable with the philosophical naturalism that has been used—with laudable success—to understand Nietzsche.

In the end, we need not abandon the hope of discovering that a cohesive framework, even a naturalist framework suitably qualified, unifies Nietzsche's thought in virtue of accepting that his philosophical orientation is at bottom skeptical. What needs to be abandoned, instead, is our identification of all skepticism with the two-dimensional view characterized at the opening of this section. The skeptic of post-Cartesian and contemporary epistemology has been rightly condemned as "an abstract theoretical construct who lacks all psychological authenticity" and who is "saddled with an uninteresting thesis about the unattainability of certain knowledge."[17] This is the skeptic against whom "the alleged dangers of self-refutation are used to render him vulnerable to the charge that he arbitrarily disputes the rational credentials of one class of

have made him familiar with Pyrrho's student Timon, who reportedly describes Democritus as an *amphinoon leschēna* (literally a "two-minded discusser") (DL IX 41), a description that alleges some connection to the Pyrrhonian tradition. In a manner of speaking, Democritus even masters the ability to talk out of "five sides" of his mouth—an admirable versatility most philosophers would have if they could, for as Nietzsche says in his lecture course on the pre-Platonic philosophers, Democritus is a "pentathlete in ethics, physics, mathematics, music and the arts" (PPP 123).

17. These characterizations belong to Bailey (2002: viii), the introduction to whose *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism* brings into sharp relief some of the salient philosophical differences between ancient and modern skepticism, and indeed, many of the advantages of the former over the latter.

beliefs while inconsistently maintaining that other beliefs susceptible to similar regressive difficulties are nevertheless actually rationally justified."[18] Once we appreciate fully that this skeptic is largely a creature of the modern philosophical imagination and come to understand how little he has in common with his flesh-and-blood predecessors in antiquity, who espoused skepticism as a genuinely practicable way of life, the affiliation of Nietzsche with skepticism should no longer be unpalatable.

Some scholars of ancient skepticism have gone so far as to decry modern versions as an "emasculation" and "little more than a caricature" of the original.[19] I submit that Nietzsche expresses something of the same exasperation with his contemporaries who do little more than entertain pedantic and "arid quibbles over the use of the verb 'to know'"[20] when he laments:

> A philosophy reduced to 'epistemology', which is really no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence; a philosophy that does not even get over the threshold and scrupulously *denies* itself the right of entry—that is a philosophy in its last gasps, an end, an agony, something to be pitied. How could such a philosophy—*dominate*? (BGE 204)

The position in Nietzsche's crosshairs in this passage is exactly the one under fire in the famous "perspectivism" passage of the *Genealogy*: a philosophy that devotes itself obsessively to demarcating the scope and boundary of human knowledge and then demonstrating exhaustively why it is impossible to go beyond that boundary, even as it locates everything of genuine philosophical value on *the other side*, is the quintessential intellectual expression of the ascetic ideal, which "reaches its peak when the ascetic self-contempt, self-derision of reason decrees: 'there *is* a realm of truth and being, but precisely reason is *excluded* from it!'" (GM 3: 12; cf. D P: 3). How *could* the ascetic ideal triumph? How *could* such a philosophy of knowledge, a "doctrine of [epistemic] abstinence" come to dominate? But it *has* come to dominate, as Nietzsche subsequently observes: "When a philosopher these days makes it known that he is not a skeptic . . . everyone gets upset" (BGE 208).

18. Bailey 2002: viii.
19. See ibid., 3–4; Hankinson 1995: 23; and Annas and Barnes 1985: 7–8.
20. Bailey 2002: 6.

What Nietzsche calls our attention to is the fundamental asceticism of all modern philosophy when he says, "As a sort of epistemological skepticism, modern philosophy is, covertly or overtly, *anti-Christian* (although, to state the point for more subtle ears, by no means anti-religious)" (BGE 54). Taking explicit aim at Kant, for instance, whose critical philosophy was supposed to establish the very preconditions of philosophical inquiry by examining the limits of reason itself, Nietzsche charges that heretofore "all philosophers were building under the seduction of morality, even Kant—that they were apparently aiming at certainty, at 'truth', but in reality at '*majestic moral structures*'" (D P: 3). Kant's celebrated critical philosophy is used as a means, in other words, to facilitate the construction of an entire noumenal realm of being that would accommodate Kant's own moral prejudices. But this is only a case in point. Overall, according to Nietzsche, though modern skepticism is supposed to challenge orthodoxy by raising doubts about its central tenets (and is supposed therefore to be anti-Christian, among other things), it becomes "a philosophy that does not even get over the threshold [of knowledge] and scrupulously *denies* itself the right of entry" (BGE 204), thereby demonstrating the same self-denying ascetic ideals Nietzsche finds in Christian morality. This popular epistemological skepticism—the one that locates genuine objects of knowledge in an inaccessible realm of Platonic forms or off among things-in-themselves, and thereby uses reason to establish, a priori, that reason is impotent and knowledge impossible—is "meaningful" to "philosophers these days" as the ascetic ideal is "meaningful" to the priestly type who would at one time have perished without it. It is a vehicle of self-preservation for a certain type of thinker—the decadent, pathological, ascetic type who is far more concerned to avoid error than pursue truth—which is why, according to Nietzsche, "it is generally acknowledged nowadays that no tranquilizer or sedative works better . . . than skepticism, the soft, sweet, soothing poppy flower of skepticism," at least not for the "gentle creature" who "is all too easily frightened" and indulges in what Nietzsche derisively refers to as the "noble abstinence" of declaring he knows nothing (BGE 208).

This, however, is certainly not the new and "stronger type of skepticism" he envisions in the passage immediately following:[21]

21. Here and below, in my discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* 209, I have preferred Kaufmann's translation, which I believe does better justice to the juxtaposition

"This skepticism despises and nevertheless seizes; it undermines and takes possession; *it does not believe* but does not lose itself in the process;[22] it gives the spirit dangerous freedom, but it is severe on the heart" (BGE 209, emphasis added). Immediately, Nietzsche notes that the "inclination to this virile skepticism" has been made possible "thanks to the unconquerably strong and tough virility of *the great German philologists and critical historians*" (BGE 209), which both indicates that it has been recovered from antiquity and helps to explain why it looks so much like the doxastic skepticism of the Greeks—a variety of skepticism unconcerned with the conceptual analysis of "knowledge" or with refining the justification conditions for knowledge claims, but one that attacks belief instead. In modern, Cartesian-inspired skepticisms, radical doubt is merely the outcome of a cumulative procedure of calling into question "more and more basic propositions as a result of adopting ever more radical dubitative hypotheses,"[23] and the end result is nothing more than a conjunctive proposition of indeterminate length to the effect of, "I doubt that *p*, and I doubt that *q*, and I doubt that *r*, . . ." Doxastic skepticism, however, is not committed to finding grounds to doubt actively one proposition after another;

Nietzsche clearly intends here between the weak, civilized, and decadent attitude of contemporary philosophers as seekers of knowledge (those who seek a "tranquilizer" for the pain of uncertainty and a "soft, sweet, soothing poppy flower" [BGE 208]) on the one hand, and the "unconquerably strong and tough virility" [*dem unbezwinglich starken und zähen Manns-Charakter*] more appropriate to a "skepticism of audacious manliness" [*die Skepsis der verwegenen Männlichkeit*] on the other. Kaufmann's choice of "audacious" over "bold" for *verwegen*, for instance, conveys not only a kind of courageousness but a brash, even transgressive recklessness—an attitude far more appropriate to warlike spirits of the kind "wisdom" wants and also to "immoralists" like Nietzsche himself. Similarly with his preference for the rhetorically loaded, dangerous-sounding, even chauvinistic "manly" over the "masculine" that might sound more acceptable in our era of gender-neutral language.

22. For *sie verliert sich nicht dabei*, Norman has "does not die out on this account." Kaufmann's rendering is not only more literal but is also a much clearer complement to Nietzsche's real concerns about contemporary philosophers' attachment to epistemic "objectivity," which he says elsewhere amounts to the attempt to cut oneself out of one's own representation of things in the interest of obtaining an accurate picture. In this (ascetic) sense of "objectivity," one must *lose* oneself in order to *gain* knowledge—a fitting example of the self-destructive impulses and nihilism characteristic of the ascetic ideal. This is the "castration of the intellect" in the service of truth that Nietzsche descries in the *Genealogy* (3: 12); I will examine this in detail in chapter 4.

23. Hankinson 1995: 21.

unlike modern varieties, it "goes for the throat, aiming to eradicate belief itself."[24] And it does so not for academic or theoretical or epistemological reasons, but as a purely practical matter—withholding belief is what brings about psychological *health*.

In chapter 1, I offer an account of the principal features of Pyrrhonism, according to which a position like the "Received View" of Nietzsche's "perspectivism" described earlier would be characterized more accurately as a negative dogmatism than as skepticism. Simply put, no skeptic of this sort would assent to such ambitious metaphysical and epistemological claims.[25] Indeed, on a proper understanding of skepticism, it is not clear why either of the positions mentioned above (the Received View of perspectivism, on the one hand, or the contemporary philosophical skeptic's claim that no proposition is epistemically justified for any person, which has been defended by contemporary skeptics like Peter Unger, on the other) should be called "skeptical" at all. But considering the unsustainability and alleged triviality of these positions, we can only applaud if they are shown to be threats not worth taking seriously.

In chapter 2, I show in greater detail how this variety of skepticism emerges in Nietzsche's early writing by taking a fresh look at his unpublished and fragmentary essay "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense." In general, in what follows, I adopt the methodological scruple (now fairly common) of avoiding resting interpretations on the so-called *Nachlaß* material, though I will provide concordances where they seem necessary or relevant, or where they offer support and guidance in interpreting the published work. However, "On Truth and Lie" is exceptional in the attention it has received in the literature on Nietzsche on truth and knowledge, and I shall argue that it deserves further consideration. In chapter 3, I turn to Nietzsche's early published works to show how this skeptical orientation informs what has come to be called Nietzsche's "naturalism" as I assess his intellectual debt to another thinker for whom Pyrrhonism proved a fruitful resource and inspiration, Michel de Montaigne. In chapter 4, I present a skeptical reading of Nietzsche's "perspectivism" designed to free that notion from the dogmatic

24. Ibid., 23.

25. With the possible exception of Pyrrho himself, ironically enough, especially with respect to claims (i) and (ii) of the "Received View" above. On the dogmatism of the early Pyrrhonists, see Bett 2000b. I shall return to some of the issues raised by Bett's careful study of Pyrrho in the following chapters.

metaphysical readings that have so far encumbered it. Finally, in chapters 5 and 6, I turn to issues of value. I explore Nietzsche's well-documented but seldom-noted fascination with the pre-Platonic philosopher Democritus of Abdera to illuminate the sources and meaning of "health" at work in his critique of morality, suggesting that, like the Pyrrhonists' enterprise, Nietzsche's too may be seen as fundamentally eudaimonistic. And I argue that an assessment of the debt that Nietzsche may owe to the Pyrrhonian tradition will shed new light on his self-professed "immoralism."

Making the case that Nietzsche is to be included in this tradition will require some work of a sort not often enough undertaken in commentaries on his thought. Where the Greeks are concerned, in particular, I believe it is crucial to come to Nietzsche's work with an independent working knowledge of the relevant figures and their views, rather than to look back at the Greeks whom Nietzsche mentions through the lens of an already-established interpretation of his writings. If the scholarship on Nietzsche and antiquity that has begun to proliferate has not been as helpful as it could be in understanding and appreciating Nietzsche's philosophical achievement, it may be because the latter methodology has tended to dominate. In this book, I will treat membership in the Pyrrhonian tradition both philosophically, in terms of a certain understanding of and attitude toward belief and its practical value, and historically, in terms of the intellectual commerce among figures not limited to Pyrrho of Elis and his late follower Sextus Empiricus. That treatment will demand discussions, for instance, of how the Pyrrhonist must finesse 'belief' and what connection between suspension of belief and well-being can be supported by his Skepticism.[26] It will also require sometimes extended treatment of figures who are better described as close cousins (rather than progenitors) of the Pyrrhonian tradition, such as Democritus of Abdera, or as its distant inheritors, among them Michel de Montaigne. In some of these discussions, Nietzsche will seem for brief periods to have dropped out altogether. But this will be in the end only an appearance if, as I suspect, a richer understanding of this subtle and sophisticated variety of skepticism yields a clearer and more synoptic vision of Nietzsche's work itself, viewed

26. Following the convention employed in Hankinson 1995, I capitalize 'Skeptic' and 'Skeptical' when they refer specifically to the Pyrrhonist and his practice, in order to avoid confusion with skepticism more generally; similarly with 'Dogmatist' and 'Dogmatism'.

"more coldly, more distantly, more prudently, from a greater height" (D P: 5). We will need, at times, to stand back from his work in just such a way to develop an appreciation for the Pyrrhonists on their own terms and for what Nietzsche genuinely shares with their Skeptical practice.

The Power of Pyrrhonism

Recent years have seen a surge of interest not only in Nietzsche's critique of morality or his "metaethics," but in the implications of his thought for value theory more broadly construed, for epistemology and the metaphysics of free will, and for philosophical psychology. And of course there has been increasing attention duly paid to his engagement with Greek thought. At the same time, there has been, independently, a surge of enthusiasm for and interest in the Pyrrhonian skeptical tradition, and deservedly so: it presents a potent challenge to epistemologists—much stronger than the worries generated by Cartesian skeptics—that has not yet been answered. The fact that skepticism in antiquity advertised itself as a genuinely practicable way of life (*agogē*) makes it both more difficult to refute than modern skepticisms and more meaningful to examine.

Consider that Descartes, for instance, who clearly appreciated the force of the challenge presented by Pyrrhonism, still must spend the best part of the first of his *Meditations* motivating the problem of doubt at all. As he sits down to devote himself to the general upheaval of all his opinions, which he formerly took for granted, he adduces one after the other example of the many false beliefs he had once held to be true; we accept these errors and Descartes' suddenly having become aware of them as his *reasons* for calling into question, ultimately, the very existence of the external world. The method he adopts suggests to us that doubt must be justified, must itself be grounded on something. *Without* such reasons, and without the assumptions that, for instance, guide Descartes' construction of a careful taxonomy of his opinions according to the types of evidence that support them, his doubt would appear indistinguishable from the ravings of those whose cerebella are irremediably clouded by the vapors of the black bile, and who therefore insist that they are rich when they are paupers or that they have heads of clay or are made of glass. However, *with* such reasons, Descartes is (like many skeptics) "vulnerable to the charge that he arbitrarily disputes

the rational credentials of one class of beliefs [e.g., about the existence of the external world] while inconsistently maintaining that other beliefs susceptible to similar regressive difficulties [e.g., his reliance on the canons of logical argument] are nevertheless actually rationally justified."[27] As will become evident in what follows,[28] Pyrrhonian skepticism, if it ought to be called a position at all, is one that emerges from a practice that is *not* itself theoretically motivated; it is not grounded upon first principles to begin with and is therefore—though it generates plenty of puzzles of its own—inoculated against self-refutation, at least in this particular form. Moreover, its practice is *integrated into* rather than *insulated from* the Skeptic's ordinary activities; it is woven into the fabric of a human life characterized by well-being. Its aims, then, reach beyond the narrow confines of epistemology-as-conceptual analysis.

The superior subtlety of Pyrrhonism, rational as well as practical, guaranteed its persistence as a source of the most intractable philosophical problems well after Descartes had ushered in a new era in intellectual history. It undeniably shaped Hume's assessment of the human faculty of reason (although he, of course, introduced skeptical innovations of his own), and so it should be less than surprising if the very form of skepticism that haunted Hume appeared as an equally formidable obstacle to Kant, who professed to have been so influenced by him. Indeed, some careful and persuasive recent studies have demonstrated that Pyrrhonism specifically—and not just skeptical worries more generically speaking—was a continuing, even formative, problem in German philosophy from Kant onward.

Paul Guyer has, for instance, defended Kant's concern with Pyrrhonism, arguing that "the whole of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is organized around the dual tasks of, first, in the 'Analytic', refuting Humean skepticism about first principles, and then, second, in the 'Dialectic', resolving Pyrrhonian skepticism engendered by the natural dialectic of human reason."[29] More specifically, he says:

> What it is that calls forth skepticism about traditional metaphysics is not merely its "obscurity" but above all its "contradiction" and "endless controversies," the perplexities into which human reason

27. Bailey 2002: viii.

28. See esp. chap. 3.

29. Guyer 2008: 30; on Kant's response to Pyrrhonism, see also Forster (2008), who describes Kant's preoccupation with Pyrrhonism as "profound."

> falls "through no fault of its own" (A vii–viii). This form of skepticism is the inevitable response to the conflicts between doctrines each of which seems to have reason fully on its side—in other words, Pyrrhonian skepticism.[30]

As Guyer illuminates Kant's astute observation that human reason falls into these perplexities naturally, even inevitably (and not only under the guiding influence of Cartesian demons), he underscores an important feature of Pyrrhonism described above; namely, that Pyrrhonism is not theoretically grounded. Its axioms (if we can call them that) as Sextus presents them emerge from actual practice, and the practice itself is one that any human being with a suitably inquisitive nature may fall into. For Kant, the recognition of this feature brought with it a full appreciation of the seriousness of Pyrrhonism's threat. Similarly, Michael Forster has nimbly defended the claim that Hegel's understanding of the Pyrrhonian tradition and his reaction to it are absolutely vital to the philosophical method he develops in the *Phenomenology*.[31] In addition to making a compelling case for this claim, Forster's investigation reveals that Hegel grasps precisely what Kant appreciates and what we have already observed: the demonstrable superiority of ancient to modern incarnations of skepticism. Nietzsche, I will argue, consistently maintains this same estimation, though he puts his understanding of the tradition to very different, and rightly troubling, use.

These recently recovered histories of Pyrrhonism's influence on the otherwise rationally optimistic project of modern philosophy have changed scholars' appreciation of both the efficacy of these skeptical challenges and the subtlety required in attempting to respond to them and have provided excellent reasons for looking all the more closely at how philosophers from Kant onward either exploited or attempted to overcome these skeptical obstacles. Of course, neither the philosophical merits of Pyrrhonian skepticism nor its significance in determining the trajectory of modern philosophy make it more plausible that Nietzsche's thought is best interpreted on this model—that case must be made in the chapters that follow on the basis of a close examination of the textual evidence. Acknowledgment that skepticism enjoys the philosophical merits and august history that it does, independently of Nietzsche's

30. Guyer 2008: 32–33.

31. Forster 1989; Frank 2008 defends a similar reading.

thought, does not make it more likely that we have our reading of him right, but it does make our reading him rightly more interesting. Seeing these strategies at work in Nietzsche's thought reveals that his already formidable critical philosophy is even more powerful and subtler than has yet been appreciated. The critiques for which Nietzsche is well recognized and lauded by modern commentators will be seen to be stronger, more compelling, and more worthy of rigorous philosophical attention—and response.

CHAPTER I

Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonian Tradition

Is Nietzsche a Pyrrhonist? Did the Skeptics influence Nietzsche's views? The first steps to answering these questions will involve familiarizing ourselves with the fundamental features of the skeptical tradition, which will be one of the central tasks of this chapter, and then asking how much of that position can be found also in Nietzsche's texts, which will occupy the remaining chapters. That work will suffice to demonstrate a similarity between them—one that may be helpful in interpreting Nietzsche. By itself, however, it will fall short of a claim of "influence," since the substantiation of such a claim surely requires more than observed similarity (which may, after all, be an intriguing accident or a happy coincidence). To sustain a claim of influence, it seems we would need to know more: first, that Nietzsche is sufficiently acquainted with the skeptical tradition in antiquity; and, second, that he understands and appreciates what the Pyrrhonists are up to. Demonstrating that the first of these criteria, sufficient familiarity, can be satisfied will be the other central task of this chapter. Satisfying it makes the possibility of coincidental similarity far less likely, and so provides further, though perhaps not yet decisive, support for a claim of historical influence. What further criteria might be required? Can they be satisfied in the case of Nietzsche and the Greek skeptics? And if not, how are we to characterize their relationship? Before turning to a discussion of Pyrrhonism itself, we should consider these issues.

Claims of influence are surely the stock-in-trade of the intellectual historian; they are ubiquitous in all literature in the history of ideas. Given their prevalence, however, it might be said that there has been less reflection than there ought to be about what such claims require. In Nietzsche's case in particular, the recent proliferation of commentary has brought with it a good deal of work on the figures who may have shaped his views and methods. Reaching beyond the more obvious cases in which Nietzsche himself credits some thinker as having exerted a formative influence on his thought (Schopenhauer, for instance) or in which he maintained the kind of close relationship that makes intellectual commerce all but inevitable (as with the Wagners or Paul Rée), there has been increasing interest in his debt to other figures in the sciences (e.g., Boscovich, Mach) and arts (e.g., Schiller, Shakespeare, the Greek tragedians), and to broader intellectual trends both antique (e.g., Sophism) and modern (e.g., Darwinism). Philosophically, the value of these connections is to be measured by the extent to which they surpass biography and intellectual history—by what we as readers of Nietzsche gain by becoming aware of them.

Thomas Brobjer's recent study, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography*, is an example of a work that promises just such gains. There, Brobjer undertakes an exhaustive inventory of the contents of Nietzsche's personal library, through which he says we may "better understand and make known the general context in which Nietzsche thought and wrote and his dependence on this context. It is only when this context is known that we can hope to understand more fully what he meant and the reasons for his attacks on other views."[1] Surely, there is more than a kernel of truth in the claim that if the context in which Nietzsche produced his work decisively shaped that work, a familiarity with the context will grant us a richer understanding of the man and his ideas. In that sense, this is an exciting undertaking. However, it must be equally clear that the possession of bare facts about, for example, the books Nietzsche owned or borrowed, the annotations he made in texts, and the authors he praised or condemned in correspondence is insufficient for strong claims of influence, many of which are on offer here. For example, we can entertain—and be intrigued by—such conjectures as that Nietzsche's adolescent (1862) essays "Fate and History" and

1. Brobjer 2008: 2.

"Freedom of the Will and Fate" (FS 2: 54–59, 60–63) were "strongly influenced by Emerson,"[2] but Brobjer never says precisely what he means by "influence" in this discussion (and he is, unfortunately, in good company in this respect), so these claims remain impossible to assess. Elsewhere we find the even more strident claim that "Emerson's influence on Nietzsche was *enormous* and can be compared to that of Schopenhauer in depth and extent," and that "it is important to be aware of Emerson's *profound* influence on Nietzsche, *which colored much of his thinking*." In the same breath, Brobjer admits that "specific examples become speculative and almost impossible to confirm or rule out" and that "it is difficult to determine with certainty the details of the influence."[3]

The influence, however, *must* be in the details—especially if it is as striking and profound as is alleged here. Without them, all this assertion can mean, it seems, is that Emerson wrote some essays on the themes of free will and fate, and a young Nietzsche read them and decided to write some essays offering his own reflections on the same themes. And here we need to ask: How does this illuminate the meaning of the texts themselves? If it does not, the claim must be mitigated; perhaps we should say that these early essays were *occasioned* by Nietzsche's reading of Emerson. Ideally, in a case of "profound" intellectual influence, we would be able to say something about what would be missing in Nietzsche's thought and how his texts would be different had he not encountered Emerson. That is to say, it is not enough to know *what* Nietzsche read; we want to know *why* he read what he read, and whether and to what extent his contact with various authors and ideas shaped his views. That order is a tall one, of course, and it is not entirely clear how exhaustive an investigation would be required to fill it.[4] Nevertheless, if the project is to understand Nietzsche's ideas better by knowing what influences operated upon him and his work, then depending on what is meant by "influence," it cannot be neglected entirely.

Take as a starting point, then, the criteria suggested by Quentin Skinner in "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas."[5] Skinner proposes that the set of *necessary* conditions under which an

2. Ibid., 23.

3. Ibid., 24, emphasis added.

4. In the case of Emerson's alleged influence on Nietzsche, Stack (1993) makes the case if anyone does.

5. Skinner 1988.

author B could legitimately be said to have been influenced by A would have to include at least the following three: "(a) that there should be a genuine similarity between the doctrines of A and B; (b) that B could not have found the relevant doctrine in any writer other than A; and (c) that the probability of the similarity being random should be very low."[6] Provided that criterion (a) could be demonstrated with ample support from the texts of both A and B, then generally speaking I agree that the fulfillment of these three criteria would provide most of what we could reasonably expect by way of support for a claim of historical influence of one author upon another. Perhaps more, since I am inclined to think that (b) may be an unnecessarily strong requirement; in some cases, I believe, it would be sufficient that B could be shown to have a high degree of familiarity with and perhaps a preference or proclivity for the relevant works by A, even where A is not a unique source for the views in question. In cases where 'A' refers not to an individual but a school or movement, especially, we will need to be prepared to cast our net a bit more widely. So we need to be able to demonstrate that B is familiar with A and, additionally, that B did in fact find the relevant doctrine in the work of A; that is, that B has not overlooked or radically misconstrued the ideas in which we are primarily interested. I take it that would also help satisfy (c), on Skinner's view.

In what follows, I will argue that Nietzsche, who was clearly familiar with the central figures, aims, and arguments of the Greek skeptical tradition, exhibits a definite intellectual affinity with those figures. Many of their ideas about knowledge and their attitudes toward philosophy—especially as conventionally practiced—run in tandem, and the thumbprint of Pyrrhonism is unique enough, I believe, to make a connection highly likely. We might even be able to speak here about motives, and introduce an additional criterion of historical influence (though perhaps not a necessary one): (d) that adopting the methods or conclusions of A would further the philosophical aims of B. Nietzsche's philosophical inclinations and the nature of his critical project would have given him very good reason to draw upon this tradition both for inspiration and for concrete strategies. In other words, Skinner's criteria (a) and (c) are easy to satisfy in this case, as is a suitably tempered version of (b), and we

6. Ibid., 46.

have criterion (d) above and beyond those for thinking of this relationship in terms of influence.

Finally, I would like to suggest that, in any case, assertions of intellectual influence should be justified pragmatically; putting this in terms of a further criterion—or perhaps a constraint—we could say (e) that an influence of A on B should be asserted only where we come to understand B better by appreciating it. The inclusion of (e), I think, has the potential to increase sharply the value of discovering such connections at all. In the case of Nietzsche, the philosophical merits of whose work are yet being acknowledged, whatever enhances our understanding of his views will surpass intellectual-historical curiosity and be of genuine interest to those who want to engage critically with his philosophy. My own view is that Nietzsche can be shown to have been influenced by the Greek skeptics in the sense conveyed by (a)–(e) above; his work makes better sense and we will find his views more consistent on the hypothesis that he was so influenced.

For all these reasons, I will in fact refer to this relationship in terms of influence, although it is not my intention to argue for the claim that "Nietzsche is a Pyrrhonist" (certainly not about everything, at any rate) or that he is a later incarnation of Pyrrho or Sextus Empiricus.[7] An influence is not a wholesale endorsement, and Nietzsche is not one for unreflective acceptance. Nor do I intend

7. Cf. Conway and Ward (1992), who claim that "Sextus and Nietzsche are misunderstood skeptics" (196). It should be noted that these authors do not address the historical question of Nietzsche's familiarity with Sextus Empiricus. Both thinkers nevertheless count as Skeptics, they say, because they both "deploy self-consuming reversals [*peritropē*] as part of a rhetorical strategy designed to construct a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against dogmatism" (196). Confusing the practice of Pyrrhonism itself with some of the stock arguments employed in that practice, the authors conclude (erroneously) that Skeptical practice is self-consuming and (disappointingly) that the self-consuming nature of Pyrrhonism gives rise to a "non-declarative mode of speech" (196). Sextus, they say, occupies a merely rhetorical standpoint that allows him to embrace the self-contradictory Skeptical way. Essentially, they want to draw a parallel between the rhetorical space they see Sextus as occupying and the results of Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism. The claim is that Nietzsche's perspectivism would be inconsistent with Nietzsche's critique of dogmatism unless that critique were to operate on a purely rhetorical level. Unfortunately, this strategy leads them subsequently to adopt such flimsy readings as: "'Truth as a woman' remains 'only' a rhetorical supposition designed to produce an epistemic stalemate akin to the Pyrrhonian *epochē*" (201). I will take up the issue of Nietzsche's "perspectivism" at length in chapter 4.

to make a case for Nietzsche's having self-consciously patterned his epistemic views after the Skeptics. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's references to the Greek skeptics reveal a genuine admiration and respect for their methods, which he comes close to putting in terms of kinship, and the affinities between them are substantial enough to indicate that an understanding of the Skeptics' positions will greatly enhance our understanding of Nietzsche's various and often cryptic pronouncements on truth and knowledge.

Nietzsche's Familiarity with Ancient Skepticism

What shape do these references to the Skeptics take? As I will show in succeeding chapters, many of them are oblique. For while the importance of Nietzsche's relationship with the Greeks has long been recognized, it is equally well recognized that the period in which he was principally interested as a classicist was the fifth and sixth centuries BCE, or what he called the "tragic age" of the Greeks. The skeptical tradition under consideration here flourished much later. The most important source of transmission for this tradition is also one of its latest proponents, Sextus Empiricus, a practicing physician probably active in the late second century CE. His extant works include a handbook and guide to Pyrrhonism, *Outlines of Skepticism* (*Purrhoneioi Hupotuposeis* [PH]), and a number of shorter treatises, known collectively under the heading *Against the Mathematicians* (*Pros Mathēmatikous* [M]). The latter are aimed at the doctrines of specialized disciplines: logic, physics, and ethics (the three subfields of philosophy recognized in the Hellenistic era), and one treatise each attacking grammar, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music.

Sextus stands at the end of a long succession of skeptical philosophers reaching back to Pyrrho of Elis, eponymous founder of the movement, who lived and was active from the mid-fourth to the mid-third century BCE but left no writings. It is now generally agreed that Sextus introduced innovations of his own and presented a version of Pyrrhonism that differs (perhaps substantially) from earlier versions, including Pyrrho's. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I will draw heavily on the Sextan picture of Skepticism, especially its systematic presentation in *Outlines of Skepticism*; but this emphasis should not be taken to suggest that this text is the final authority on how Pyrrhonism is to be understood or that

Pyrrhonism itself is either a wholly unified tradition or a complete and closed system (that, as we will see, would in fact be opposed to the very spirit of its practitioners). Sextus clearly identifies with the label 'Pyrrhonist' and acknowledges Pyrrho as the founder of this variety of skepticism, but Pyrrho himself is rarely invoked in *Outlines of Skepticism*. And because Pyrrho himself left nothing in writing, it is sometimes difficult to gauge the extent to which his thought may differ from Sextus's representation of it. There may in fact be two, or even three, importantly different strains of skepticism properly gathered under the umbrella of 'Pyrrhonism'.[8] Sextus Empiricus, then, is not the only or even the most important figure in the history of Pyrrhonism—he is only the most visible.

Another important source to which I will refer frequently is Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* (DL).[9] The account of skepticism offered there, in fact, is the one with which Nietzsche was undoubtedly most familiar; indeed, there is almost no evidence in Nietzsche's published work to suggest that he devoted much time or owed very much to a study of Sextus's writings as such, which would be the most natural source for a familiarity with Pyrrhonism. No references to Sextus or, for that matter, to Pyrrho appear in Nietzsche's early *published* material, even when he was most heavily engaged in straightforwardly philological work—for instance, in the summer of 1872, when he was developing his series of lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers, which he repeated four times and which seems to have been a favorite of his.[10] However, Diogenes' *Lives* was the subject of Nietzsche's doctoral work, and he produced three articles addressing the "source" question—an investigation of which and how many sources Diogenes drew upon in completing his ten-volume enterprise. Nietzsche labored particularly hard on the ninth book, some of the longest sections of which are devoted to accounts of the lives of Pyrrho of Elis (DL IX 61–108) and one of his immediate followers, Timon of Phlius (DL IX 109–16). In addition, this chapter

8. As Richard Bett (2000b) has argued.

9. Diogenes Laertius was a third-century CE doxographer (dates controversial).

10. On which, see Breazeale 1979: xxii. However, Bett (2000a), Brobjer (2001), and Barnes (1986) all discuss *Nachlaß* material from the late 1860s (especially Nietzsche's philological work) that reveals that Nietzsche was in fact familiar with all of the figures central to Pyrrhonian practice—not only Pyrrho and Sextus, but Timon, Aenesidemus, and others.

of Diogenes' *Lives* contains the brief intellectual biographies of other Nietzschean "favorites"—Heraclitus, the atomists Leucippus and Democritus—and members of the Eleatic School and also Protagoras. Despite the typically low estimation of Diogenes' work as unscholarly, unsystematic, and philosophically unsophisticated, it remains one of the most important sources for our knowledge of the history of Greek philosophy.

In an effort to assess Nietzsche's contribution to philology, Jonathan Barnes has examined closely Nietzsche's Laertian studies,[11] in which Nietzsche originally endeavored to show that Diogenes depended on only two sources, Diocles of Magnesia and Favorinus of Arles.[12] In the process of unearthing the evidence for his claim and arranging it for presentation, Barnes says, "Nietzsche came to believe that the account of Pyrrhonian skepticism in Book IX of the *Lives* could not have come either from Diocles or from Favorinus, and he posited a third, skeptical, source, tentatively identified as Theodosius."[13] To make his case, Nietzsche would have to have been thoroughly familiar not only with Diogenes' *Lives* but with a great deal of other relevant source material, including Sextus. And this is indeed the case. In Nietzsche's notes from the late 1860s, he looks to Sextus when trying to sort out issues of succession and to determine more precisely the years in which his central figures lived.[14] So in spite of the dearth of published remarks about the history of Greek skepticism in Nietzsche, there is ample support in his notes and lecture material for the claim that he knew the tradition well, from early on in his career.[15]

11. Barnes 1986.

12. Little is known of the second- or first-century BCE figure Diocles beyond his having been a source for Diogenes Laertius. Favorinus of Arles was a rhetorician, philosopher, and an author of skeptical arguments; he lived and was active around 100 CE.

13. Barnes 1986: 22. For more on Nietzsche's conjecture, which seems to have been at best hasty and at worst erroneous, see also Bett 2000a: 66.

14. See, e.g., Nietzsche's references to Sextus in a series of miscellaneous notes on Diogenes (FS 5: 260, "Miscellanea Laertiana") and notes for his argument for a skeptical source in Diogenes (FS 5: 131).

15. On the basis of his own study of this portion of Nietzsche's philologica, Bett (2000a: 67) concurs: "Nietzsche seems to have involved himself with skepticism to a greater degree than he would have had to do purely in his role as a scholar of Diogenes Laertius."

Moreover, Nietzsche harbored an interest in the atomist philosopher Democritus of Abdera for many of these early years. He made plans to try to authenticate and publish a commentary on as many of the extant fragments as possible. In the course of pursuing this long-standing interest in Democritus he could not have avoided Sextus, who is an indispensible source for many of those fragments; many of the citations to Sextus in Nietzsche's notebooks, generally to the skeptical treatises of *Against the Mathematicians*, appear in the context of his scholarship on Democritus.[16] Of the dozens of figures whose biographies appear in Diogenes' *Lives*, Democritus's is the only one Nietzsche analyzes carefully and as a whole[17]—a detail that provides further support for the depth and seriousness of Nietzsche's engagement with Democritus, which will become important in chapter 5.

Even very late in his career, Nietzsche's enthusiasm for ancient varieties of skepticism is in evidence. It appears in Nietzsche's notebooks and other writings just after the 1887 publication of Victor Brochard's *Les sceptiques grecs*, which until very recently was one of the best available works on the history of skepticism. Nietzsche's notebook entries from the spring of 1888 and afterward indicate that he seized the book almost immediately upon its publication and read it with much interest.[18] This reengagement with Pyrrho and Sextus (the main characters, as it were, in Brochard's study) prompted a number of reflections about Pyrrho in Nietzsche's notebooks.[19] And in addition to the increased attention the Pyrrhonian tradition received in this unpublished material, Nietzsche also began to include positive reflections about the skeptics in his published work.[20]

16. E.g., in "*Die* pinakes *der Democritea*" in the fall of 1867 (FS 3: 251, 262, 273) and in later miscellaneous notes on Democritus (FS 3: 327f.).

17. Barnes 1986: 22.

18. As Brobjer (2001: 12–14) and Bett (2000a: 63–65) also note.

19. KSA 13: 264ff., 276–78, 293, 311ff., 324, 332, 347, 378, 403, 446. It must be said that many of these late references are somewhat negative in tone. Usually, Pyrrho is under indictment for his tranquil character (a feature of his personality that is emphasized in Diogenes), which Nietzsche associates with decadence and exhaustion; see, e.g., "Pyrrho, ein griechischer Buddhist" (KSA 13: 264, cf. 13: 347, 378). But Nietzsche's attitude toward "tranquility" (*ataraxia*) as the end of Skepticism is more complicated; I will take up this issue at length in chapter 5.

20. See especially *Ecce Homo* 'Clever' 3, although most of the allusions to Skepticism in the late works are indirect; e.g., "Men of conviction are not worthy of the least consideration in fundamental questions of value and disvalue. Convictions are prisons. . . . A spirit who wants great things, who also wants the means to them, is necessarily a skeptic" (A 54).

Thus there is good evidence for attributing to Nietzsche a familiarity with the principal sources of Greek skepticism and some interest in Greek skeptical thought, both in his early years as a classics scholar and toward the end of his career, although, as I shall argue, the best evidence we have in addition to this is Nietzsche's own attitude toward knowledge and toward the practice of philosophy.

There remains an interesting question, though, as to what became of this zeal for ancient skepticism in the interim (in what is sometimes called Nietzsche's "middle period"). Some commentators have taken the absence of direct references to Pyrrhonian figures as an indication that Nietzsche's interest in them had faded almost entirely,[21] to be rekindled only by his reading of Brochard. However, contrary to the suggestion that Nietzsche's interest in Greek skepticism remained essentially underground until after his engagement with Brochard in 1888,[22] a preponderance of textual support exists for the claim that skeptical themes are never far from Nietzsche's mind in the middle or late works. A close reading of some of these interim works reveals that Nietzsche never entirely abandoned an interest in skeptical themes or skeptical thinkers.[23] In compositions of the early 1880s, such as *The Gay Science* (begun 1882), it is clear that he remains observant of the distinction between ancient and modern varieties of skepticism (even if he is not always careful to indicate which he has in mind in any particular instance).

In *The Gay Science*, for instance, Nietzsche's praise of the "subtler honesty and skepticism" that "arose wherever two conflicting propositions seemed to be *applicable* to life" seems as clear an indication as we could want that he has the Pyrrhonists in view (GS 110).

21. E.g., Bett 2000a and Brobjer 2001.

22. Its reemergence is most apparent, Bett claims, in late works such as *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, although he wants to argue that in these works Nietzsche's tone is more like the negative dogmatists the Skeptics attacked than it is like the Pyrrhonists (2000a: 85). The chapters that follow will make the case that Nietzsche's attitude toward doubt and dogmatism is consistent throughout his career; it no more disappears in the middle works than it becomes a negative dogmatism in the later ones.

23. As I show in chapter 3, for example, Nietzsche maintained, apparently throughout his productive life, a genuine interest in and admiration for Michel de Montaigne, whose skepticism was Pyrrhonian throughout. While Nietzsche's comments about Pyrrho himself are few (about a dozen) and mostly confined to his later career (after his encounter with Brochard), his remarks about Montaigne are scattered consistently throughout the corpus and tend to be quite positive in tone.

The litany of apparently uncontroversial claims with which the passage begins (e.g., "that there are things") Nietzsche refers to as the oldest "articles of faith," as dogma in our contemporary, nontechnical sense. These are the propositions to doubt or deny which is considered "madness" (GS 110). But the reference to "those exceptional thinkers," the Eleatics, signals that Nietzsche's focus is on the Greeks. Prima facie, Parmenides of Elea and his followers appear to court just such madness and to raise skeptical worries by challenging the deliverances of the senses and the most intuitive beliefs about the natural world with what seems to be a radical denial of change, motion, and plurality. Though it most likely started earlier, perhaps with Xenophanes of Colophon, the distinction between "appearance" and "reality" might be said to have originated—or at least to have appeared in its most acute form—here, with the Eleatics. But just as Sextus might have done, Nietzsche is quick to point out that this is no genuine skepticism, since the beliefs they "posited and clung to" were equally "articles of faith." In order to maintain them, they must (dishonestly, in his view) have "closed their eyes to the fact that they, too, had arrived at their propositions in opposition to what was considered valid or from a desire for tranquility or sole possession or sovereignty" (GS 110).[24] Thus, he contrasts these schools of thought with genuinely skeptical ones, which "arose wherever two conflicting propositions seemed to be *applicable* to life" (GS 110). This *just is* the hallmark of Pyrrhonian practice; the Skeptics were known for the suspension of judgment (*epochē*) brought about by their apparently limitless talent for equipollent argument—for their ability to construct arguments of roughly equal persuasive force for conflicting propositions on any issue their opponents, the Dogmatists, wished to consider.

Through the interpretation I offer here, we come to appreciate more fully why Nietzsche connects this practice with "honesty" and why he finds it "subtler," more refined, and demanding while it is at the same time "innocent and happy like all play" (GS 110). And

24. Cf. Sextus's account of the origin of Skepticism: "Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in these things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil" (PH I 12). Sextus goes on to explain that all inquirers start off in this way, thinking that resolving anomalies is the route to happiness, but that not all inquirers resolve them. The Skeptics, as we shall see, are precisely those who do not.

we will also discover why, as he claims in the passage that immediately follows this one, "every great degree of caution in inferring, every skeptical disposition, is a great danger to life" (GS 111). For Nietzsche's challenge to contemporary morality—a challenge that does not install any new moral system but only undermines, suspends judgment, and leaves us (to appropriate a favorite metaphor of Nietzsche's own) quite at sea—is a challenge that he also claims is a great danger, something not for the faint of heart. "No living being would be preserved," he continues, "had not the opposite disposition—to affirm rather than suspend judgment, to err and make things up rather than wait, to agree rather than deny,[25] to pass judgment rather than be just[26]—been bred to become extraordinarily strong" (GS 111).

Knowing that Nietzsche remained cognizant of the important differences between ancient and modern skepticism is crucial for understanding contrasts of the sort I discussed in the introduction from part 6 ("We Scholars") of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche initially maligns skepticism as "the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition which in layman's terms is called weak nerves or a sickly constitution" (BGE 208). This "soft, sweet, soothing poppy flower of skepticism," he says, is "prescribed *by physicians today* as a protection against 'spirit' and its underground rumblings" (BGE 208, emphasis added). At first

25. For reasons that will soon become clear, the Pyrrhonists are not themselves in the business of "denying"; their attitude to the propositions advanced by Dogmatists is not atheism but always agnosticism. The "affirming"-"denying" contrast in this passage is used for rhetorical purposes, to preserve the parity of structure. Elsewhere, Nietzsche makes abundantly clear that denying is not his business either: "I have no sense of atheism.... I have too much curiosity, too many doubts and high spirits to be happy with a ridiculously crude answer" (EH 'Clever' 1); "I do not refute ideals, I just put on gloves when I have to deal with them" (EH P: 3); and of course, "what have I to do with refutations!" (GM P: 4).

26. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche connects "justice" with skeptical practice, or at least with the opposition to dogmatism: "There is, to be sure, a quite different species of genius, that of justice.... It is the way of this kind of genius to avoid with hearty indignation everything that confuses and deceives us in our judgment of things; it is consequently an *opponent of convictions*... and to that end it must have a clear knowledge of it; it therefore sets every thing in the best light and observes it carefully from all sides" (HH 1: 636). The metaphor of observing a thing from all sides both to "have a clear knowledge of it" and to oppose conviction is employed again in *Genealogy* 3: 12. Chapter 4 undertakes an examination of this passage and an exegesis of the skeptical underpinnings of Nietzsche's perspectivism.

blush, such comments seem a grim diagnosis for Nietzsche's attitude toward skepticism, but upon closer inspection it is clear that Nietzsche is thinking of modern varieties of skepticism as manifestations of a wider phenomenon—an intellectual "sickness" in Europe—and in contrast to ancient varieties. Thus, in this passage, he explicitly signals his concern over what happens with skeptics "these days" and over the attitude that prevails "today" with a "new generation" of thinkers.

In sections prior to this one, too, Nietzsche has signaled that the investigation in this part of *Beyond Good and Evil* is concerned with contemporary philosophical movements by pointing the finger at Descartes and suggesting (as we have already seen) that "as a sort of epistemological skepticism, modern philosophy is, covertly or overtly, *anti-Christian*" (BGE 54). The skeptic who comes in for such abuse in these passages is the one who may parrot Montaigne's "'What do I know?'" (BGE 208)[27] but who gives no indication of having retained any of Montaigne's (Pyrrhonian) honesty. Modern thinkers, even under the banner of skepticism, manage to establish an alternative faith (a faith in "certainty")—in spite of their being nominally anti-Christian. If this is the only type of skepticism Nietzsche recognizes, however, it is difficult to make sense of the abrupt shift between *Beyond Good and Evil* 208 and 209, where he invokes a "new and stronger type of skepticism":

> that more dangerous and harder new type of skepticism . . . the skepticism of audacious manliness which is most closely related to the genius for war and conquest and first entered Germany in the shape of the great Frederick.
>
> This skepticism despises and nevertheless seizes; it undermines and takes possession; it does not believe but does not lose itself in the process; it gives the spirit dangerous freedom, but it is severe on the heart. . . . Thanks to the unconquerably strong and tough virility of the great German philologists and critical historians (viewed properly, all of them were also artists of destruction and dissolution) . . . the inclination to virile skepticism became a decisive trait. (BGE 209)[28]

27. There is an allusion at the close of D 547 to Montaigne's having carved this phrase above the door to his study, though Nietzsche alters it slightly: "'What do I matter!'—stands over the door of the thinker of the future."

28. As in the introduction, I here return to Kaufmann's translation of *Beyond Good and Evil* 208 and 209. Cf. GS 283, "Preparatory human beings," on the search for knowledge in "a more virile, warlike age approaching."

To appreciate the "audacious" (*verwegen*) quality Nietzsche has in mind is to appreciate the differences between the purely academic skepticism of contemporary epistemology and the living skepticism of antiquity. I turn now to an account of Pyrrhonism that will further illuminate the distinction.

The Fundamentals of Pyrrhonism

The understanding of skepticism in virtue of which it could be conflated with the epistemological pessimism (or even nihilism) sometimes ascribed to Nietzsche is a modern phenomenon—largely a peculiarity of the post-Cartesian tradition. To appreciate this point more fully, one must be familiar with the basic conceptual features of Pyrrhonism and its departures from modern incarnations, and so it is to that matter that I now turn.

The publication of Sextus Empiricus's handbook in 1562 by the French scholar Henri Etienne (better known by the Latinized name Stephanus) made his systematic and compelling presentation of skeptical arguments available to the academic world for the first time.[29] Its impact upon the intellectual community is hard to overstate: the problems presented by *Outlines of Skepticism* can rightly be said to have set the agenda for philosophy for the following three centuries, or the entirety of what is called the "modern period" in philosophy. But the spirit with which Descartes and his followers—both sympathetic and not—confronted the challenges raised by skepticism was very different from the spirit that prevailed when those challenges had been formulated originally. From the middle of the sixteenth century to the present time, the history of skepticism has been essentially concomitant with the history of epistemology, insofar as it maintains a relatively tight focus on knowledge claims (propositions) and the conditions under which they may be

29. Strictly speaking, Diogenes' *Lives* appeared first (it had been available in Latin since 1430) and does contain a discussion of the most prominent figure in the ancient skeptical tradition, Pyrrho, as well as his student, Timon of Phlius. However, Diogenes' account is conversational in tone and anecdotal in content. Though Diogenes remains an important source for the history of Greek philosophy and an important source for Nietzsche's knowledge of Skepticism, Sextus's presentation is surely the more rigorous and organized. At any rate, the influence of the latter was noticeably greater.

justified. As developments in logic within the twentieth-century Anglo-American tradition have increasingly shaped discussions of philosophical skepticism, the scope of these discussions has been ever more narrowly focused on the gradual refinement of justification conditions for knowledge claims. For those who take the trouble to go back to skepticism's roots in antiquity, however, a very different and livelier picture emerges.

In the opening lines of *Outlines of Skepticism*, Sextus recognizes three branches of philosophy, distinguished according to the way their practitioners conduct themselves in inquiry and characterize its goal:

> When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation. This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigations, too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating. Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth—for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Skeptics are still investigating. Hence the most fundamental kinds of philosophy are reasonably thought to be three: the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Skeptical. (PH I 1–4)

While all three groups are seekers after knowledge, Dogmatists as Sextus presents them give up seeking and say they are satisfied once they arrive at an answer. It is this attitude toward inquiry that is the standard target of skeptical attack in the sense that it is a common, even essential, feature of the groups Sextus names. Skeptics identify themselves by contrast to Dogmatists—those who make a professional habit of forming theories and beliefs (*dogmata*) and who subsequently stop investigating. In this respect, Skepticism is an ad hominem enterprise.

Note, also, how this claim bears on the third group Sextus mentions, the Academics, or the inheritors of Plato's Academy. Under the leadership of Arcesilaus in the early third century BCE, and on the strength of his strongly aporetic interpretations of Plato's dialogues, the Academy turned increasingly toward skepticism. Yet Sextus presents this group as maintaining the very strong view that all things are, by their nature, inapprehensible. Thus, there are no

answers to be found; epistemic frustration is the inevitable outcome of inquiry. Since it is difficult to see how anyone could continue to investigate after having come to this conclusion, Sextus treats theirs as an ersatz skepticism and characterizes the Academic philosophers as negative dogmatists of an especially insistent stripe.[30]

It should be said that Sextus's presentation of Academic skepticism has been criticized as something of a caricature. Strictly speaking, the division between Academic and Pyrrhonian varieties of skepticism is not as tidy as Sextus or many contemporary mainstream discussions make it out to be. The boundary is in fact a matter of some controversy, and there are a number of ancient sources who claim the Academics say nothing of the sort.[31] His own doxographical inaccuracy (or perhaps his lack of charity) aside, however, Sextus's observation about the similarities between the Dogmatists and the Academic skeptics does say something important about the nature of the claim that nothing can be known: Academics are characterized—or caricatured—as those who throw up their hands and end investigations by declaring the inapprehensibility of things, a result that has the same stifling effect on future investigation as any of the Dogmatists' claims. In either case, the arrival at a judgment calls a halt to inquiry for the simple reason that once we think we have found what we are looking for, we generally stop looking. One half of Meno's paradox trades on this observation, of course. As Socrates says, "He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search" (*Meno* 80e). Nietzsche, too, notices that "a matter that has become clear to us ceases to concern us" (BGE 80) and that "ridiculously crude" answers put "even a ridiculously crude *ban* on us: thou shalt not think!" (EH 'Clever' 1).

From Sextus's point of view, what divides Dogmatists from Academics is less significant than what divides both of them from Skeptics. There are, so to speak, two types of people: those who suspend judgment on objects of Dogmatic investigation, such as whether numbers are elements of the universe, as Pythagoras's followers say (PH III 152), and those who do not. In the latter case, the inquiries come to an end. Only the Pyrrhonist, who suspends

30. This is where Bett's (2000b) characterization of early Pyrrhonism is particularly of interest: it attributes just such a view to Pyrrho himself and his immediate followers, who declare things to be in their natures "inapprehensible"—on Sextus's account, a negatively dogmatic claim.

31. On which see Hankinson 1995: 75–78, 85–86.

judgment and continues to inquire, is entitled to the name 'Skeptic', since the Skeptics (by definition) "are still investigating" (PH I 3). The Greek verb *skeptesthai* means "to inquire" or "to examine" and is a cognate of *skeptikos*, which eventually came into English as 'skeptic'. Skeptics were also known as 'Zetetics', a name that derives from the verb *zētein* ("to search"). The way to keep the spirit of investigation alive, Pyrrhonists maintain, is by not coming to rest with a judgment one regards as true. (Later we will consider Nietzsche's comments about intellectual experimentation and continual seeking as a way of avoiding conviction and fostering intellectual honesty.)[32] Thus, according to Sextus, Pyrrhonists are the only genuine skeptics, as they are devoted—unlike Academics and Dogmatists—to continuing inquiry.

At this point, however, even if we concede Sextus's claim that the Pyrrhonists are the only genuine skeptics (the Academic philosophers being mere negative dogmatists), it may yet seem a stretch to grant him that the Pyrrhonists are the only ones who genuinely *inquire*. For this claim appears to make it a criterion of genuine inquiry that the investigation never conclude. But why should that be the case? The Skeptic, after all, must remain open to the possibility of his discovering truth; he has not ruled out the "apprehensibility" of things. And yet, even if it appears to him that he has come across a sound (even a highly persuasive) argument that *p*, his response will not be to be persuaded, but to continue investigating the matter. This response we may find highly peculiar, even irrational or perverse: once we have encountered a good argument for some conclusion or other, why would anyone be so persistently incredulous?

Sextus disarms this objection by explaining that, in terms of his initial motivation at any rate, the Skeptic is not so different from the Dogmatist. Skeptics embark on their intellectual journey along the same road as everyone else, fueled by the feeling of curiosity that begins the moment we confront the perceptual richness and variety of the world. Like his philosophical rivals, the Skeptic sets out with a number of beliefs about where he is headed and how he should get there. The end of his journey—his goal—is the good life, a life characterized by freedom from psychological disturbance: "The causal principle of skepticism we say is the hope of becoming

32. See, e.g., GS 2, 151, 319, and BGE 210, a clarion call for "experimenters."

tranquil. Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil" (PH I 12, cf. PH I 26).[33] From what we might call a naïve "initial position," he takes perplexity over the "anomaly in things"—the wide variety of everyday contradictions and mysteries posed by the natural world—to be one of the chief sources of such disturbance. If we investigate, the proto-Skeptic thinks, and if we resolve some of these mysteries, gradually replacing questions with answers, we will cease to be troubled and will lead a better life as a result. And so he begins his investigations, using the same tools and procedures as the Dogmatist—he considers hypotheses, gathers evidence, and examines arguments.

A funny thing happens to this investigator, though, along the way: the more he delves into the most troubling and most persistent questions, the more he discovers not that he is moved to accept this or that answer, but that he consistently comes across equipollent arguments, or arguments of roughly equal persuasive weight for and against just about any claim the Dogmatists offer. His discovery of the equipollence of arguments, *isostheneia*, is central, since "the chief constitutive principle of Skepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed; for it is from this, we think, that we come to hold no beliefs" (PH I 12). This suspension of judgment, *epochē*, on all matters of concern to the Dogmatist is thus the distinguishing feature of Pyrrhonian practice. The Skeptic's incredulity is not willful; rather, he comes by it naturally—almost accidentally—through the exercise of his tireless spirit of inquiry and in virtue of what turns out to be an exceptional talent for opposing one argument to another, one judgment to another, one hypothesis to another, in such a way as to neutralize any dogmatic theory. The so-called modes of Skepticism, the stock arguments described in the ninth book of Diogenes' *Lives* (DL IX 79–89) and illustrated at length by Sextus in *Outlines of Skepticism* (PH I 35–179), are the Skeptic's tools of the trade. Sextus's presentation of the modes is not prescriptive but descriptive; he endeavors only to give the reader an idea—even a fairly loose idea—of how the Skeptic operates: "So

33. Chapter 5 will consider in some detail Nietzsche's attitude toward "tranquility" as a goal.

that we may get a more accurate impression of these oppositions, I shall set down the modes though which we conclude to suspension of judgment. But I make no affirmation either about their number or about their power—they may be unsound, and there may be more than I shall describe" (PH I 35). Sextus is, like Nietzsche, more often concerned with the pragmatic value of the arguments than with their philosophical rigor.

It is important to recognize that the Skeptic is not committed in advance to there being an argument for the opposite of every claim about the essence of things, but, as it happens, he is always able to find one. A Skeptic, therefore, is not someone with a certain sort of philosophical agenda (another respect in which he is fundamentally unlike his Dogmatic opponent), but simply someone who possesses a *dunamis antithetikē,* "an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility. We call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of 'to be able to'" (PH I 8–9). Accordingly, Sextus emphasizes that Pyrrhonism is neither a theoretical program nor a philosophical school in any conventional sense, but an *agōgē*, or way of life (PH I 16–17).

That *epochē* comes about as a result of a kind of talent that not everyone has or that not everyone is inclined to develop means that some people will have a more credulous nature than others. For such people it is easy—and it feels like a natural habit of the mind—to be persuaded, especially if they maintain (as the Dogmatists are supposed to do) that truth is the highest good, that it is bad for the soul to harbor false beliefs, or that the key to happiness lies in our dispelling the anomalies in the way things appear. For those who do possess the *dunamis antithetikē* Sextus describes, however, coming to the end of inquiry could be achieved only through a rather conscious and willful suspension of that ability. Having discovered that as long as he continues to inquire he is always able to find an opposing argument, the Pyrrhonist could secure conviction, it seems, only by turning a blind eye toward potential refutations of his views or to other objections and counterevidence. But to do that would surely be epistemically irresponsible, and potentially a sign of weakness or laziness. It is in this way that the Pyrrhonist's practice actually manages to preserve the integrity and vigor of inquiry in a way the Dogmatist's, his pretensions notwithstanding, does not.

Nietzsche explains in *The Gay Science* that dogmatizing is a habit that betrays dishonesty in some and a certain weakness of character in others—in particular, an unhealthily disproportionate need for security and stability: "The extent to which one needs a *faith* [*Glaube*] in order to flourish, . . . that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to speak more clearly, one's weakness). . . . For that is how man is: an article of faith could be refuted to him a thousand times; as long as he needed it, he would consider it 'true' again and again" (GS 347; cf. D 26, BGE 10). The Sextan Skeptic may be read at this point as advancing a similar psychological conjecture: a Dogmatist is someone whose desire for tranquility gets the better of him and whose interest in knowing the truth should in fact be understood as an interest in attaining a feeling of certainty or epistemic security. This way of characterizing the Skeptic's position helps flesh out the extent to which the Skeptic's enterprise is a psychological one. In addition to being professional investigators, the Skeptics are (like Nietzsche) preoccupied with issues of psychological health, and dogmatism, on their view, is treated as a symptom of pathology. Sextus, in his capacity as Pyrrhonist and physician, proclaims of Skeptics that they are "philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (PH III 280). The Skeptic, of course, suspends judgment on the value of truth and on the issue of whether the truth would bring him happiness. Once he does that, he eliminates what might have been an ulterior motive for failing to find or to be moved by equipollent arguments and for accepting as true claims that he has not investigated as fully as he might. In the case of the Skeptic, unlike the Dogmatist, a truth could not "be refuted before him a thousand times" and still be taken to be true (GS 347). The Skeptic has no deep commitment to a system of norms governing inquiry, but the Dogmatist does, and he therefore betrays himself if, for instance, a psychological need for security overrides his commitment to those norms. On this way of understanding the pursuit of knowledge, we need not be suspicious of the thinkers who never achieve it: they are more responsible, more committed to the practice, and in Nietzsche's sense more "honest" than their dogmatic opponents.

Adherence to dogmas, the Skeptics say, is not only anathema to the spirit of inquiry; it is also an obstacle to well-being. In Greek antiquity, Socrates was of course well known for his pronouncements about the therapeutic goals of philosophy, and Plato shows at least as much care for ethics as for straightforward metaphysics. Similarly, ancient scientific

inquiry was often guided by the intuition that greater knowledge about the natural world would assuage fears about death and reprisal from the gods, allowing human beings to live happier lives. Such themes play a central role in the work of Epicurus and other Greek atomists, and in many of the surviving writings of the pre-Platonic philosophers. The Greek skeptics are no exception to this eudaimonistic trend, though their position is, of course, unorthodox. Pyrrhonists do not join their contemporaries in claiming that *ataraxia* is the highest good, though they readily concede that it is what the Dogmatists seek. They aim to show, among other things, that the Dogmatist fails to secure what he takes to be the good by the means he employs, while for the Skeptics, tranquility (*ataraxia*) supervenes like "a shadow on a body" (PH I 29, cf. 26) upon suspension of judgment (*epochē*). So the Skeptic does what he does, according to Sextus, "for the sake of tranquility" (PH I 18). It is not clear, on his account, that the Pyrrhonist could dispense with this as a "causal principle" of his practice. This statement may be taken as problematic in two ways, however; first, with respect to the connection between the Skeptics and Nietzsche. The latter criticizes relentlessly moral systems that promote compassion and decry suffering as intrinsically bad and to be avoided. How could he look upon "tranquility" as an end with anything other than contempt? The answer to this question will turn on understanding *ataraxia* as a state of mental health; I take up this issue at length in chapter 5. For now, there is a second danger that the Skeptic himself courts in describing *ataraxia* as the "causal principle" of his practice; there is in fact a host of questions generated by the relationship between the Skeptic's practice and the *ataraxia* alleged to follow from it. Does the Skeptic *believe* that *ataraxia* is *caused* by his practice? And if so, then does he violate the Skeptical rejection of belief? Does the Skeptic *recommend* his skepticism to others as a route to *ataraxia*?

The short answer to each of these questions is "no" or, at least, "not exactly." Sextus reports that upon suspension of judgment *ataraxia* supervenes "as a shadow on a body" (PH I 29), but he reports this phenomenon as a matter of his own experience, and such reports of how things appear to be are fully in keeping with Pyrrhonian practice. Sextus's claim that such reports are not instances of belief, however, depends for its acceptance on a qualification on the term 'belief' that has been hotly contested:

> When we say that Skeptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take 'belief' in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief

> is acquiescing in something; for Skeptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances—for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, "I think I am not heated (or chilled)." Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear. (PH I 13)

Skeptics, that is to say, may assent to lots of things. Accepting that this is so hinges crucially on how we understand the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*, one of the most vexed issues in the scholarship on ancient skepticism and the source of several of the most persistent objections to Pyrrhonism. The scope issue is a critical one for any interpretation of Greek skepticism, and since it will be equally important for the reading of Nietzsche I aim to present here, it merits its independent treatment.

The Scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*

Scholars committed to the disparity between ancient and modern varieties of skepticism have tended to emphasize the radical nature of Pyrrhonism by attributing to the Skeptic an unqualified rejection of belief, in marked contrast to the modern skeptic's tighter focus on knowledge claims and their justificatory status. This approach has the virtue of heightening the philosophical intrigue of Pyrrhonism as something more than a narrow academic enterprise, but seems to be purchased at the high cost of making Skepticism thoroughly unlivable. How is a life without belief to be negotiated? The alternative approach, which restricts the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*, skirts this practical objection but seems to take many of the teeth out of Skepticism and to obviate the distinction between ancient and modern varieties. More important, however, the restricted interpretation gives rise to concerns about how to cash out the scope restriction itself—for if it is to be principled and not arbitrary or merely sophistical, it appears to saddle the Pyrrhonist with theoretical commitments that clearly violate Skeptical hygiene and threaten to make Pyrrhonism self-refuting.

The two leading approaches to the scope issue have come to be known widely by terms borrowed from the ancient physician Galen by Jonathan Barnes: the "rustic" Skeptic makes no sophisticated distinctions, but suspends judgment on all belief; the "urbane" skeptic restricts the scope of his suspension of judgment, and thereby

occupies a more subtle, but potentially more precarious, position.[34] Although he explores the philosophical advantages of the latter position and even produces some textual support for it in Sextus, Barnes has argued that, ultimately, urbane skepticism collapses into the rustic position. The urbane skeptic lays claim to at least some beliefs of the ordinary, everyday variety. But belief, even in ordinary matters, requires assent, and assent requires a criterion of truth the having of which is a strict violation of Skeptical hygiene. Thus, argues Barnes, the Pyrrhonist—if he is to remain a skeptic at all—"emerges as a rustic." That he does so, however, is singularly unfortunate on the picture Barnes and others present. The rustic Pyrrhonist may simply be too dim-witted to realize that actions require beliefs and that his going about the business of life betrays his having beliefs, so that his practice is hopelessly inconsistent; or else he does see this inconsistency and simply acts disingenuously. At worst, the Skeptical sage actually succeeds in eschewing *all* belief only to become a sad self-parody, persisting in a state of intellectual paralysis and emotional bankruptcy that is little better than vegetative. When asked whether he believes his candidate will win the election or his team the championship, whether it is hotter today than it was yesterday, or even whether that roast really is done, this Skeptic is reduced to offering a noncommittal shrug or to parroting again and again a childish, "It seems so to me." Even if the Skeptic could live his Skepticism, on this account, there is no reason he should want to.

Finding a defensible solution to these scope-related objections will be especially important for our treatment of the relationship between skepticism and the positions that have been attributed to Nietzsche under the heading of naturalism. Nietzsche's respect and admiration for the methods—and for many of the results—of the disciplines we would group together under the umbrella of the natural sciences is clear and now commonly accepted. Indeed, Nietzsche estimates that "it is the mark of a higher culture to value the little unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous methods more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men, which blind us and make us happy," and there is good reason to think that the "little unpretentious truths" he has in mind are those yielded by scientific investigation (HH 1: 3). How could we attribute to Nietzsche a

34. Barnes 1982.

suspension of judgment on such matters? If he can praise the revelations of the sciences—indeed if he can isolate them at all as a class—then initially it seems that if he is a skeptic of the Sextan variety, he is an urbane one. Immediately, then, we will have an interest in the stability and plausibility of this interpretation of Pyrrhonism.

Happily, an appropriately urbane Sextan skepticism has found some adept defenders. A revisionist reading advanced persuasively by Tad Brennan,[35] for instance, does not "find in Sextus the advocation of universal doubt, but only of a more focused and limited doubt. For Sextus says on many occasions that the Skeptic examines not all beliefs, but only '*dogmata*'. And by '*dogmata*' Sextus means the principles and tenets characteristic of the professional schools of philosophy, as for instance the Epicurean's belief in invisible atoms, or the Platonist's belief in eternal, unchanging forms" (21). This interpretation has the virtue of taking seriously and doing the best justice to the essentially ad hominem nature of Pyrrhonism, which Sextus emphasizes repeatedly. Skeptical method and practice is aimed, again, not at knowledge claims and justification conditions, but at "the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (PH III 280). The Skeptic examines, attacks, and suspends judgment upon not every belief, but those offered up by the adherents of particular schools—Sextus often has in mind Stoic doctrine, but also argues against Platonists, Epicureans, Pythagoreans, and others. Thus the Skeptic is entitled to maintain a number of beliefs about perfectly ordinary and everyday matters, which he arrives at in the ways ordinary, everyday people do. On Brennan's account, the Sextan skeptic is on no sort of mission to question things generally; he simply finds the views proffered by the Dogmatists brash and arrogant and puts them to question. Skeptics believe what many ordinary folk believe, question what many ordinary folk would be inclined to question, and for similar reasons, and are themselves ordinary folk; and conversely, Brennan says, many if not most "ordinary people are Sextan skeptics" (17).

I suspect that whatever controversy arises over Brennan's revisionist reading will be fueled by this last claim. The interpretive mainstream has it that Pyrrhonian skeptics are mavericks and outsiders, even subversives, relentlessly calling into question claims that no ordinary person would doubt; no belief is safe. Brennan's reading radically

35. Brennan 1999; citations to this work in what follows will be given by page numbers in the body of the text.

inverts this paradigm by highlighting the audacity of the Dogmatist's abstruse and grandiose products: "various brands of technical logic, criteria of infallible first principles, incorrigible sense-perceptions, direct intuition of spooky entities, and so on" (55). Once we see the Dogmatist in this light, as a purveyor not of innocent hypotheses but of "theories that claim special insights, perfect universalizability, perfect certitude and sound guidance of action" (11), then the Dogmatist looks like the outsider, and the Skeptical challenge to their theories' rational credentials looks perfectly reasonable, perhaps (as Brennan has it) "conservative and even reactive" (13). A Skeptic is someone who makes a habit, or a career, of challenging *dogmata*; and "what makes something a *dogma* in the Sextan sense is exactly its being put forward by its proponent as part of a fully-worked out, justified theory" (56). Beliefs that are not put forward in this way are not typically subjected to skeptical scrutiny. For as Sextus himself states, "it is sufficient to conduct one's life empirically and undogmatically in accordance with the rules and beliefs that are commonly accepted, suspending judgment regarding the statements derived from dogmatic subtlety and furthest removed from the usage of life" (PH II 246).

Thus a Skeptic can without vicious inconsistency form an opinion about whether the roast is done: he will inspect it visually or maybe jab it with a meat thermometer to determine its doneness. In either case, he does arrive at a judgment and does employ some means of making it, and he has in that sense employed a criterion. But Brennan argues persuasively that there is in Sextus a highly attenuated sense of 'criterion' that is not the sense the Skeptic has in mind when he attacks Dogmatic criteria. The difference lies in the Dogmatist's insistence that the criterion to which he appeals is a route not just to "knowledge" in the sense in which that word is used in everyday conversation, but to infallible cognition (it is "an infallible foundational criterion of truth"), in virtue of its contributing to or supporting an overall explanatory system of everything (29). It is the Dogmatist's resolute determination to erect such systems that draws the Skeptic's attention in the first place.

There is much to be said for this way of understanding Sextan skepticism, although I believe that Brennan ultimately does the Pyrrhonist a disservice by overstating the case for his conservatism when he says, "I have argued that the Skeptic can believe anything that other people believe, just the way that they believe it, and that what the skeptic refrains from getting involved in are the dogmatic positings of the professional philosophers" (61). This mission

is accomplished, Sextus says, by distinguishing between two senses of "standard" or "criterion" (*kritērion*), one of which he rejects (those adopted "to provide conviction about the reality or unreality of something") and one of which he accepts ("what is apparent") as necessary to the conduct of everyday life (PH I 21–22). The latter criterion, in addition to making provisions for the exigencies of human physiology, allows the handing down of laws and customs and the teaching of various kinds of expertise to guide the Skeptic's behavior (PH I 23). On Brennan's reading, the Sextan skeptic has no reason to challenge conventional beliefs and customs. But, he asks: "What if, for one reason or another, the technical jargon of the schools becomes part of the general vocabulary of everyday life, and perhaps even shapes the general outlooks of everyday life? What if last year's dogma becomes this year's convention? I maintain that the skeptic should not feel any discomfort at this prospect at all" (61). Contra Brennan, I think this sells the Skeptic short. It certainly does not follow from his reading that the Skeptic cannot feel discomfort in this situation; moreover, everything else we know about the Skeptic and his concerns suggests that, in fact, he would.

First of all, that a dogmatic belief becomes detached over time from the Dogmatic school that proposed it does not disqualify it from becoming an object of interest for the Skeptic. "Even those who will disagree with me about most aspects of Sextan skepticism," says Brennan, "will agree that the Greek term '*dogma*' tends to pick out beliefs that have a certain status, particularly because of their place within a system" (56). However, that a belief has become popular and lost its association with this or that card-carrying Dogmatist does not entail that it has lost its place within such a system. Indeed, generally speaking, the beliefs of greatest concern to the Pyrrhonist are the ones that are meaningful or explicable only against the background of some system of which they are a part; in that sense, they may depend upon the systems to which they belonged originally whether or not *hoi polloi* are conscious of their provenance. Second, Brennan argues that the Sextan skeptic has no interest in challenging each and every thesis he encounters and that his practice will leave intact a great many conventional beliefs, some of which he will employ in going about his own business. But he urges an important clarification early on:

> My claim that in the skeptic's mind traditional and conventional beliefs need no justification must be distinguished from another

> claim with which it might be confused, namely the claim that in the skeptic's mind these beliefs are justified by their being traditional or conventional. The skeptic does not claim that because a certain belief is tradition, it is thereby justified. (11)

Thus, the fact that last year's dogma has become this year's convention does not necessarily immunize it from Skeptical attack. As soon as the Skeptic becomes aware—however that awareness comes about—that a particular thesis would lay claim to a special, universal, or infallible status or that it would occupy a place within "an overall explanatory system of everything," he is off and running.

In a context in which last year's technical jargon has become this year's convention, propositions accepted as "truths" really are, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, simply "illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" (TL 84).[36] They are extravagant hypotheses, propounded by Dogmatists, fueled by rashness and conceit; the fact that they come to enjoy widespread acceptance, untempered by skeptical curiosity or caution, may serve to obscure their origin but does not change their fundamentally Dogmatic nature. Brennan himself, as we have seen, emphasizes strenuously that their widespread acceptance lends them no justification whatsoever. So why would their popularity prevent the Skeptic from taking an interest in and challenging them? "Sextus says that one of his criteria for action and life is the tradition of customs and laws. And in some sense it seems to be right to say that the reason why we go to church on Sunday rather than Tuesday and worship this way rather than that is precisely because that is how everyone around us does it and has done it" (30). Common consent will be good enough reason to attend church on Sunday rather than Tuesday provided we raise no further questions about the reasonableness of attending at all. But what separates the Skeptic from the common run of people is that relentless spirit of inquiry that makes him constitutionally incapable of following his brethren, zombie-like, to church or anywhere else without asking, "And why is it that we do this?" Surely for some practical actions in a public arena, the appeal to convention will be sufficient. The American Skeptic drives on the right side of the road and the British Skeptic on the left, but, crucially, the reasons they do so make no appeal to transcendent authority or "spooky entities"—unlike the reasons for churchgoing.

36. Cf. also the "erroneous articles of faith" criticized in GS 110.

This disparity shows that the habits and behaviors of members in a society sometimes count as conventions in the sense Sextus regards as acceptable, and in some cases not. It is entirely compatible with Brennan's portrait of the Skeptic as someone who has no general interest in questioning to say that nothing prevents the Skeptic from inquiring further into the reasons behind this or that practical activity, and doing so more often than not. Contrary to the mainstream account, which portrays the Skeptic as never satisfied with any answer to such questions, Brennan is right to say that he will, quite frequently, be satisfied (as in the case of driving)—convention really does tell the whole story. But when it comes to other sorts of conventional behaviors, like Sunday churchgoing, for instance, the Skeptic will quickly realize that although we may now have forgotten that these "truths" and imperatives originated as Dogmatic "illusions," fairy tales, just-so stories, and metaphysical extravagances, once a light is shone on these propositions, their presuppositions, and their genesis, they succumb to the modes of Skepticism and fall well within the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*. The Sextan skeptic need not, and indeed, in the interest of maintaining Skeptical hygiene will not, agree with the Cartesian skeptic that, once having been deceived (as by our senses) it is wise never to put our trust in that source again. So he need not question absolutely everything. But once a problem has appeared—"the problem of the *value* of compassion and of the morality of compassion" (GM P: 6), for instance—the failure to keep it alive *as a problem* and to attack it with all the resources at the Skeptic's disposal is, as Nietzsche so often insists, nothing short of an affront to intellectual honesty.

What Brennan misses, given his focus on Pyrrhonism as a phenomenon of antiquity, is what Nietzsche sees, from the standpoint of his concern with contemporary society and its moral conventions: in the modern world, the dogmatists have won. The metaphysical excesses of the dogmatists have been packaged and marketed with such overwhelming success that they have been fully internalized; the ascetic ideal has triumphed; they have ceased to be objects of scrutiny. Crucially, however, they have not ceased to be questionable. And what other interpreters of Pyrrhonism have missed, when they have worried that the restricted "urbane" account of Skepticism (such as the one Brennan offers) will make it less radical and less philosophically interesting than a fully global doxastic skepticism, is what Nietzsche sees when he challenges the presuppositions of morality and the reasonableness of religious and moral dogmas. The

belief in God, belief in the metaphysically free will upon which the concept of moral responsibility is parasitic, and what Nietzsche describes occasionally as the "faith" in science (not to be confused with Nietzsche's own positive attitude toward science) are all properly dogmatic in Sextus's sense of the term; that they have become commonplace has nothing to do with whether they can be rationally justified. Recognizing the supporting role such beliefs play in the worldview handed down by the "teachers of the meaning of existence," the genuine skeptic—far from being the "conservative and even reactive" figure Brennan imagines—will rather appear as "that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!" (GS 125) And Nietzsche understands that he will inspire a similarly derisive reaction in the vast majority: "They yelled and laughed."

CHAPTER 2

Skepticism in Nietzsche's Early Work

The Case of "On Truth and Lie"

I have alluded twice now to Nietzsche's 1873 essay "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense," and a more detailed examination of this work is an excellent place to begin the discussion of the emergence of skepticism in his thought. Though unpublished and in fact never intended for publication as an independent work, this essay has become something of a lightning rod for all parties to the conversation about Nietzsche on truth and knowledge. For many years it has, like other writings culled posthumously from Nietzsche's literary remains, been cited as an important source for attributing to him a blanket rejection of the existence of truth and the very possibility of knowledge. The claim, "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" has inspired more than a few commentators to regard Nietzsche as having anticipated the spirit of postmodernism in dispensing with the notion of *truth* altogether. A classic example is Paul de Man's assertion that "the *misrepresentation of reality* that Nietzsche finds *systematically repeated* throughout the tradition" is due to "the rhetorical structure of language" as described in "On Truth and Lie." "This essay," he claims, "flatly states *the necessary subversion of truth by rhetoric* as the distinctive feature of all language."[1] This is heady stuff for Nietzsche, a thinker who observes in the very same

1. De Man 1979: 110, emphasis added.

essay that such definitive claims are just as indemonstrable as their opposites.

Yet even commentators who resist "postmodern" readings of Nietzsche reluctantly agree that it is nevertheless difficult to resist assigning a rejection of truth and denial of the possibility of knowledge to the Nietzsche of "On Truth and Lie." Many of the so-called "analytic" interpretations of Nietzsche—to the extent that their proponents find something philosophically suspect about denials of truth—have in response advanced various developmental hypotheses designed to show that although Nietzsche holds this radical and unstable view early on, he eventually overcomes his youthful infelicities with the concept of truth and settles upon something more sophisticated and more conventional.[2] The suspicion about the viability (or philosophical respectability, or stability, or coherence) of denials of truth is one that I share, although, unlike the majority of commentators on this early essay, I do not take the Nietzsche of these early writings to be committed to it.

There is nothing transparent about "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense" and nothing that lends itself to easy analysis. For one thing, although the weight this little essay has been made to bear, especially by postmodern readers of Nietzsche, makes it easy to forget, it is after all merely fragmentary. Although its first section and much shorter second section are reasonably well polished—Nietzsche conscripted his friend von Gersdorff to produce a fair copy of both[3]—they are insufficient for a stand-alone work. To them, Nietzsche added a number of related observations and sketches for additional sections in his notebooks: disconnected paragraphs, lists, and some sentence fragments that were given order and assigned numbers by the editors of *Nietzsches Werke Grossoktavausgabe* (1901–1913).[4] Independently of their location in the corpus, it would not even be obvious that these smaller fragments belong to "On Truth and Lie," since it is not always clear how some of these bits and pieces are conceptually or thematically related to what precedes them. To this set of philological difficulties we can add

2. This claim is central to the developmental hypothesis defended eloquently by Clark (1990). Of "On Truth and Lie," she says, "Far from a precocious statement of Nietzsche's lifelong views, [this work] belongs . . . to Nietzsche's juvenilia" (65).

3. Breazeale 1979: lvi; KSA 1: 875–90.

4. Many of these fragments, from Nietzsche's notebook 'U II.2. *Sommer-Herbst* 1873', are translated in Breazeale 1979: 91–97; cf. KSA 7: 621ff..

another: as far as we know, this essay was originally conceived as only one part of a much grander project—a comprehensive treatment of the origin of philosophy and of Greek thought before Plato. In addition to "On Truth and Lie," Nietzsche's planned *Philosophenbuch* was to have included what is now known as his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge" (writings from the fall and winter of 1872), "On the Pathos of Truth" (also written during the winter of 1872, and included among the five little essays Nietzsche presented to Cosima Wagner for Christmas of that year), and "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician" (which engaged Nietzsche from winter 1872–73 to the spring and fall of 1873).[5] The question of how these writings were supposed to have worked *together* is one that so far has mostly been neglected by those who single out "On Truth and Lie" as a key to Nietzsche's early thought, which means that among other things the connection of its themes and ideas to Nietzsche's engagement with the Greeks or to the shaping of his own role as a diagnostician of cultural illness has not been made.

These connections will become clearer as we work through some of the exegetical difficulties the essay presents. For even in its apparently quite polished opening section, it is no small task to identify Nietzsche's primary concern. The parable with which he opens the essay is the most damning evaluation he can muster of the human tendency to overestimate the value of knowledge. To it, he adds: "One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature" (TL 79). But from this claim about value he moves quickly to a suggestion about the important role of deception in the preservation of the species, introduces a question about the origin of the "drive" for truth in the human being, and then enters into a rather more lengthy linguistic disquisition about the formation of words and concepts and their apparently tenuous connection to the things they are taken to represent. In the course of this highly speculative and now infamous discourse on the origin and nature of language,

5. All of these are also helpfully collected in English translation by Breazeale (1979). For the full manuscript sources of all these works, see his "Note on the Texts, Translation, and Annotation" (1979: li–lxi); and for a much more extensive account of Nietzsche's early engagement with philology, the place of the *Philosophenbuch* in his early thought, and its scope and significance, see Porter 2000.

Nietzsche arrives at the question, "What then is truth?" and ventures the provocative, perhaps cheeky, answer that has been taken to herald the coming of postmodernism and the ultimate triumph of rhetoric over such quaint and outmoded notions as "truth":

> A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (TL 84)

The first thing we need to do is appreciate this provocative challenge for what it is—a provocative challenge, and not the rudiments of a metaphysical or semantic theory of truth. So it is important to recontextualize this passage and see that focusing selectively on it misconstrues the purpose of "On Truth and Lie," the main objective of which is a psychological inquiry into the origin and nature of a particular drive (the truth-seeking drive) and its role and significance for human beings. In addition, we should pay close attention to the early warnings against philosophical dogmatism that Nietzsche inserts into this essay, because the critical stance against dogmatism that he adopts here (and elsewhere) would preclude his advancing a positive theory of truth or meaning in "On Truth and Lie," even if that were what he set out to do. Finally, we need an exegesis of some crucial passages in an attempt to lay to rest the idea that Nietzsche stridently denies the possibility of truth and to build a case for attributing to Nietzsche instead a position that is genuinely skeptical about it.

The Origin of the "Will to Truth"

The ambitious project of which "On Truth and Lie" was to constitute only a part was an investigation of the beginnings of philosophy itself. What concerns are proper to philosophy? How did it originate? What is the nature of the philosophical impulse in human beings? What are the drives that underlie its activity? With that in mind, the fact that "On Truth and Lie" does not advance a comprehensive or even coherent theory of truth and knowledge may

be more easily understood: this was simply not Nietzsche's concern. The actual subject-question is introduced early on, where we would reasonably look for some sort of programmatic remark, and well before he poses the question about truth quoted in the previous section. Given the state of epistemic affairs that he captures in his opening parable and man's stalwart if not willful refusal to recognize that state of affairs or for that matter even to entertain curiosities about it, Nietzsche asks, "Where in the world could the drive for truth have come from?" (TL 80). This question heralds *not* a metaphysical inquiry, but a *psychological investigation* characteristic of the sort Nietzsche pursues throughout his entire career. The real business at hand is not a question about the nature of truth, but a puzzle about the *genesis* of a particular drive: the drive for truth. Whence does it arise? Why is it so powerful?

Considered in this way, the real focus of "On Truth and Lie" communicates at a very early stage of Nietzsche's career his interest in the psychological lives of human beings and what constitutes their health or flourishing. He does not yet offer an answer to the question of what best promotes or most significantly hinders that flourishing (a question he takes up more explicitly in later works), but at this early stage in his career he is at least able to rule some things out. In "On Truth and Lie," Nietzsche focuses on fleshing out what the drive toward "truth" might in fact be a drive toward: stability, security, control over the world of one's experience, and even a feeling of importance for oneself and meaningfulness in one's life. He suggests that the activity of language-creation reveals a perhaps deep-seated psychological desire to tame the world of restless and conflicting appearances by organizing them under a scheme, according to stable and enduring concepts. The desire to reduce 'many' to 'one' is one prevalent form of the "desire to rule over life" by imposing regularity and predictability and by making familiar what is unfamiliar (TL 90). In the previous chapter, we saw that the Skeptic's suspicion about the assertions of the Dogmatists and indeed about dogmatic habits of thought more broadly construed similarly takes the form of a psychological hypothesis. Since from the Pyrrhonist's point of view the Dogmatists' assertions invariably yield to Skeptical *isostheneia*, the only thing to do is suspend judgment about them; that the Dogmatist fails to do so is due to his "rashness and conceit," maladies that Skeptical practice may relieve.

Only by pretending to have unmediated perceptual access to the world and forgetting the human contribution to the formation of

concepts does humankind "live with any repose, security, and consistency," which is what Nietzsche implies the many in fact want (TL 86). He illustrates vividly this desperate need for psychological security when he discusses the man of science: "The scientific investigator builds his hut right next to the tower of science so that he will be able to work on it and to find shelter for himself beneath those bulwarks which presently exist. And he requires shelter" (TL 88). In some individuals, this need for stability (later to become the "metaphysical need" much reviled by Nietzsche)[6] may even be acknowledged as such, and may accompany the conscious conviction that the acquisition of true beliefs will bring about happiness or some other good for the agent. Even the proto-Pyrrhonist, after all, in his pre-*epochē* initial position agrees with those "men of talent," who, "troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil" (PH I 12).

What is crucial to clarify at this point is that Nietzsche sees nothing wrong with the project of seeking truth or knowledge as such. Inquiry, in any meaningful sense, is a goal-directed enterprise; it aims at knowledge of the truth. To gain knowledge and to resolve the "anomaly" in things is, as we have seen, precisely what the Skeptic—qua Zetetic—searches for. That no Dogmatist is able to convince him is an indication either of the weakness of the Dogmatist's arguments or the strength of the Skeptic's practice, but it is no indication that the Skeptic does not inquire or that he does not inquire genuinely. This point is important for Nietzsche, who quite clearly views himself too as a pursuer of knowledge—in fact, as a restless and relentless investigator and experimenter. Frequently, he characterizes the feeling of certainty that in most cases terminates inquiry, and the termination of inquiry itself, as overtly nihilistic. In a passage characteristic of his later work, he says:

> All over Europe these days, the problem "of the real and the apparent world" gets taken up so eagerly and with such acuity—I would even say: shrewdness—that you really start to think and listen; and anyone who hears only a "will to truth" in the background here certainly does not have the sharpest of ears. In rare and unusual

6. See, e.g., HH 1: 26; GS 151, 347; BGE 230; as well as A 23, 54 on a similar theme. I will return to this phenomenon in chapter 5.

> cases, some sort of will to truth might actually be at issue, some wild and adventurous streak of courage, a metaphysician's ambition to hold on to a lost cause, that, in the end, will still prefer a handful of "certainty" to an entire wagonload of pretty possibilities. There might even be puritanical fanatics of conscience who would rather lie dying on an assured nothing than an uncertain something. But this is nihilism, and symptomatic of a desperate soul in a state of deadly exhaustion, however brave such virtuous posturing may appear. (BGE 10)

How are we to explain the tenacity of philosophers in their attention to problems like those generated by the distinction between the "real" world and the "apparent"? At first, we may say simply that these thinkers want "to get to the bottom of things"; they want to get to the truth and to resolve the anomalies that trouble them. But this explanation, Nietzsche quickly points out, remains superficial. Whoever accepts it "certainly does not have the sharpest of ears." If we listen more closely, we will hear (especially in the most extreme cases) the nihilistic and mortally weary soul speaking its ardent desire to do nothing more than *stop* its seeking. The "will to truth" or truth-drive that comes under attack in "On Truth and Lie" is merely the form in which this nihilistic desire appears in the character who implicitly takes his good to reside in the cessation of the intellectual struggle.

Once we understand the connection in Nietzsche's work between the desire for the cessation of inquiry—the desire that defines the opponents of Pyrrhonism—and nihilism, Nietzsche's common cause with the Skeptics begins to come into focus, and we have even further reason to conclude that Nietzsche's overarching concern with the nihilistic tendency of modernity is what leads him to focus not on truth as such, but on *us* and our unflagging and almost inexplicable faith in its value. As he will claim in the *Genealogy*, heretofore "truth was simply not *permitted* to become a problem. . . . From the moment belief in the god of the ascetic ideal is negated, *there is also a new problem*: that of the *value* of truth.—The will to truth is in need of a critique—let us thus define our own task—the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question*" (GM 3: 24). There is no denial of truth here—or anywhere else in Nietzsche's work; he is not yet entitled either to denial or to affirmation of such a thing. Moreover, his appreciation of this point and his sense of this task are as evident in "On Truth and Lie"—for instance, where he cautions us against "presuming" to make claims about the essences of things,

about things "in themselves," because any such claim "would be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, would be just as indemonstrable as its opposite" (TL 86)—as they are later in his corpus.

Against the Grammarians

Immediately after the framing question of "On Truth and Lie" ("Where in the world could the drive for truth have come from?") has been posed, Nietzsche ventures the hypothesis that begins his well-known discussion of language:

> Insofar as the individual wants to maintain himself against other individuals, he will under natural circumstances employ the intellect mainly for dissimulation. But at the same time, from boredom and necessity, man wishes to exist socially and with the herd; therefore, he needs to make peace and strives accordingly to banish from his world at least the most flagrant *bellum omni contra omnes*. This peace treaty brings in its wake something which appears to be the first step toward acquiring that puzzling truth drive: to wit, *that* which shall count as "truth" from now on is established. That is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth. For the contrast between truth and lie arises here for the first time. . . . [W]hat about these linguistic conventions themselves? Are they perhaps products of knowledge, that is, of the sense of truth? Are designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities? (TL 81)

Nietzsche's critical eye is trained upon those who would answer these last questions in the affirmative. The idea that linguistic conventions, which arise to serve purely pragmatic and immediate ends, could be elevated to the status of laws that mirror the fundamental structure of reality, and thereby form the foundation of a systematic theory of everything is, as discussed in the last chapter, a quintessentially dogmatic idea. And it is here, for perhaps the first but certainly not for the last time, that Nietzsche recognizes Plato as a paradigm Dogmatist. Taking Platonism to be an implicit target in this passage makes excellent sense of Nietzsche's comment that "the concept 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the 'leaf': *the original model* according to which all the leaves were

perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted" (TL 83, emphasis added).

Those who promote such a view of language—e.g., Platonists—betray the metaphysical need and dogmatizing tendencies that Nietzsche takes to be symptomatic of nihilism and the "desperate soul." How would Nietzsche avoid running afoul of his own critique if his objective in "On Truth and Lie" was to defend, say, "*the necessary subversion of truth by rhetoric* as the distinctive feature of all language" or any other overarching, systematic theory of truth or of discourse?[7] The short answer is that he could not. He is too well aware of the siren song of truth that seduces lesser intellects into settling comfortably into positions that satisfy their "desire to rule over life" and their inner need for "repose, security, and consistency" (TL 90, 86). And he is not the only one who is so aware. The first of Sextus Empiricus's several treatises collectively titled *Against the Mathematicians*—that is, "against the learned"—is "Against the Grammarians" (M I), an assault on precisely those Dogmatists who exemplify this attitude toward language. Thus, he opens:

> Let us begin at once the investigation against the grammarians, first of all since we are handed over to grammar almost since infancy or as soon as we are in nappies, and grammar is, as it were, a point of departure for learning the other studies; secondly, because it is the boldest of the sciences, practically promising the Sirens' promise. For those females knew that man is naturally fond of learning and that the desire for truth within his breast is great. So they promise not only to charm the men sailing past with divine songs, but also to teach them the truth. (M I 41–42)

Nietzsche's familiarity with Sextus's collection of treatises *Against the Mathematicians* is amply demonstrated in his notes from the late 1860s and early 1870s. Probably, it was Sextus's value as a source of information about Democritus, in whom Nietzsche was so keenly interested, rather than as a source for Pyrrhonism that prompted Nietzsche to return many times to these works. But in the case of "Against the Grammarians," the similarity between its agenda and Nietzsche's agenda in "On Truth and Lie" is striking and more than suggestive.

After singling out the Dogmatists who regard linguistics as the sure path to truth, Sextus goes on to raise the same question

7. De Man 1979: 110, emphasis added.

Nietzsche entertains at this point in "On Truth and Lie": namely, whether words signify "by nature" or "by imposition" (M I 145), for instance, "when they say that some names are masculine by nature, others feminine, and others neuter, and that some are singular in number, others dual, and others plural" (M I 142). With characteristic brevity, Sextus makes the argument that if the correct use of words were determined or constrained by reality, by "nature," such that we could not change the genders of words, then it seems that all peoples—Greeks and barbarians alike—would recognize the same grammatical conventions and that they would speak a common language. Of course, they do not: "For example, the Athenians say that *stamnos* ('jar') is feminine, the Peloponnesians that it is masculine; some use *tholos* ('rotunda') as feminine, others as masculine; some use *bōlos* ('clod') as feminine, others masculine" (M I 148). Nietzsche's point, and his argument for it, are exactly parallel:

> We separate things according to gender, designating the tree as masculine and the plant as feminine. What arbitrary assignments! How far this oversteps the canons of certainty!... The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression; otherwise, there would not be so many languages. (TL 82)

The point is important enough that Nietzsche reiterates it later, in the opening passages of *Daybreak*: "When man gave all things a sex he thought, not that he was playing, but that he had gained a profound insight:—it was only very late that he confessed to himself what an enormous error this was, and perhaps now he has not confessed it completely" (D 3). It is worth noting here that the "error" involved is not the error of thinking this or that is masculine or feminine by nature when in fact they are not; for how would one establish that? The error, rather, is taking for a profound insight what is merely arbitrary, useful, or conventional. Sextus's discussion "About the Name" concludes, "Thus it is not by nature that some names are masculine, others feminine, but by imposition some become the one and others the other" (M I 150). In Nietzsche's perennial complaint that human beings project or impose value upon the world, he, like Sextus, is making a point about people—who begin by pretending and then forget the pretense—and not about the world.

From here, one might expect that Sextus, to preserve the equipollence of argument, would launch a parallel attack on the opposite position—that is, that words signify "by imposition" rather than

by nature—but he does not. His skeptical hackles have been raised by the Dogmatist's claim to have "a criterion of what is said correctly" (M I 153) and by his efforts to solidify linguistic convention and common practice, which one would require extraordinary reasons for calling into question, into a grand theory and in doing so to promote ambitious metaphysical claims. Sextus constructs an argument to oppose those efforts and accordingly suspends judgment. We will see him do the same in another treatise, "Against the Ethicists" (M XI).[8] An audience unfamiliar with the methods of the Skeptics, seeing only one argument and conclusion here, might well infer that Sextus meant to advance and defend that conclusion as a theory of his own; but that impression could be maintained only by remaining ignorant of or by choosing to ignore the larger framework of Sextus's skeptical treatises, in which equipollence is preserved. Sextus investigates the received views of the Dogmatists; these positions are so well known and so widely believed that he need not rehearse the arguments in support of them or contribute new arguments. Rather, taking for granted his audience's receptivity to those positions, the Skeptic presents arguments against these received views, with the aim of bringing about suspension of judgment. Similarly, we must stand back from these brief and well-worn passages in "On Truth and Lie" and ask about its contribution to the larger project of constructing a comprehensive history of Greek philosophy that would systematically explore the origin of the will to truth and the impulse to philosophize, to dogmatize. The Pyrrhonists treat that impulse as a threat to psychological stability and well-being, and to the extent that he affiliates it with nihilism, so does Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's Alleged Denial of Truth in "On Truth and Lie"

On the reading I have been constructing, "On Truth and Lie" warns explicitly that dogmatism is an expression of the will to truth and gives voice to Nietzsche's earliest suspicion about its tendencies toward nihilism (and, later, asceticism). Clearly, Nietzsche himself associates no small degree of "conceit and rashness" with the most

8. In chapter 6.

common manifestations of the truth-seeking drive: the invention of knowing was "the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history'," he says. "The pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men"; it is a pride that "contains within itself the most flattering estimation of the value of knowing" (TL 79–80). And "a continuous fluttering around the *solitary* flame of vanity" is, for Nietzsche, the rule among most human beings (TL 80). So it is difficult to escape the feeling that the interpretations of "On Truth and Lie" according to which he aggressively opposes the possibility of truth and knowledge and inverts philosophical tradition by staunchly defending the "necessary subversion of truth by rhetoric" make Nietzsche out to be just the sort of thinker of whom he is most pointedly critical. Nevertheless, allegations that he "denies truth" in this essay have been persistent. In this section, I will consider two passages most frequently adduced as support for these allegations and explain why the strident denier of truth portrayed in so much of the secondary literature does not present an accurate portrait of Nietzsche.

One of these passages from "On Truth and Lie" is by now almost as familiar as the "truths are illusions" quip; it is often cited, but rarely in full:

> We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an x which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us. For even our contrast between individual and species is something anthropomorphic and does not originate in the essence of things; *although we should not presume to claim that this contrast does not correspond to the essence of things: that would of course be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, would be just as indemonstrable as its opposite.* (TL 86, emphasis added)

While a handful of commentators have paid appropriate attention to the final clause of this passage and defended the position that Nietzsche is an "agnostic" about truth,[9] too many others have maintained in spite of it that Nietzsche should be read as an "atheist" about truth.[10] In fact, the agnostic reading does better justice to the

9. See, e.g., Grimm 1977.

10. Notably Clark (1990), according to whom the Nietzsche of "On Truth and Lie" denies that human beings have perceptual access to independently existing objects. On her reading, Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer's "veil of perception"

text itself and also results in a more coherent and philosophically defensible position for Nietzsche.

There are at least two things worth noting about the strongly skeptical qualification Nietzsche tacks on to the end of the passage quoted above. One is the relationship between the observation that such and such a claim (in this case, the claim that the contrast between individual and species "does not correspond to the essence of things") is *dogmatic* and the recommendation that we not "presume" to make it. The other is the stipulation that a dogmatic assertion *as such* is "just as indemonstrable as its opposite." Sextus uses the term 'Dogmatist' [*dogmatikos*] to refer to a cluster of rival philosophical schools: "Those who are called Dogmatists *in the proper sense of the word* think that they have discovered the truth—for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others" (PH I 3, emphasis added), though what Sextus finds and opposes in the members of these schools are habits of thought that may range far more widely. Skeptics live non-dogmatically, without belief in what Sextus qualifies as "unclear objects of investigation" (PH I 13). When they claim specifically to avoid "unclear" objects of investigation, they are singling out beliefs concerning the essences of things (whether the honey that tastes sweet is *really* of such a nature to *be* sweet, and so on). So, for the Skeptic, to avoid dogmatism is to avoid giving one's assent to claims offered not only in a certain spirit but with a certain sort of content. When Nietzsche takes it to be a matter "of course" that a claim about what corresponds to the essence of things would be a dogmatic assertion, he has the same targets in view.

The parallelism of use and attitude is strengthened by Nietzsche's further remark about the indemonstrability of dogmatic assertions "as such." As we know, the impetus behind the Skeptic's suspension of belief on "unclear" matters is his discovery of *isostheneia*, the equipollence of disputes about the natures of things (PH I 12). The problem to which Nietzsche points in the above passage reflects precisely the Skeptical problem of the criterion: when we examine arguments on both sides of a position, we notice that there does not seem to be a principle available to us by which we could adjudicate

problem and concludes that truths are illusions "because he assumes both that truth requires correspondence to things-in-themselves and that our truths do not exhibit such correspondence" (83).

between competing positions. Rather, we find that opposing positions simply neutralize one another, one position being "just as indemonstrable as its opposite."

Many of Nietzsche's writings from around this time are peculiarly concerned with the role of the philosopher within culture, and the exhortation to avoid dogmatism is a constant refrain in many other early *Nachlaß* passages on the purpose and value of philosophy. Consider, for example, "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician,"[11] in which Nietzsche notes at several points that part of the "*value* of philosophy" (correctly practiced, we must assume) is that it "cleanses muddled and superstitious ideas. Opposes scientific dogmatism" (72).[12] He returns a few sections later to underscore philosophy's opposition to "scientific dogmatism" (74), and in a free-standing subsection also titled "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician," Nietzsche explores the significance of philosophy in relation to culture. Among its most valuable contributions, he thinks, are both "*the destruction of rigid dogmatism*: (a) in religion, (b) in mores, (c) in science," and "the *skeptical* impulse. Every force (religion, myth, knowledge drive) has barbarizing, immoral, and stultifying effects when it is taken to extremes as an inflexible master (Socrates)" (75). Religion and myth, clearly, operate chiefly by proffering these sorts of "deep" explanations of reality, by positing unseen or hidden entities. Such is the force of the passage we have been considering in "On Truth and Lie," in which Nietzsche warns us against presuming to make a claim about the *essence* of things. And in a critical note about Kant (from the *Nachlaß* sections collected together under the heading "The Philosopher"),[13] whom Nietzsche charges with this specific type of presumptuousness, the same important caveat found in "On Truth and Lie" appears—that we are not licensed in concluding that things are not just the way they seem: "Against Kant, it must always be further objected that, even if we grant all of his propositions, it still remains entirely possible that the world is as it appears to us to be" (32).[14] This is not the proclamation of an

11. Breazeale 1979: 67–76; KSA 7: 537–59. The following citations from "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician" refer to page numbers in Breazeale 1979.

12. "Werth der Philosophie: Reinigen von verworrenen und abergläub<ischen> Vorstellungen. [G]egen den Dogmatismus der Wissenschaften . . . " (KSA 7: 542).

13. Breazeale 1979: 3–58; see Breazeale 1979: lvii–lix for notes on the sources of the contents of this section.

14. KSA 7: 459

atheist about real entities behind the appearances ("there is no thing-in-itself") or of an atheist about truth ("it is not true that there is a thing-in-itself," or "there is no truth, since there are things-in-themselves to which our beliefs can never correspond"), but the proclamation of a (principled) agnostic—a budding cultural "physician" who, like Sextus, diagnoses the "stultifying effects" associated with dogmatism and reports on a cure.

I would like to consider briefly one further passage on the basis of which commentators have argued that we may safely dismiss Nietzsche's warning against dogmatism. Shortly after the passages above, Nietzsche says:

> The insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that human beings do, and . . . the question as to which one of these perceptions of the world is the more correct is quite meaningless, for this would have to be decided by the standard of *correct perception*, which means by a standard which is *not available*. But in any case it seems to me that 'the correct perception'—which means 'the adequate expression of an object in the subject'—is a contradictory impossibility. (TL 86)

The tone of this passage is strident indeed, but I do not think Nietzsche's rejection in this context of the idea of a "correct perception" must be wholly incompatible with the Skeptical attitude I have been ascribing to him.

To see that this is so, I would like to call attention first to the parity of reasoning between Nietzsche's appeal to the variation in perception among different sorts of animals and a standard Pyrrhonian argument, presented by Sextus as the first mode, by which Pyrrhonists aim to bring about suspension of judgment by establishing the absence of a criterion for judging among various and conflicting perceptions (PH I 40–79). After presenting a catalogue of varieties of animals—including the same birds and bees Nietzsche mentions—and the observable differences among their organs of sense, Sextus argues that it would be improbable to suppose such different organs produce similar perceptions.[15] Since we

15. Compare Nietzsche's otherwise highly peculiar conjecture in *Daybreak*, in a passage that reads as if it came straight from Diogenes' *Lives*: "How different nature must have appeared to the Greeks if, as we have to admit, their eyes were blind to blue and green, and instead of the former saw deep brown, instead of the latter yellow (so that they used the same word, for example, to describe the color of hair, that of the cornflower, and that of the southern sea; and again the same word for the

do not have "a proof through which to prefer our own appearances to those produced in the so-called irrational animals," we are compelled to suspend judgment about the nature or cause of the perception (PH I 61).[16] For the Skeptic, producing arguments against the availability of a criterion of judging is a central task.

Nietzsche's main point in the passage under consideration is, similarly, the absence of a criterion: the question which of two (or several) perceptions is "more correct" he dismisses on the grounds that it would have to be decided by a standard "which is not available," namely "the standard of *correct perception*." For Nietzsche to claim that we lack a standard by which to judge which of several competing impressions is the correct one, so that we cannot know which if any is correct, is importantly different from his claiming that none of them is or could be correct. Indeed, lacking such a standard it is not clear what possible warrant we could have for making the claim that none is correct (a point I shall return to just below). And to see Nietzsche as having realized this and as having taken the Skeptical (and in this case more conservative) line is consistent with his caveats here and elsewhere that we not "presume" to make the stronger claim. For instance, he remarks later that, "if each of us had a different kind of sense perception—if we could perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant, or if one of us saw a stimulus as red, another as blue, while a third even heard the same stimulus as a sound—*then no one would speak* of such a regularity of nature" (TL 87, emphasis added). Such an acute demonstration of the relativity of perception would unseat our confidence in declaring that one perception or the other gets closer to the nature of things.

But what of Nietzsche's more dogmatic-sounding claim that "in any case it seems to me that 'the correct perception'... is a contradictory impossibility" (TL 86)? One might suppose that whatever is a "contradictory impossibility" necessarily does not exist.

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color of the greenest plants and that of the human skin, honey, and yellow resins: it has been shown that their greatest painters reproduced their world using only black, white, red and yellow)—how different and how much more like mankind nature must have appeared to them, since in their eyes the coloration of mankind also preponderated in nature and the latter as it were floated in the atmosphere of human coloration!" (D 426)

16. Extrapolating on this argument, the Skeptics advance another argument for suspension of judgment "depending on the differences among humans" (PH I 79–90).

Thus, whoever declares something a "contradictory impossibility" has issued a negatively dogmatic statement, and at that point abandons his skepticism. At first, this reading looks perfectly reasonable. If in fact Nietzsche means to declare that the notion of a 'correct perception' is an impossibility, then a simple appeal to the principle of bivalence ought to lead us to the conclusion that all perceptions must then be *incorrect*. However, Nietzsche has alleged in the sentence prior to this one the unavailability of any standard of correctness in perception, and it seems to follow from that charge that we are no more warranted in asserting (1) that *no perception* is correct than we could be in asserting (2) that one is *more correct than* another. Thus, it seems that this passage either marks a spectacular failure of philosophical consistency on Nietzsche's part, in which case it cannot be appealed to in support of much of anything, or forces a rereading of one or the other statement to make sense of the whole.

Here is how I suggest we understand Nietzsche's claim that "the correct perception" is a "contradictory impossibility." The first thing necessary is to properly identify the contradictory of 'correct', which in this case will not be 'incorrect' (i.e., false) but 'not-correct'. ('Correct' and 'incorrect' are in this case not contradictories but contraries.) A perception, then, must be either correct or not-correct, just as the surface of any solid, colored object must be either red or not-red. So for Nietzsche, that "correct perception" is a "contradictory impossibility" means not that all perceptions are incorrect but that all perceptions are not-correct. When we talk about "the correct perception," what we fall into on Nietzsche's view is not so much a logical contradiction (like denying the claim that "all bachelors are unmarried") as a kind of category mistake: we presuppose that perceptions are truth-evaluable, but this is simply not the right way to think about or describe them. Perceptions have phenomenal content, not propositional content—they do not take judgments as objects. This way of explaining Nietzsche's comment about why the notion of a "correct perception" is a "contradictory impossibility" makes better sense of his earlier remark in "On Truth and Lie" that our "senses nowhere lead to truth" (TL 80). Much later, in *Twilight of the Idols*, he will insist of the senses that "they do not lie at all. It is what we *make* of their evidence that first introduces a lie into it. . . . 'Reason' is the cause of the falsification of the evidence of the senses" (TI 'Reason' 2). If the evidence of the senses is ever falsified, it happens when we form a judgment on the basis of perception;

brute perceptions, however, cannot properly be assessed for truth or falsity.[17]

Though Nietzsche himself puts forward no such explanatory argument in this text, it makes sense as a reconstruction of the reasoning that underwrites this well-known passage. And, furthermore, it seems to shed a great deal more light on the immediately succeeding sentence:

> But in any case it seems to me that "the correct perception"—which would mean "the adequate expression of an object in the subject"—is a contradictory impossibility. *For between two absolutely different spheres*, as between subject and object, *there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression*; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue—for which there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force. (TL 86, emphasis added)

"On Truth and Lie" is a difficult essay to read, in part because the ideas Nietzsche puts forward—though I take them to be rough expressions of sensible views that remain relatively unchanged over the course of his career—are often expressed poetically; Nietzsche is at this stage a young rhetorician. It is difficult to tell *what* we are to make, for instance, of the "freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force" that is required for "a suggestive transference [and] stammering translation" of one "completely foreign tongue" into another. But in this case at least, by understanding perceptions as not liable, by themselves, to being either correct or incorrect (they are not-correct, or perhaps even 'non-correct'), we have as much help as I think we could ask for in reading such an opaque and difficult passage.

Nietzsche's explicit warnings about dogmatism and his pronouncements about the value of skepticism, both of which we find throughout the early notebook writings, coupled with his statements about the danger and rashness of our making pronouncements about the nature of a reality behind the appearances all contribute

17. Nietzsche makes a strikingly similar point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, with a similar story to be told about the conflict between our sensory apparatus and what it does versus what we expect of "knowledge" and, furthermore, the role our language has in perpetuating confusion on this point. "I will say this a hundred times: 'immediate certainty', like 'absolute knowledge' and the 'thing in itself' contains a *contradictio in adjecto*. For once and for all, we should free ourselves from the seduction of words!" (BGE 16)

something to this interpretation and should raise our suspicions against interpretations that saddle Nietzsche with just the views he seems to regard as symptoms of weak and degenerate characters. Indeed, it is important to recognize this attitude in Nietzsche's early work, since it comes to play an even larger role in his philosophical development and finds expression in the published works as well.

CHAPTER 3

The Question of Nietzsche's "Naturalism"

The question why Nietzsche never prepared "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense" for publication is seldom raised explicitly, perhaps because its answer would almost certainly involve more conjectures about "authorial intention" than are possible to bear out or are even fashionable to pose nowadays. But without venturing too far into this thorny territory, we can suggest that a prose stylist of Nietzsche's caliber has all the resources necessary to determine when a piece of writing is as unclear as "On Truth and Lie" remained, his honing and polishing notwithstanding. For whatever reasons, Nietzsche shelved "On Truth and Lie"; but that he did not abandon its central ideas is evident in the published works that closely followed it.

If I have been right about the depth of the suspicion about metaphysical speculation expressed in that essay and about the direction in which it led Nietzsche (i.e., not toward the conclusion that knowledge is impossible or that truth is relative because hopelessly anthropomorphic, but toward a principled agnosticism about metaphysical propositions), then "On Truth and Lie" will have squared poorly with other works Nietzsche undertook around the same time: in particular, with some of the earliest *Untimely Meditations*, one of which (published in 1874) was an homage to Schopenhauer, whose metaphysical flights of fancy Nietzsche had not yet begun to criticize as such. By the time *Human, All Too Human* appeared, however, all this had changed, as he openly reappraised his relationship with

a figure whom he once regarded as having had an inestimable influence on his thought. In the preface to the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche reflects on his previous publications, characterizing himself as having been "deep in the midst of moral skepticism and destructive analysis," which eventually led him to distance himself from Schopenhauer's beliefs—and from much else besides (HH 2: P1). Thereafter, the skeptical themes of "On Truth and Lie" could be safely resurrected and expressed more clearly and perspicuously.

The opening parable of "On Truth and Lie," with which I began the introduction to this book, threw a spotlight on the truly self-congratulatory and flattering nature of "knowledge." In *Human, All Too Human*, which will be the focus of discussion in this chapter, Nietzsche revives the connection between the concept of knowledge and the psychological phenomena of pride and vanity, even once putting the point, as in "On Truth and Lie," in terms of a conjecture about language—the source, as he sees it, of much metaphysical confusion:

> The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal. (HH 1: 11; cf. HH 1: 5)

So preoccupied is Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human* with combating the proud self-promotion of human beings above the natural world, and so sharply does he turn away from the metaphysical extravagance of Schopenhauer's views and toward the arena of the natural sciences in doing so, that this book has sometimes been said to mark a "positivist" turn in his thought. For the naturalist readings that have recently gained such currency in Nietzsche scholarship, this work is a crucial source of evidence for the claim that Nietzsche has by this time adopted a methodological program that is best described as "naturalistic," that is to say, a program in which the standards of evidence and rules of inference used successfully in the natural sciences should serve also as guidelines and models for reasoning in philosophy, and one in which the results of philosophical reasoning should be reconcilable with those of the sciences.

In this chapter, I will examine this "turn" and what precisely it involved. In my view, given the continuity between "On Truth and Lie" and *Human, All Too Human* in terms of their skeptical orientation, there is no fundamental shift in Nietzsche's work in the 1870s. Rather, what he finds are new and more powerful ways of expressing already nascent critiques. As we will see, a number of intellectual forces worked to effect this development; in particular, as Schopenhauer's influence began to wane, other important figures came to the fore.

Among these, Friedrich Lange has duly been recognized as one of the most central. Although Nietzsche discovered his *Geschichte des Materialismus* only a year after encountering Schopenhauer's work, Lange continued to have a powerful hold on his imagination even after Nietzsche had become scathingly critical of his former "teacher." George Stack has made an elegant and compelling case for Lange's sizable and enduring influence on Nietzsche's thought,[1] but in his analysis of the early writings, he goes beyond identifying Lange as the source of Nietzsche's discovery of the irreducible anthropomorphism in the concept of "knowledge." As so many readers of "On Truth and Lie" have done, Stack misses the skeptical concerns expressed there and concludes that Nietzsche is at work developing a radical theory of truth:

> In this overly condensed essay we find a number of interesting things. The notion that neither in perception nor knowledge do we grasp the "true essence of things," the understanding of language as metaphorical, abstract, simplifying, schematizing, and the anthropomorphic nature of truth in general and scientific truth in particular. We find here what seems to be the earliest presentation of a humanistic or pragmatic theory of truth.[2]

Here, the exclusivity and thoroughness Stack claims for Lange's influence tends to overshadow the Greek thinkers who were never far from Nietzsche's mind and leaves less room for us to ask what other authors Nietzsche discovered and admired who might have urged him even further along the same path.

In the first half of this chapter, I argue for the influence of one such figure, Michel de Montaigne, whose writings are deeply indebted to the Pyrrhonian tradition and who has so far been

1. Stack 1983.
2. Stack 1983: 114.

underappreciated as a philosophical influence on Nietzsche.[3] As this picture develops, what will come into focus is more than another face in the small and select crowd of Nietzsche's philosophical interlocutors. We want to be able to do more than identify the various thumbprints on Nietzsche's texts; ideally, we would like to know what brought these thinkers together in this company in the first place. To be sure, Stack's careful study reveals how extensively he borrowed from Lange, many instances being "not a case of influence alone, but direct appropriation": "By examining the specifics of Lange's text, we discover the origin of many of what are taken to be Nietzsche's original arguments and insights."[4] And it is now beyond doubt that Nietzsche not only read but studied carefully and returned over and over to Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*. Yet the question of how Nietzsche made use of the thinkers he most admired is different from the question of what inspired his enthusiasm for those thinkers in the first place and why *they* are the figures whose company Nietzsche sought time and again. With respect to Montaigne, I argue that Nietzsche not only quotes from and refers to his work, borrowing and appropriating as it suited his purpose, but that his esteem for that work was inspired by the artfulness and ease with which Montaigne presented ideas that were already attractive to Nietzsche. His own philosophical orientation being more developed than is sometimes realized, even by the mid-1870s, Nietzsche discovered in Montaigne (and perhaps in Lange) not so much a mentor or teacher, but a kindred spirit or ally in a struggle against dogmatism that was already under way.

3. In fact, the relationship between Montaigne and Nietzsche has seldom been carefully examined. There has yet to be a book-length study devoted solely to Montaigne and Nietzsche, and article-length treatments of the relationship between their works and thought have been surprisingly scarce. What discussions there have been tend to locate the connections between Nietzsche and Montaigne mainly in matters of either literary or personal style. Donnellan 1982, for example, argues at length that Nietzsche's "aphoristic" writing style is ascribable primarily to his reading of French writers. But studies that examine Montaigne's influence on Nietzsche with an eye toward philosophical rather than literary or stylistic issues have been almost nonexistent. I am aware of only two: Molner 1993 and Vivarelli 1994. But see also Lom 2001, which devotes significant discussion to Montaigne and Nietzsche. On the topic of Nietzsche and the French tradition more generally, see Williams 1952 and, more recently, Pippin 2006, which argues that Nietzsche ought to be read as a French moralist.

4. Stack 1983: 6.

What we will have to ask now, however, is whether and how the skeptical attitude I attribute to Nietzsche even in these early writings could be compatible with the scientific methods of investigation and the naturalistic attitudes that he champions in this period in his career, and specifically in *Human, All Too Human*. Must the very skepticism that inoculates him against the "sickness" of the metaphysical outlook and motivates his "overcoming" of Schopenhauer inadvertently infect and even undermine his esteem for the sciences as models for rational inquiry and his apparent insistence on restoring human beings to their proper place in the natural world? Or does the value he attaches to the "little unpretentious truths" revealed by scientific inquiry (HH 1: 3) rather indicate a turn as much away from skepticism as from speculative philosophy? These questions touch upon a more general philosophical worry about the compatibility of skepticism and the naturalistic program Nietzsche has been said to have adopted; assuaging that worry will be the task of the second half of this chapter.

The Rejection of Dogmatism in *Human, All Too Human*

From the very first of its nine major sections, the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* narrates a struggle between science on the one hand and philosophy on the other. For understanding what is at stake in this contest, it is important to keep in mind that the denotation of science [*Wissenschaft*] is not limited to what we think of as the "exact" or "natural" sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry, and the like), but encompasses any organized body of knowledge that is cultivated by the rigorous application of a given methodology. The term is used not only with respect to the natural sciences [*Naturwissenschaften*] but also to the humanities [*Geistewissenschaften*], and so may include areas of inquiry we now refer to as the "behavioral sciences" (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology) among other things, such as philology [*Altertumswissenschaft* or *Altphilologie*]. Philosophy, by contrast, is specified far more narrowly. As Nietzsche uses the term throughout *Human, All Too Human*, "philosophy" is usually shorthand for "metaphysical philosophy" and singles out for criticism the discourse of metaphysics that in Nietzsche's opinion has dominated the philosophical landscape at least since Plato.

In the sense in which Nietzsche worries about it, "metaphysical philosophy" promotes speculation about such weird, supra-sensible entities as Platonic forms, Descartes' "immaterial substances," and Kantian things-in-themselves. That its contributions include, for instance, theories about the existence and immortality of the soul accounts for Nietzsche's grouping "metaphysical philosophy" together with religion and art as "arts of narcosis" (HH 1: 108). These bodies of theory endeavor (consciously or not) to comfort us by assuaging our fear of death, our existential anxieties about the purposelessness of suffering, and so on. According to Nietzsche, the task and future of science as he sees it is to "[cast] suspicion on the consolations of metaphysics, religion and art" (HH 1: 251) in two ways: by showing them up as incommensurable with respectable standards of justification and explanation and by raising practical objections to these ersatz consolations.

The first of these practical objections, which we might call collectively Nietzsche's "pragmatic argument" against metaphysical philosophy, is that its claims and concerns are utterly idle epistemically: "Even if the existence of such a world [the metaphysical world] were never so well demonstrated," Nietzsche charges, "it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge, more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck" (HH 1: 9). Even if we could produce evidence to support our hypotheses, the "truths" proposed by metaphysics would still be empty of significance since knowledge of them would do nothing to change our experience of the world. Once the scientific spirit has taken firm hold, Nietzsche hopes, "Perhaps we shall then recognize that the thing in itself is worthy of Homeric laughter: that it appeared to be so much, indeed everything, and is actually empty, that is to say empty of significance" (HH 1: 16).[5]

5. Here, the hope is that the scientific worldview will cast suspicion on the superstitious fantasies currently employed to cope with suffering, which ascetic systems of morality designate as unconditionally evil. How should suffering be dealt with when these fantasies have been discredited? See *Gay Science* 302, in which Nietzsche explains that with such Homeric laughter, or "Homeric happiness," in one's soul "one is also more capable of suffering than any other creature under the sun!" I will return in chapter 5 to the connection between such laughter, or gaiety, and the healthy outlook that Nietzsche explicitly regards as requisite for overcoming ascetic ideals and revaluating values, as well as the issue of suffering and Nietzsche's connection between the capacity for suffering and one's overall state of health.

In addition, Nietzsche views metaphysical explanations as psychologically suspect on account of their origin in the need to secure a transcendent guarantee of life's value.

> That is why there is in all philosophies so much high-flying metaphysics and such a dread of the explanations offered by physics, which seem so modest and insignificant; for the significance of knowledge for life *has* to appear as great as it possibly can. Here lies the antagonism between the individual regions of science and philosophy. The latter wants, as art does, to bestow upon life and action the greatest possible profundity and significance. (HH 1: 6)

As such, metaphysical explanations are symptomatic of psychological weakness and ill health. Like Freud's explanation of the belief in God as an infantile projection, Nietzsche's account of the origin of faith in various metaphysical theories is intended not to demonstrate their falsehood but to undermine confidence in them.[6] But what is more, the belief in metaphysical theories and religion will, on Nietzsche's account, turn out to be incompatible with the achievement of the best sort of state either for an individual or for a society. So one of his central tasks in *Human, All Too Human* is to champion the spirit of scientific inquiry as one that belongs to "higher cultures," at the same time exposing the psychological drives behind metaphysical philosophy in such a way as to discourage its practice altogether: "It is the mark of a higher culture to value the little unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous method more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men, which blind us and make us happy" (HH 1: 3).[7] A "higher culture" values these "little unpretentious truths," then, not because it values truth as such—certainly not in any unqualified way—but because it recognizes the pretentions Nietzsche has in view and successfully avoids them. The hoped-for result is to purge philosophy of its metaphysical pretense, divorce it from religious, artistic and other "narcotic" endeavors, and claim for it a place alongside other empirically grounded, "naturalistic" modes of inquiry—a view that directly reverses the position Nietzsche

6. Compare his remark in *Beyond Good and Evil* about altruistic feelings: "To say that these feelings are *pleasing* (for the one who has them, for the one who enjoys their fruits, and even for the onlooker) is not yet an argument in their *favor*, but rather constitutes a demand for caution. So let us be cautious!" (BGE 33).

7. See also HH 1: 9, 264 and 609.

advocates in the earlier *Birth of Tragedy*. But what does this "naturalism" entail?

As Charles Taylor once described it, "naturalism" is "not just the view that man can be seen as a part of nature—in one sense or other this would surely be accepted by everyone—but that the nature of which he is a part is to be understood according to the canons which emerged in the seventeenth-century revolution in natural science."[8] Both postulates are on offer in *Human, All Too Human*, in which Nietzsche first embarks on the project of "translating man back into nature"—a project he later describes with characteristic urgency (BGE 230; cf. GS 109). As this "translation" begins in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche maintains, first, that human beings should be understood as continuous with the rest of nature, asserting that for too long "the animal has, especially in the interest of ecclesiastical teaching, been placed too far below man" (HH 1: 101). The view that humans ought not to place themselves "above" nature is a position Nietzsche continues to express not only throughout *Human, All Too Human*, but throughout his career.[9]

Further, he avers that metaphysical assumptions, unlike empirical claims, are supported by "the worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge [i.e., a priori speculation], not the best of all [i.e., empirical observation]." Along these lines, he goes so far as to conclude, "When one has disclosed these methods as the foundation of all extant religions and metaphysical systems, one has refuted them!" (HH 1: 9).[10] For all the reasons his pragmatic argument suggests (i.e., that metaphysical and religious beliefs are psychologically suspect and do no positive good), and for the reason that they fail to be methodologically well grounded, Nietzsche eschews engagement in discourses that would place facts (or statements) about the structure of reality beyond our capacity to verify them. To take this seriously will mean keeping to scientific methods of explanation, which will in turn prevent our straying into murky areas of a priori

8. Taylor 1985: 2.

9. See, e.g., GS 115 ("[Man] placed himself in a false order of rank in relation to animals and nature") and GS 77.

10. On the value of science belonging more to its methodology than its results, see also: "*Science furthers ability, not knowledge*" (HH 1: 256), and "the scientific spirit rests upon an insight into the procedures, and if these were lost all the other products of science together would not suffice to prevent a restoration of superstition and folly" (HH 1: 635).

philosophical speculation and committing ourselves to beliefs that are incommensurate with the picture of psychological well-being Nietzsche wants to draw. He states that "one cannot *believe* [the] dogmas of religion and metaphysics if one has in one's heart and head the rigorous methods of acquiring truth" (HH 1: 109). The abandonment of such dogmas means the banishment of myths that had served to substantiate a hierarchy that ranks human beings substantially above the rest of nature. The belief in that hierarchy becomes unsustainable, further encouraging us to grasp and to appreciate the continuity Nietzsche emphasizes between human beings and the natural world.

At this point it is important to see that the naturalism that finds its voice in *Human, All Too Human*, as I have characterized it so far, does not commit Nietzsche to the positive ontological thesis (which comes packaged together with some articulations of naturalism) that there are *only* natural entities.[11] In fact, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche explicitly avoids the dogmatic denial of supra-sensible entities and instead adopts a skeptical attitude about the existence of purely metaphysical posits: "It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it is hardly to be disputed. We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head; while the question nonetheless remains what of the world would still be there if one had cut it off" (HH 1: 9; cf. BGE 34). In short, if there are no agreed-upon standards for adjudicating such disputes, then we will not settle the question whether non-natural stuff exists because there will be nothing available to us that could count as evidence either for or against it. True, the question "What of the world would be left over if we could transcend our perspective?" does remain open; the answer could turn out to be "nothing" or even "things-in-themselves." The point is that Nietzsche's critique demands that he remain agnostic on this issue and maintain that the most sensible thing to do is to suspend our judgment about such idle and speculative matters.

11. As in Philip Pettit's version, for instance: "Naturalism is the doctrine that there are only natural things: only natural particulars and only natural properties" (1992: 297). Or according to Bernard Linsky and Edward Zalta: "Naturalism is the realist ontology that recognizes only those objects required by the explanations of the natural sciences" (1995: 525). Both are quoted by Leiter (1998), who provides a helpful "taxonomy" of naturalisms.

Montaigne as Nietzsche's Educator

Nietzsche's reconsideration of Schopenhauer—and Schopenhauer's metaphysics in particular—makes good sense in light of his heavy engagement in the early to mid-1870s with the skeptical tradition of French moral psychology. Although as a young scholar Nietzsche had no more than a passing familiarity with French thought as part of the regular curriculum at boarding school at Pforta (1858–64), in Leipzig (1864–69) he encountered two major sources of his interest in the French. One was Schopenhauer, and the other was Lange; both authors refer frequently and favorably to the French moralists. It was not until Nietzsche took up his teaching appointment in Basel in 1869, however, that his sporadic contact with the French tradition began to bear more substantial fruit, prompting him to begin a serious and systematic study of their work. W. D. Williams speculates that once that study got under way, from 1870 through the publication of *Human, All Too Human* eight years later, "it is predominantly the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century [French] moralists whom he reads."[12]

During this time, Nietzsche's friendships with the native French-speaking Franz Overbeck and Ida Rothpletz-Overbeck were of critical importance.[13] Since Nietzsche's facility with French lagged behind his skills in the classical languages, he would read and discuss works with friends from whom he urged translations. Ida Overbeck was an especially helpful tutor and guide for Nietzsche; she had published some of her own translations of French authors, and she held regular "French evenings" at which friends met to read and discuss works in French, especially those of the moral psychologists. Also, Nietzsche's intimate acquaintance with the Wagners (Cosima Wagner in particular) played a central role in his growing interest in French thought. After accepting his appointment at Basel, Nietzsche spent his first few holidays with the

12. Williams 1952: 8. Williams's conjecture is made entirely plausible by the many references in Nietzsche's notes not only to Montaigne but to Voltaire, La Rochefoucauld, Chamfort, Stendhal, and others in conjunction with his glowing remarks about these figures in his published works, and by his paraphrases and quotes of figures such as Montaigne.

13. The following biographical sketch owes much to the introductory chapters of both Donnellan 1982 and Williams 1952.

Wagners at Tribschen. At Christmas 1870, Nietzsche gave Cosima Wagner a new essay, "On the Dionysian World-view," and she presented him with a complete edition of Montaigne's *Essais* in the original French, some of which they had been translating together.[14] The gift at least suggests that Nietzsche's short acquaintance with Montaigne had led to an immediate interest that continued to grow over the next several years.

By the winter of 1876, about the same time he began work on *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche had announced his intention finally to step out of the shadow of Schopenhauer's thought, and he gestured in a letter to Cosima Wagner toward the direction his work would soon take:

> Would you be surprised, if I confess to you a difference with Schopenhauer's teaching that has been gradually emerging, but which appeared suddenly to me? I have been in disagreement with him on almost all general theses. Even as I wrote about Schopenhauer, I noticed that I found myself beyond everything dogmatic in his work; with me, everything rested with the *human*.[15]

To make sense of this last claim, we have to understand how the terms "dogmatic" and "human" can be taken as contraries. It is not immediately apparent, perhaps, but if I am right about the relevant senses of "philosophy" and "science" in *Human, All Too Human*, then Nietzsche in his letter is juxtaposing Schopenhauer's metaphysical philosophy (which, like religion, is characteristically dogmatic) with his own burgeoning interest in moral psychology and the question of the origin of moral sentiments and values (scientific interests, on Nietzsche's view). The contrast Nietzsche expresses here prefigures the distinction between philosophy and science that will be fully articulated in *Human, All Too Human*, where he observes of Schopenhauer, "Much science resounds in his teaching, but what dominates it is not science but the old familiar 'metaphysical need' "—the very condition that makes metaphysical philosophy psychologically suspect (HH 1: 26; cf. 2: P). The publication of *Human, All Too Human*, then, only marks the point at which Nietzsche was ready to commit *in print* to worries about Schopenhauer's system

14. Nietzsche lists the gifts he has received, including the "handsome volume" of Montaigne's collected works, in a letter to his mother and sister (30 December 1870).

15. Letter to Cosima Wagner, 19 December 1876.

that had been haunting him for some time.[16] Of course, Nietzsche never fully repudiated Schopenhauer or his thought; indeed, he positions himself explicitly in later works as an "inheritor" of Schopenhauer's teaching (GS 99). Clearly, though, the early 1870s marked a period of serious critical reevaluation of, and disillusionment with, Schopenhauer's thought (HH 2: P).

Prior to and throughout the writing of *Human, All Too Human*, however, Michel de Montaigne remained an important behind-the-scenes interlocutor and ally in Nietzsche's struggle to liberate himself from Schopenhauer's metaphysics.[17] In "Schopenhauer as Educator," the 1874 essay celebrating Schopenhauer as his greatest teacher, Nietzsche carefully refrains from discussing the other's doctrines, already raising the question of whether he is attempting to distance himself from their content. Instead, he focuses on Schopenhauer's style as a writer and his virtues as a person; but even in these arenas, Schopenhauer's imperfections have begun to come to light. In a revealing passage, Nietzsche makes a direct comparison between Schopenhauer and Montaigne in respect of two characteristics he prizes most highly—honesty and cheerfulness—and suggests strongly that Schopenhauer suffers somewhat by the comparison, particularly with respect to honesty: "I know of only one writer whom I would compare with Schopenhauer, *indeed set above him*, in respect of honesty: Montaigne. That such a man wrote has truly augmented the joy of living on this earth. . . . Schopenhauer has a second quality in

16. It is in Nietzsche's reflections on his first years in Leipzig that he reports having chanced upon Schopenhauer's work in a bookstore (FS 3: 297f.); but only shortly after, in his notes "On Schopenhauer," he is already reflecting critically, and sometimes sharply so, on Schopenhauer's notion of the will "as thing-in-itself" (FS 3: 352–61). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for Oxford University Press for drawing my attention more closely to this material.

17. Contra Clark (1998), whose account is surely the clearest and most forcefully argued investigation of this issue to date, I look to Montaigne (rather than Schopenhauer himself!) to help explain Nietzsche's "naturalistic turn" and his rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysical philosophy. I fully agree with Clark's general account of Nietzsche's naturalism and with her characterization of the major project of *Human, All Too Human* as an attempt "to induce skepticism concerning the metaphysical world by showing it to be cognitively superfluous" (1998: 49). But my task here is to push this interpretation even further by using "skepticism" in a technical (i.e., Pyrrhonian) sense that Clark does not recognize and by connecting it to a tradition of Greek skepticism for whose transmission Montaigne becomes partly responsible.

common with Montaigne, as well as honesty: a cheerfulness that really cheers" (UM 3: 2, emphasis added). Now, our interest is in Montaigne's philosophical influence on Nietzsche's reassessment of Schopenhauer, and, strictly speaking, this remark draws no more attention to Montaigne's doctrines than to Schopenhauer's. But it does tell us that in the years preceding the appearance of *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche not only read both figures but read them comparatively. Their juxtaposition in the context of "Schopenhauer as Educator," a meditation on the intellectual backdrop of his own work, suggests that both men are candidates for playing an important influential role in Nietzsche's thought. Montaigne surpasses Schopenhauer in some of the very respects in which Schopenhauer has been a role model for the young Nietzsche.

This remark is, in addition, one of only three explicit references to Montaigne in the *Untimely Meditations*—so the sudden high praise of him may seem out of place. In all three volumes of *Human, All Too Human*, in fact, Montaigne is singled out by name only four times.[18] (Though "the *great* Arthur Schopenhauer" is mentioned more frequently, we should note that virtually all of those references temper their praise with some qualification or other.) But Nietzsche's infrequent mention of Montaigne is in no way incompatible with his holding him in quite high esteem; Nietzsche does not always acknowledge his intellectual debts. Furthermore, it is important to take account of the tone and content of those scenes in which these two characters do play a role: in two of the four aphorisms of *Human, All Too Human* in which Nietzsche discusses Montaigne, Schopenhauer is mentioned also and ranked either on a par with or else slightly below him in one respect or another.[19] Moreover, we must take into account what we might call Montaigne's appearances "incognito" in *Human, All Too Human* (as well as other works) and not assume that he is present only when named. (The same anecdote about superstition that Nietzsche relates in the fifth part of *Human, All Too Human*, "Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture," for example, is colorfully narrated by Montaigne in his essay "On

18. HH 1: 176, 1: 408, 3: 86, 3: 214

19. HH 2: 408, 3: 214; for what follows, note too that the context of the second passage draws attention to Montaigne as a writer whom "the Greeks would have understood" and also *as a skeptic*.

Prognostications.")[20] Finally, many of Nietzsche's remarks about "free" and "fettered" spirits in *Human, All Too Human* are echoes or even paraphrases of Montaigne's various condemnations of the uncritical acceptance of tradition—especially religious tradition.[21] The image of the "free spirit," of course, was particularly significant for Nietzsche at the time of his writing *Human, All Too Human*, which he subtitled "A Book for Free Spirits" and which itself replaced a fifth *Untimely Meditation* on the topic, planned but never written.[22]

Montaigne's *Human, All Too Human*

All this testifies to Nietzsche's engagement with and esteem for Montaigne, but only a look at the texts themselves will help us understand how Montaigne came to be enlisted on Nietzsche's side of the struggle between science and philosophy. We can get a vivid sense of both the naturalistic attitude represented in Montaigne and the skepticism which so impressed him by considering a representative essay, Montaigne's longest sustained philosophical enterprise, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*.[23] The ostensible purpose of the *Apology* was to defend a tract called *Natural Theology*, written by an obscure fifteenth-century Spanish physician and theologian, Raymond Sebond, who argued for the necessity of divine illumination as a guide to human understanding. The pretense, however, is a thin one: Montaigne nowhere in this essay betrays genuine sympathy with Sebond's thesis about "divine illumination." In fact, after the first few pages of the *Apology*, Montaigne hardly mentions

20. HH 1: 255; *Essais* 1: 11. References to Montaigne will hereafter be given as *Essais*, as indicated in the scheme of abbreviations, and cited by volume number and number of the essay, followed by page number where applicable.

21. Compare, e.g., HH 1: 226 and *Essais* 2: 12, 497. Vivarelli (1994) makes a case for the thesis that Montaigne serves as an important model for the "free spirit" in *Human, All Too Human*. Donnellan (1982: 23) also remarks that Nietzsche's notebooks contain numerous "sketches of Montaigne's role as one of the first free-thinkers." This motif in fact makes for perhaps the most obvious comparison between Nietzsche and Montaigne, one of the chief parallels noted by commentators so far.

22. Schlecta 1975: 55.

23. What follows is a slightly condensed version of the discussion in Berry 2004b.

Sebond and never appeals to the text of *Natural Theology*. And at any rate, Montaigne had by this time already gained a reputation as an intellectual libertine and a challenger of both religious and moral conventions.

Of course his skeptical and iconoclastic tendencies, in addition to their having earned him something of a renegade status within the Church, were an important facet of Nietzsche's portrait of Montaigne. As he observes in one notebook passage: "One is amazed at all the hesitation and halting in Montaigne's argumentation. But, having been put on the *Index* [*of Forbidden Books*] in the Vatican, and having long been an object of suspicion for all parties, it is perhaps on purpose that he expresses his dangerous tolerance and his scandalous impartiality in the sardonic form of a kind of question" (KSA 13: 32). Although he generally refrained from attacking religious orthodoxy overtly, Montaigne did challenge the dogmas that typically accord with that orthodoxy—like the belief that human beings are endowed with special cognitive gifts, which, properly exercised, will reveal the features of God's design. Skepticism on these issues raised further questions for Montaigne about humans' ability to know religious truths. Like Nietzsche, he came to think the dogmas promoted by religious and philosophical speculation were not only unsustainable but also idle: his position therefore finds him in perfect harmony with Nietzsche's pragmatic argument against metaphysical and religious discourses.

Essentially, Montaigne's *Apology* served him as an opportunity to attack these discourses and marshal an array of his favorite skeptical arguments against what he identified as the pretensions of human reason. *Natural Theology* met with a poor reception for many reasons, but Montaigne chooses to focus on the oft-heard criticism that Sebond's arguments are simply incurably bad and unworthy of serious attention: "Some say that his arguments are weak and unsuited to what he wants to demonstrate; they set out to batter them down with ease. People like those need to be shaken rather more roughly, since they are more dangerous than the first[24] and more malicious" (*Essais* 2: 12, 500). So goes Montaigne's justification for spending the bulk of his long essay addressing this one issue in

24. Montaigne refers here to the first of two groups of critics he addresses, whose charge (that it is inappropriate to defend articles of faith by means of reason) he dismisses somewhat summarily before turning to the other critique; see *Essais* 2: 12, 492.

particular. Those who advance this criticism are "dangerous" and "malicious," on Montaigne's account, primarily because their complaint about the weakness of Sebond's arguments promotes the illusion that human reason is or ought to be more capable of delivering sound arguments for well-warranted conclusions. In his defense, if it can be called that, Montaigne makes no attempt to defend the strength or efficacy of Sebond's arguments at all. Instead, his stated aim is to "trample down human pride" in its own rational abilities; if Sebond's arguments are not any good, Montaigne declares, he should not be blamed—no one could have done any better! "Let us see," says Montaigne, launching fully into his skeptical mode, "whether a man has in his power any reasons stronger than those of Sebond—whether, indeed, it is in man to arrive at any certainty by argument and reflection" (*Essais* 2: 12, 501).

The *Apology* as a whole is oriented toward establishing precisely the point at which we have seen Nietzsche driving: that human beings arrogantly suppose their rational faculty makes them not only unique among creatures but also superior, and that they vastly overestimate its power and value. This overestimation, Montaigne thinks, is pure vanity on our part—"conceit and rashness," as the Skeptics say. As a corrective, Montaigne attempts to "naturalize" human beings by restoring them to their proper place and undermining whatever ground we think we have for accepting a distinction between human and animal capabilities. Harmonizing with the general spirit of *Human, All Too Human* as well as Nietzsche's indictment that "the animal has, especially in the interest of ecclesiastical teaching, been placed too far below man" (HH 1: 101), Montaigne says that one of his goals with the *Apology* is "to emphasize similarities with things human, so bringing Man into conformity with the majority of creatures. We are neither above nor below them" (*Essais* 2: 12, 513–14).

For our purposes, it is crucial to acknowledge the extent to which Montaigne's arrival at this position is indebted to the skeptical philosophy of Sextus Empiricus.[25] In general, Montaigne's work is distinguished by its erudition and its frequent and illustrative use of classical texts—indeed, this is one of the features to

25. On the sources and background of the *Apology* as well as an analysis of the text, see Coleman 1987 and Starobinski 1985. To a surprising degree, these and other commentaries have generally underestimated and sometimes neglected altogether the importance of the Pyrrhonian position for understanding the *Apology*.

which Nietzsche explicitly calls our attention as especially admirable (HH 3: 86, 3: 214).[26] Like Nietzsche, Montaigne was fascinated by the figure of Socrates, and more often than not he characterizes Socrates as a kind of skeptical figure.[27] Montaigne is also heavily indebted to Plutarch, Cicero, and Diogenes Laertius, and he read broadly in (and made copious use of) the major Hellenistic authors, including Seneca, Lucretius, and Sextus Empiricus; but the Pyrrhonian tradition seems to have had the most substantial influence on Montaigne. He draws heavily on a wealth of ancient sources in the *Apology* but borrows almost all of his best examples and arguments directly from Sextus's *Outlines*. This ancient skepticism, for Montaigne, motivates the naturalism in his views on human knowledge. That is to say, this position develops naturally out of Pyrrhonian skepticism as Montaigne understands and presents it.

According to the Pyrrhonists, when we draw conclusions and make assertions that take us beyond simple reports of the way things appear to us, we are entertaining speculations that cannot be justified without running afoul of one of the modes of Skepticism. It is in this spirit that Montaigne takes up the issue of whether reason is the possession of human beings alone and asks: "How can [Man], from the power of his own understanding, know the hidden, inward motivations of animate creatures? What comparison between us and them leads him to conclude that they have the attributes of senseless brutes?" (*Essais* 2: 12, 505). Crucially, Montaigne does not intend to advance a positive argument in favor of the rational powers of animals. As a Sextan Skeptic, he is above all concerned that his attacks on dogmatic convictions about human reason not become dogmatic themselves. Since Nietzsche is motivated by a similar concern in *Human, All Too Human*—namely, that his critique of dogmatic metaphysics not simply install new dogmas—this point is important. For it is this concern that, as we have seen, sets Pyrrhonism apart from other varieties of skepticism.

Montaigne is adamant in the *Apology* about refusing either to give his assent to or to deny hypotheses that take us beyond the

26. Montaigne's voluminous references throughout the *Essais* to thinkers in Greek and Roman antiquity confirm his passion for them (see *Essais* 2: 10 'On Books', 460–61); see also Friedrich (1991), especially his chapter "The Knowledge of Antiquity."

27. Friedrich 1991: 53. For a more thorough discussion of what skepticism in antiquity owes to Socrates, see Woodruff 1988 and Annas 1992.

level of straightforward empirical observation, and he makes extensive use of the Pyrrhonian strategy of introducing equipollent arguments. He discusses the use of this strategy explicitly just after his first lengthy borrowing from Sextus (*Essais* 2: 12, 562); but even earlier than that, he has begun employing it and continues to do so throughout the *Apology*. Entertaining some of the reasons that might be offered in support of the assumption that animals do not reason, for example, he seeks to show that if we must draw a conclusion from appearances, the weight of evidence on the side of animals having rationality fares just as well as the evidence against it. Thus, we should hold back from formulating any conclusions about the comparative power of animal and human rationality and stick to the appearances, which suggest we are in much the same epistemic position as the "brutes."

His mode of demonstration here is taken over directly from Sextus: He introduces seemingly inexhaustible catalogs of animal anecdotes hoping, by the sheer volume of examples he produces, to make an equal case for "raising animals up," as it were, from the lowly position to which human arrogance would relegate them. Rather than taking aim at one specific presupposition of this position, the arguments that follow have rather the effect of grapeshot fired from a cannon: any one of them is sufficient to cause some damage, but some may overshoot and others fall short of the mark, so their success really depends on their being deployed collectively. This dialectical strategy (common in Sextus's works and particularly fitting for the Skeptics, whose program precludes the typical philosophical attempt to launch one decisive argument in favor of a position) accounts for the number and variety of Montaigne's examples and appears frequently in Nietzsche's texts as well, where he compares human and animal perceptions of the world.

In the second half of the *Apology*, he turns his attention to what I have referred to as practical issues, namely, the question of whether metaphysical inquiries (e.g., questions about the nature or properties of God or the gods), the kind to which philosophers devote themselves, have any relevance to human happiness. Philosophical theories, Montaigne concludes, do not help us overcome the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, nor do they make physical or psychological pain easier to deal with. Such hypotheses, even if ultimately justifiable, would be irrelevant for much of human experience, and they certainly would do nothing to promote human well-being. The focus of the attack on "learning" in this part of the *Apology*, like Sextus's

multipronged attack on the "learned" (*mathēmatikoi*) in his early treatises, has the same target and the same force as Nietzsche's indictment of the usefulness of inquiry into metaphysics; it is not an attack on the value of inquiry itself. As Sextus remarks, on the question of whether Skeptics should study "natural science": "We do not study natural science in order to make assertions with firm conviction about any of the matters on which scientific beliefs are held. [We] touch on natural science in order to be able to oppose to every account an equal account" (PH I 18). This opposition and the suspension of judgment that follows upon it are what liberate the Pyrrhonist from the "conceit and rashness" that afflict their Dogmatic opponents.

Without this frame of reference, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that rigorous scientific inquiry should be undertaken not so much for the sake of acquiring one kind of belief as for ridding ourselves of another, wholly pernicious sort. Nietzsche advocates science as a remedy for the sickness he associates with the metaphysical outlook. The task of "rigorous science," he reminds us, "is quite gradually and step by step, [to] illuminate the history of the genesis of this world as idea—and for brief periods at any rate, lift us up out of the entire proceeding" (HH 1: 16). Its chief benefit is not the installation of new convictions about the way things "really" are. Far from it. Thus, Nietzsche urges that "gradually the scientific spirit in men has to bring to maturity that virtue of *cautious reserve* [*jene Tugend der vorsichtigen Enthaltung*], that *wise moderation* [*jene weise Mässigung*] which is more familiar in the domain of practical life than in the domain of theoretical life" (HH 1: 631). The attitude recommended here resonates deeply with the ephectic stance occupied by the Pyrrhonists. The avoidance of convictions, those "dangerous enemies of truth" (HH 1: 483), is a top priority for Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*: he declares openly that "the man of convictions is not the man of scientific thought" (HH 1: 630), a theme that is echoed loudly throughout the final section of the first volume (HH 1: 629–37).

Now, fundamentally, this task of illuminating the history and genesis of what Nietzsche calls the metaphysical "errors" in such a way as to reveal their underlying psychological drives and show that they are supported only by the "worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge" is a psychologist's task (HH 1: 9).[28] In this

28. Compare to his characterization of "the worst possible taste" as "the taste for the unconditional" (BGE 31).

respect, Nietzsche's praise of psychology as an indispensable and genuinely "scientific" project and his enlistment of Montaigne and that great tradition of French moral psychologists make perfect sense: "At its present state as a specific individual science the awakening of moral observation has become necessary, and mankind can no longer be spared the cruel sight of the moral dissecting table and its knives and forceps. For here there rules that science which asks after the origin and history of the so-called moral sensations" (HH 1: 37). The second major section of the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*, "On the History of the Moral Sensations," opens accordingly, with a lament about the general state of neglect into which the French moralists have fallen: "Why does one not even read the great masters of the psychological maxim anymore?" (HH 1: 35).[29] The answer, he suggests in the following section, is that the "unpleasant consequences of [their] art" have compelled us to direct our eyes away from it. The masters of the art of "psychical examination," according to Nietzsche, "are like skillful marksmen who again and again hit the bulls-eye—but it is the bulls-eye of human nature" (HH 1: 36). The "art" these marksmen undertake dispels metaphysical illusions by uncovering the motivations that give rise to them in the first place. And their approach yields disconcerting results for "the ordinary, everyday man" for whom "the value of life rests solely on the fact that he regards himself more highly than he does the world" (HH 1: 33). This human "pride" and arrogance, attacked by both Montaigne and Nietzsche, however serviceable it may at times have been for the survival of the species, originates in make-believe—a kind of projection. The non-naturalistic view according to which human beings are "over and above" nature is founded upon metaphysical fantasizing, which is why skeptical attacks on metaphysical philosophy and other "arts of narcosis" are supposed to be uniquely effective against it. In a human being who is not equipped with the proper temperament, giving up such beliefs is apt to bring about a state of despair. Nietzsche acknowledges that this is so, but claims that "whether

29. It might well be suggested that Nietzsche has in mind, here and above, Rée's *Origin of Moral Sensations*, against the background of which Nietzsche formed many of the central theses of his *Genealogy* and his ideas on morality in general. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at Oxford for pointing this out to me. It is worth noting, however, that the French moralists influenced Rée himself to no small degree.

psychological observation is more advantageous or disadvantageous to man may remain undecided; what is certain, however, is that it is necessary, because science cannot dispense with it" (HH 1: 38).

Skepticism and Naturalism

In the face of the stark naturalistic picture offered by science, we can fully appreciate the value and importance of the "cheerfulness" Nietzsche attributes to Montaigne. For it is only with such a temperament that "in the end one [will] live among men and with oneself as in *nature*, without praising, blaming, contending" and so on (HH 1: 34). That Nietzsche opens the second volume of *Human, All Too Human* by paying homage to the French tradition indicates that he views these figures as the progenitors of the scientific spirit in moral psychology. But Nietzsche's regard for Montaigne is not ascribable to his eminence as a forerunner of naturalism or as a psychologist *only*. Nietzsche is also keenly attuned to Montaigne's skepticism, since in *Human, All Too Human* skepticism is a necessary antidote to metaphysical dogmatism. It is what unseats the justification for metaphysical hypotheses without forcing Nietzsche into the opposite (negatively dogmatic) position of denying the existence of, say, things-in-themselves (recall Nietzsche's reluctance to dispute "the absolute possibility" of a metaphysical world [HH 1: 9]). But here we need to look more carefully at this reluctance, juxtaposed as it appears to be with a naturalistic program that, it seems, must commit Nietzsche to at least a handful of beliefs.

For now, let us take Nietzsche's "naturalism" to have just two prominent features: a rejection of a priori methods of reasoning in favor of those that emulate the methods employed successfully in the natural sciences (HH 1: 9) and a refusal to accept that human beings can claim any pride of place within the natural world (HH 1: 101, cf. GS 115). It is important to keep in view that neither of these components entails a commitment to any substantive ontological position. If it did, of course, it would rule out decisively any genuinely radical doxastic skepticism, but it would also run afoul of many of Nietzsche's own critiques of speculative philosophy. In addition, as Brian Leiter has pointed out, there is little or no textual evidence to suggest that Nietzsche is at all sympathetic

to the kind of substantive naturalism embraced by physicalists and other contemporary "substantive" naturalists.[30] In keeping with Nietzsche's constant refrain that what is most valuable in the sciences is the methodology,[31] therefore, I understand his "naturalism" as a methodological stance that demands continuity with the investigative techniques employed by the natural sciences.[32] Nevertheless, even such a purely methodological stance as I have described may reasonably be supposed to conflict with the doxastic skepticism I attribute to Nietzsche. The objection that no one can be both a skeptic and a naturalist can take two forms, just as objections to skepticism itself typically come in two varieties, which I will call "logical" and "psychological" and to which I now turn.

The Logical Objection

The logical objections to skepticism are typically aimed at skeptical method or practice with a view to establishing that the position is internally incoherent or unstable. To adopt the skeptic's position at all, one's doubt must be motivated by reasons or commitments that are themselves undermined by skeptical questioning. Therefore, skepticism either cannot get off the ground or, if it does, it quickly falls victim to self-refutation. Assuming for the sake of argument that skepticism can get off the ground, the parallel objection—which would challenge *naturalism's* compatibility with skepticism—is that there must be at least some principles and guidelines that motivate and govern naturalistic inquiry; but maintaining such principles and guidelines again seems contraindicated by skeptical practice. Thus, one cannot remain a skeptic once one has become a naturalist. For instance, one might say that Nietzsche—recognizing that it is pure philosophical arrogance and a symptom of asceticism that places human beings "above" the natural world—rejects "first philosophy" and insists upon treating human beings as continuous with the rest of nature. In doing so, he establishes a guideline that will put constraints on the kinds of theses an "honest" and "healthy" thinker can entertain—namely, only naturalistic theses. And any

30. Leiter 2002: 6.

31. A few of the passages that make this idea clear are HH 1: 109, 635; A 13, 59; and WP 466.

32. Leiter 2002: 3–6.

such guideline betrays commitments that are incompatible with the Skeptics' suspension of judgment.

It is worth noting that this interpretation would suggest Nietzsche's naturalism is not wholly methodological in character, since on this understanding of "naturalism" he does adopt one substantive claim: namely, that humankind is of the same order and origin as the rest of the natural world and should not be placed above it. Brian Leiter, though he also characterizes Nietzsche's naturalism as "fundamentally methodological," at the same time says, "In the ontological sense, [substantive] naturalism historically involved opposition to 'supernaturalism'. . . . Historical [substantive] naturalists (including both Hume and Nietzsche) reject, in particular, any explanatory role for God in an account of the world."[33] Earlier I identified something like this view as one of two important features of Nietzsche's naturalism. Indeed, perhaps *all* naturalists must be committed to at least some form of this claim. If so, the line between substantive and methodological naturalisms will be a finer one than we might have thought, which will pose a particular challenge to the skeptical reading (since the skeptical reading does not make space for substantive commitments). The question for us will be whether to regard this rejection of first philosophy and any explanatory role for God as a substantive principle that motivates or guides Nietzsche's naturalistic inquiry, or as a general result established by his "employment and emulation of distinctively scientific ways of looking at and explaining things."[34] In the end, it will turn out to be neither.

First of all, that "the animal has, especially in the interest of ecclesiastical teaching, been placed too far below man" (HH 1: 101) is obviously not something one accepts a priori. Insisting that human beings be treated as of a piece with the rest of nature is not a matter of gross prejudice for Nietzsche. He is surely self-reflective enough to avoid the charge he levels at those other "European thinkers" who "for thousands of years . . . thought merely in order to prove something," and who arrived at "conclusions that *ought* to be the result of their most rigorous reflection [but] were always settled from the start" (BGE 188). For Nietzsche simply to adopt this claim as foundational, prior to any investigation of human

33. Ibid., 5.
34. Ibid.

beings and the natural world, would seem to contravene the method itself and would, moreover, be grossly hypocritical. Perhaps, then, this principle emerges in the course of investigation and eventually attains a canonical status as an axiom or guideline for naturalistic inquiry.

The chief reason, however, for not treating the rejection of supernatural explanations as a pillar of Nietzsche's naturalism (though it may well be exactly that for Hume or other historical naturalists) is that to do so would misrepresent its unique structure. Here is where the parallel to Pyrrhonism will be particularly helpful since, as a methodological stance, Nietzsche's naturalism resembles his skepticism as his skepticism resembles Pyrrhonian skepticism: none of these positions is undermined or refuted by its theoretical foundation because *none of these positions has a theoretical foundation nor needs one to do the work it does in advancing Nietzsche's critical philosophy.* Like skepticism in antiquity, which fleshes out its positive practice without first constructing a theoretical framework on which to build, Nietzsche's skepticism and his methodological naturalism can thrive in practice without resting on any preconceptions or even intuitions about knowledge or the natural world. To appreciate this point, it cannot be overemphasized that Pyrrhonian skepticism is not an epistemology. There is no theory about knowledge at stake that the Pyrrhonist sets out to vindicate, refute, or refine. The Skeptic does not use doubt methodologically to establish any conclusion about the possibility of knowledge. He does not aim to define knowledge, determine its scope, or elucidate its justification conditions. And he certainly does not aim to demonstrate that knowledge is impossible.[35] Along with everything else, the genuine skeptic suspends judgment on this question as well.[36] The Pyrrhonist, uninterested in matters of conceptual analysis, is, like Nietzsche, uninterested in "philosophy reduced to 'theory of knowledge'" (BGE 204).

It is a misconception, though a common one, to think that doubt must necessarily be motivated by reasons—that doubt must be justified to keep from being simply perverse or idle. The Skeptic distinguishes himself from his opponents, the Dogmatists, just by describing what he does: for example, "Skeptics are those who oppose one explanation about the causes of appearances to another."

35. But cf. Bett 2000b.
36. Williams 1988: 549.

But it is a mistake to take this description for a theoretical precept; it is a descriptive claim about what the Pyrrhonist *in fact does*, and not a normative statement about what one *is obligated to do* to become a skeptic. It is perfectly possible for doubt or, in the Pyrrhonist's case, suspension of judgment to arise without his having explicitly pursued it as an end. Like all natural philosophers, the Skeptic is as naturally curious and ruthlessly inquisitive as Nietzsche's new philosophers who are "curious to a fault, researchers to the point of cruelty" (BGE 44).[37] That Nietzsche's often-invoked "philosophers of the future" are fundamentally Zetetics is a point not to be understated. This qualification appears emphatically later, in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> So, if something in the image of future philosophers makes us suspect that they will, perhaps, be skeptics (in the sense just mentioned), then it would only indicate some aspect of them and *not* who they themselves really are. They could be called critics with equal justification; and they will certainly be engaged in experiments. I have already laid particular emphasis on the notions of tempting, attempting, and the joy of experimenting in the name that I have dared to christen them with:[38] is this because, as critics in body and soul, they love to experiment in a new, perhaps broader, perhaps more dangerous sense? . . . Without a doubt: these coming philosophers will be least able to dispense with the qualities that distinguish the critic from the skeptic—qualities that are rather serious and by no means harmless.[39] (BGE 210)

Of Sextus Empiricus, it may fairly be said that 'Skeptic' is a word for what he does and not who he himself "really" is. His airy tone in the *Outlines* keeps him at a distance from deep commitments and self-identifications; he reports that Skeptics adduce their arguments and use their signature phrases casually and "without holding

37. Other of Nietzsche's many references to "men of experiments" (BGE 210) include: "Let us try it!" (GS 51); "we who thirst after reason are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment" (GS 319); and "the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge" (GS 324). Also, he says, "A new breed of philosophers is approaching: I will risk christening them with a name not lacking in dangers. . . . These philosophers of the future might have the right (and perhaps also the wrong) to be described as *those who attempt* [*Versucher*]" (BGE 42).

38. See previous footnote on BGE 42.

39. I will examine the danger that Nietzsche associates with criticism and skepticism in chapter 6.

commitments." They are not even particularly finicky about what you call them:

> The Skeptical persuasion is also called Investigative, from its activity in investigating and inquiring; Suspensive, from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; Aporetic, either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over and investigates everything, or else from its being at a loss whether to assent or deny; and Pyrrhonian, from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to Skepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him. (PH I 7)

And Skeptics were known by other names as well, including Zetetics, as we have seen.

Basically, the Skeptic goes about his investigations with an air of innocent curiosity to learn about the world around him, but what he happens upon instead is his own talent for opposition. When presented with a plausible hypothesis and argument about the way things really are, the Skeptic does not have to exhaust himself fending off a credulity that would otherwise naturally overtake him. It is just that his tirelessly inquisitive nature has led him into extensive investigations into things until he finds that he can always come up with a suitably plausible alternative hypothesis. (Note how striking a difference there is between the Pyrrhonist and the modern skeptics Descartes and Hume, both of whom remark on the difficulty of withholding belief since credulity seems to them to be the state to which the mind is most naturally inclined.) The longer he has been at this task and the more subtle his talent for coming up with oppositions, the more difficult it becomes for any Dogmatist to get leverage against the Skeptic's suspension of judgment and knock him off balance. "Fortuitously," as Sextus says, the Skeptic thus arrives at a state of psychological balance and equanimity without explicitly having tried.

The mistake we make, as Michael Williams explains so clearly, is to presuppose that "any form of skepticism can usefully be analyzed into two components: a theoretical component giving the skeptic's reasons for doubting the possibility of knowledge, and a (possibly vestigial) practical or prescriptive component recommending suspension of belief or judgment."[40] Such analysis, as Williams points out, makes a genuine understanding of Pyrrhonian skepticism all but impossible. The practice is quintessentially dynamic and

40. Williams 1988: 548.

"astonishingly discursive"; it therefore actively resists any attempt to canonize it or reduce it to a set of axioms. We should think of Nietzsche's skepticism (and his naturalism) not as a philosophical position but as a martial art. Nietzsche successfully deflects certain sorts of claims and throws down certain sorts of thinkers, not because he has a theory that first provides a sorting mechanism for identifying offending claims and offending thinkers and then gives him a technique for generating a defense against them, but simply because he has a remarkable talent for using his opponents' momentum against them and for neutralizing their claims with hypotheses of his own.[41]

Of course, readers of Nietzsche (or even of Sextus) recognize a similarity among those claims that most commonly fall victim to the Skeptic's art: they are quite reliably transcendental or supernatural propositions. But if we seize upon those similarities and suppose that Nietzsche or the Skeptic targeted all and only beliefs in that class, then (perhaps in our human zeal to taxonomize, axiomatize, and systematize, which we have predictably enough, according to Nietzsche) we end up reading *our* reasons for doing so back into *his* methods and saying that Nietzsche does the same thing we do. Nietzsche's views in the end may look just like the view currently called by the name 'naturalism', where naturalism is in fact motivated by, say, a prior set of beliefs that includes (among others) that human beings are not of any higher order than the rest of the natural world. But, to adapt Williams's way of formulating this error, in which the structure of our naturalism can be "usefully analysed into two components: a theoretical component giving the [naturalist's] reasons for [adopting a naturalist approach], and a . . . practical or prescriptive component

41. By way of another analogy: skepticism, understood in this way, can be canonized and reduced to a set of axioms about as successfully as the tango can be canonized and reduced to a set of axioms. One tries it out and finds either that one is good at it or not; like any other talent, some have it, and others don't. This characterization of the kind of *ability* that skepticism is accords well with Nietzsche's pronouncement in *Twilight of the Idols*, "Thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a *type* of dancing" ('Germans' 7), a statement that follows closely his observation that "learning to *see*—getting your eyes used to calm, to patience, to letting things come to you; postponing judgment, learning to encompass and take stock of an individual case from all sides . . . The essential thing here is precisely *not* to 'will', to be *able* to suspend the decision" ('Germans' 6). This makes sense of both Sextus's and Nietzsche's reluctance to offer prescriptions. Some people simply will not take to the method; some people you just can't teach to dance.

recommending [that the methods or results of our theorizing ought to be continuous with those in the natural sciences],"[42] the structure of Nietzsche's naturalism is quite different, though it functions in just the way we hope it will and still accounts for Nietzsche's rejection of any explanation offered in terms of supra-sensible entities, God, and the like. We presuppose that because the results look similar, the way of getting them must be similar. But that presupposition manages to get the structure of Nietzsche's "naturalism" precisely backward!

So far, I have spoken about "Nietzsche's naturalism" and "Nietzsche's skepticism" as if they are two independent positions he holds. But one consequence of the foregoing account of how Pyrrhonian skepticism manages reliably to eliminate or defeat non-naturalistic claims in particular is that really there is only one unified position here—a genuine skepticism, the results of which appear to us as a consistent and vigorous philosophical naturalism. There is no independent naturalism whose theoretical precepts work against the skeptical reading. This claim is what I had in mind to defend when in the introduction I said my task was to explain how Nietzsche's skepticism in fact leads him to a position generally recognized as "naturalistic." This explanation solves the problem of how a certain sort of skeptic could be described without inconsistency also as a methodological naturalist. The worry was that the methodological commitments of the naturalist would preclude any serious skepticism; this worry should be put to rest once we appreciate, first, how the practice of a genuine skeptic could be taken for naturalism but without its having the theoretical framework erected by other naturalistic thinkers, and second, how the charge that skepticism is self-refuting because it cannot justify or ground its dubitative practice misses the mark with this kind of skepticism. However, that this variety of naturalistic skepticism does not fall victim to self-refutation, or the "logical objection," the way modern epistemological skepticism might, is still only half the story.

The Psychological Objection

So far I have been suggesting that Nietzsche's method is *entirely* critical, that it defeats speculative philosophy but advances no positive views. Even while Nietzsche rejects any explanatory role for

42. Cf. Williams 1988: 548.

God in an account of the world, for example, he does not commit himself to atheism. As he says in *Ecce Homo*, "I have no sense of atheism as a result. . . . I have too much curiosity, too many doubts and high spirits to be happy with a ridiculously crude answer" (EH 'Clever' 1). Any firm answer to this question would be according to Nietzsche a gross answer and an indelicacy against his inquisitive nature, since it would declare, in effect, "You shall not think!" Here and elsewhere, Nietzsche touches on that original Greek meaning of *skeptikos* ('inquirer'); the moment one ceases to inquire into things, to seek and to experiment, one ceases to be a Skeptic in the original sense. Where one accepts an explanation, there one puts an end to inquiry. Furthermore, Nietzsche does exhort us over and over again "not to remain stuck" to any conviction or thinker (BGE 41). He goes out of his way to demonstrate that he is not a teacher and that he has no doctrine to disseminate. And he declares that, "I am not remotely the religion-founding type . . . I do not *want* any 'true believers' " (EH 'Destiny' 1). Yet, without accusing Nietzsche of being completely disingenuous on this point, it is difficult to accept the idea that Nietzsche has nothing to say. After all, "the first thing a good reader will realize" is that a psychologist without equal speaks from Nietzsche's works (EH 'Books' 5).

But taking seriously Nietzsche's frequent claims to be a psychologist[43]—even *the first* psychologist (EH 'Destiny' 6)—will again seem to entail that he accepts at least the facts any psychologist would have to accept in order to recognize and diagnose properly various mental illnesses. The *Genealogy*, in particular, yields nothing so much as a devastatingly astute symptomatology of a diseased moral psychology based on what appears to be a positive view about human nature and health. The explanatory hypotheses that Nietzsche offers as the fruits of this labor are surely among his most insightful and valuable contributions to the history of moral philosophy. How can Skeptical *epochē*, especially if it is as radical as I have been suggesting, possibly be compatible with the successful practice of moral psychology?

This question returns us to the second type of objection often leveled at the Skeptic, the psychological objection. Versions of this

43. BGE 23, 45, 222, 269; EH 'Books' 5, 'Destiny' 6; GS P 2; TI 'Ancients' 3; GM 3: 19, 20.

objection go back at least as far as Aristotle,[44] but it finds its most familiar modern expression in Hume's *Enquiry*:

> A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behavior. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. (*Enquiry* XII, 2: 128)

The source of Hume's objection is his supposition that the Skeptic is required to suspend judgment on all matters because, Hume thinks, that is what he commits himself to in virtue of taking on the moniker 'Skeptic'. However, the objection proceeds, he invariably fails to live up to this obligation. In the course of everyday life, the Skeptic betrays that he has not suspended judgment on all matters simply because he acts, and it is not psychologically plausible that one act without belief. So Skepticism, though coherently describable and not patently self-refuting as an intellectual position, as the logical objection would have it, still cannot be lived. And if ordinary life is incompatible with Skepticism, how can we possibly imagine a Skeptic engaging seriously in any reflective activity, such as developing a vibrant naturalistic psychology?

Let's take this question one step at a time, and consider first whether Skepticism is compatible with everyday life. On this level, the debate about whether the Skeptic can live his skepticism has a long and lively history. Strangely, Hume's version of this objection—though it is directed at Pyrrhonism in particular and reveals some familiarity with the source material relevant for understanding Pyrrhonism—utterly fails to take this history into account and never mentions Sextus's own (preemptive) reply: "We live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive" (PH I 23). The Skeptic lives his life by taking as his criterion or action-guiding standard "what is apparent." To appreciate the adequacy of this standard for ordinary conduct, we need only concede that a good deal of life

44. Annas and Barnes 1985: 11–12.

is carried on more or less unreflectively. The Skeptic can perfectly well go about his housekeeping, go bowling, spend time at the pub, and throw dinner parties without engaging in any heavy theorizing about the nature of reality.

Obviously, if we happen to accept a philosophy of action "such that it is impossible to provide an account of a person performing [any] voluntary action without [that account at the same time] providing grounds for the ascription [to that person] of some belief or other," then we are going to disagree with the Skeptic on this point.[45] Of course, it is important to bear in mind that the Skeptic himself subscribes to no such philosophy of action, and that we have no good reason to suppose Nietzsche does either. If anything, Nietzsche seems more amenable to the idea that a good deal of what is important in our psychological lives never rises even to the level of conscious experience. And yet Sextus seems to have a ready answer even for those who would connect belief *necessarily* to voluntary action:

> When we say that Skeptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take 'belief' in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Skeptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances. . . . Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear. (PH I 13)

This distinction has drawn a tremendous amount of attention in the literature on Pyrrhonism, and not without good reason, since if the Pyrrhonists have any persuasive answer to the charge that their skepticism is undermined by practice, it seems reasonable to suppose it might turn on the issue of the scope of Skeptical *epochē*. But scholarly attention to this passage has tended to obscure a crucial point related to the one I made earlier: we should not be misled here into thinking that the Skeptic has, or even feels the need to have, a well-worked out answer to the "scope" question prior to taking up his practice. Sextus issues an important caveat for our understanding of this and other quasi-technical Pyrrhonian terms when he says that "we do not use the [Skeptical] phrases strictly, making clear the objects to which they are applied, but indifferently and, if you like, in a loose sense—for it is unbecoming for a Skeptic to fight

45. Bailey 2002: 12, citing philosophies of action and their antiskeptical implications as developed by, e.g., P. F. Strawson and Norman Malcolm.

over phrases" (PH I 207). Indeed, if Sextus were at all clear on this issue, the scholarly debate about the scope of Pyrrhonism would not have arrived at anything like its current state. If one's central goal is to cast aspersion on the pretensions and rashness of speculative philosophers, then this caveat will seem less like an excuse for sloppy thinking on the part of the Pyrrhonist and more like an acknowledgment of what they have to do (or avoid doing) to consistently avoid Dogmatic theorizing.

Once again, the modern understanding of skepticism as a two-part enterprise, with a practical component laid down on a theoretical groundwork, where the groundwork is established prior to the practice, has determined our expectations about the kinds of justificatory accounts we ought to find in Sextus and other Pyrrhonian texts. But as far as Sextus is concerned, there are some claims that elicit from the talented Skeptic an equipollent argument (e.g., the Dogmatist's claims about the hidden causes of appearances) and others that do not (e.g., reports of appearances and other descriptive accounts about what is apparent). Without belaboring the issue, it seems reasonable enough to suppose that the Skeptic can do a great deal without violating his Skeptical practice. However, we are interested not in Nietzsche's mundane and day-to-day activities, but his philosophical activity and psychological investigations, and when it comes to something that exceeds the boundaries of the mundane and demands a higher level of reflective engagement, the Skeptic is on much thinner ice. Here, we go back to the beginning with the question of how skepticism of a Pyrrhonian sort can in any way be compatible with a robustly critical and scientifically friendly moral psychology.

In the context of a discussion of Greek skepticism, diagnostic and medical terms are more than merely metaphorical; the history of skepticism and medical practice in antiquity are in fact closely intertwined. Sextus Empiricus was a physician by trade, whose name 'Empiricus' comes from the tradition of Medical Empiricism that developed and flourished in the last two centuries BCE. The Medical Empiricists "rejected the theoretical pretensions of the Dogmatists [and especially a rival school known under the name 'Rationalists'] and held that experience alone, without the need for grand theory, was all that was required for sound medical practice."[46] No doubt it

46. Hankinson 1995: 8; see also the more detailed discussion of Skepticism in the medical schools (1995: 225–36).

is this affiliation that motivates some of Sextus's best-known claims, including his claim that "Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists. Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency . . . so Skeptics propound arguments which differ in strength" (PH III 280). Embracing even the suggestion that some of the arguments employed by Skeptics are self-refuting, Sextus concedes the point, observing that they are like purgative drugs that are expelled from the body along with the cause of illness (PH I 206, 288). And Sextus is by no means unique in this respect: if we turn again to the biography of Pyrrho offered by Diogenes Laertius, which Nietzsche dissected thoroughly, we find a number of well-renowned and successful practitioners of medicine on his roster of Pyrrhonian philosophers. The commerce between medicine and skepticism in the ancient world was very lively, and it is no overstatement to say that developments in each tradition importantly influenced the direction of the other.

The nature of the partnership, however, might still strike us as somewhat puzzling. Why on earth would a patient voluntarily put himself in the hands of a physician who claimed to suspend judgment on all matters and refused to speculate about the exact causes of the patient's illness, and who proposed to restore the patient to health while at the same time embracing the view that "no course of treatment is better justified than any other"?[47] And why would a physician who wanted to establish a successful practice affiliate himself with such a radical way of thinking in the first place? This final question cuts to the heart of the compatibility between Skeptical practice and naturalistic investigation, and an answer to it must begin with some understanding of how Medical Empiricism emerged as a discipline in antiquity.

At what we might consider the dawn of medical science, there emerged a handful of practitioners keenly interested in giving to medicine some intellectually respectable foundation.[48] To distinguish themselves from "the lowly and relatively uneducated" folk healers who offered medical treatment to slaves and the poor, these doctors insisted that "effective medical treatment had to be based upon an

47. Bailey 2002: 87.

48. This account generally follows Bailey 2002: 88ff., but see also Hankinson, "Skepticism in the Medical Schools" (1995: chap. 13).

understanding of the hidden constitution of the human body and the non-evident causes of particular illnesses."[49] This approach yielded before long a number of interesting but incompatible theories and no clear way of predicting which would in fact get better therapeutic results. Furthermore, their proponents were often at a loss to justify their recommendations of one specific course of treatment over another solely on the basis of the vague and abstruse theories they proffered. The best one could do, some others argued, was to stay attuned to observable regularities between particular courses of treatment and subsequent physiological changes in the patient, to shun causal accounts based on conjectures about the hidden constitution of the human body, and to guide one's medical practices by trial and error. Those who shared this view eventually came to be known as the Empiricists.

What is likely is that as some of these doctors seized upon the arguments of the Pyrrhonists as particularly effective ways to unsettle the dogmatic pretensions of the Rationalists, Medical Empiricism emerged as a school in its own right. Though the original proponents of this view were fairly cavalier about their claims that medical knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the hidden causes of disease) was unattainable, Empiricism (like Pyrrhonism) was gradually refined so as to become less and less a negative dogmatism about medical knowledge and more and more a genuine skepticism. By Sextus's era, as Alan Bailey points out, it is "possible to interpret Empiricist accounts of the art of medicine as simply offering a naturalistic description of the practice of those people who generally strike other people as being successful doctors; and such a naturalistic account would be perfectly compatible with the judgment that no one, not even those doctors who appear to be able to treat a wide range of illnesses effectively, has any rationally justified beliefs about the correct way to treat particular illnesses."[50] In this case, as before, their theory is descriptive and not normative, and it follows rather than precedes practice.

What I hope is that the case of the Empiricist tradition in ancient medicine will illustrate by example not only how the Skeptic can live his Skepticism, but how he can at the same time make a tangible contribution to the promotion of health, whether physical or

49. Bailey 2002: 87–88.
50. Ibid., 90.

mental. The "psychological objection," as I called it earlier, again misses its target. It does so, first, by supposing that it is a normative requirement of Skeptical (or Empiricist) practice that the practitioner suspend judgment on all matters. No such requirement exists; the theories of the Empiricists and Skeptics are descriptive accounts. Second, by misconstruing the nature of their suspension as the kind of active doubt that would create an obstacle to action. It is true that there is a great deal the skeptic makes use of in practicing his method, namely, a great store of information gleaned from his investigations into a variety of subjects. But the "knowledge" used wholly opportunistically by the Skeptic as grist for his mill or by the Empiricist as the occasion for a diagnosis is just that: the Skeptic never makes such beliefs "his own," and he need never concede that one is ultimately better justified than another. While the modern skeptic's theoretically grounded position can be summed up briefly, simply by listing the principles that motivate his doubt, the Pyrrhonist's "lack of any privileged connection with epistemological arguments"[51] upon which to rest his method requires that he continue investigating and continue collecting particular arguments later to be used against Dogmatists. Without a general epistemological theory that will cover all claims about, say, knowledge or justification, skeptical "oppositions are orchestrated within particular fields of inquiry and always case by case. There are no short cuts."[52]

Skepticism as "Naturalism"

The Pyrrhonian skeptics, whom Sextus also characterizes as students of natural science, report that equipollent argument works for them as a therapy for a variety of psychological ills associated with the having of beliefs—or at least certain varieties of belief. Nietzsche and Montaigne, who discuss the dogmas of religion and metaphysical philosophy in similarly "pathological" terms, take up those arguments in a similar spirit of concern for the well-being of individuals and (for Nietzsche) entire cultures. An appropriately restricted variety of skepticism, as introduced and defended in chapter 1, aimed as it is against beliefs supported by reason alone (i.e., a priori

51. Williams 1988: 557.
52. Ibid., 558.

speculations about matters that are "unclear" or "hidden" [*adēlos*] and that cannot be settled by recourse to the way things appear), still leaves room for preferring certain methodological practices ('skeptical' or 'scientific') for making practical diagnoses of the sort that appear in Nietzsche's pragmatic argument and for entertaining views about the way things are—stopping short of making claims about the way things "really" are.[53] It supports, rather than competes with, Nietzsche's and Montaigne's "naturalist" intuitions about the way things are with respect to human beings and their place in the world—by all appearances, human beings ought to be counted among the rest of the animals—and it repudiates "first philosophy," cautioning us against drawing conclusions that would be grounded in nothing more than vanity and insecurity.

At the same time, it in some sense obviates the need for the title "naturalist"—a title that, under the circumstances, can be applied to these thinkers only somewhat misleadingly. Recent scholarship has evinced a strong desire to find a place for Nietzsche *within* the philosophical tradition that still does justice to his scathing critique of the engines that drive it. This trend has put Nietzsche in dialogue—often quite fruitfully—with naturalists like Hume, but has also required explaining away the tension between Nietzsche's adoption of such a program and his insistent attempts to eschew such programs. In the case of Nietzsche's "translation" of man "back into nature," then, we can only be helped by coming to understand how the Pyrrhonist accomplishes such a task without, we might say, explicitly having tried.

53. Frede 1989 defends this view; see especially pp. 12–15.

CHAPTER 4

Perspectivism and *Ephexis* in Interpretation

The deep "moral skepticism and destructive analysis" in which Nietzsche found himself in the early 1870s continued unabated.[1] In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche complains that "*the great majority lacks an intellectual conscience*" (GS 2). They go about making moral evaluations, "calling this good and that evil," without ever making their scales of value an object of investigation. When questions are raised, in fact, "perhaps they laugh at your doubts. I mean: *to the great majority* it is not contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly *without* first becoming aware of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterwards" (GS 2). Raising questions about our commitments and examining the presuppositions of our beliefs, entertaining arguments on both sides of the issue is, on the one hand, the obvious responsibility of every philosophical thinker. And on that level, Nietzsche might be read here as reiterating a sound piece of professional advice, echoing Socrates when he says that "the unexamined life is not worth living for man." But it is easy for that sentiment to become a mere platitude, and Nietzsche is well aware of the common and human, all-too-human tendency to shirk such responsibility, to hide from the strenuous task of evaluation and self-evaluation, and to shrink from what it might reveal not only about our thoughts but about ourselves as thinkers.

1. HH 2: P1; see the introduction to chapter 3.

He is, in short, too well aware of our self-deceptive tendencies to believe that we are doing the hard intellectual work when in fact we leave the heaviest stones unturned. Thus, he links the notion of the intellectual conscience to "honesty," and honesty to skepticism—to raising and maintaining doubt. Indeed, "honesty and skepticism" are often paired together and posited in direct contrast to the tendency toward self-deception exhibited, for example, by those who "had the faith that their knowledge was at the same time the principle of *life*," and who "had to *deceive* themselves about their own state" (GS 110). The "subtler honesty and skepticism" he describes in *Gay Science*, in fact, explicitly calls to mind the variety we have been considering, since it "arose wherever two conflicting propositions seemed *applicable* to life because both were compatible with the basic errors" (GS 110). It is worth noting here that the "errors" Nietzsche has in view are not established falsehoods; he gives no proof in this passage that there are no equal things, for instance, or that there are no things, substances, or bodies, or that there is no free will, and he gives no indication that such proof is coming. For all we know, these might be truths. For Nietzsche's purposes here, it is a sufficient indictment of the "intellectual conscience" that such ideas are either made up out of whole cloth or accepted utterly uncritically. In the following passage he observes that this tendency, "to affirm rather than *suspend judgment*" (GS 111, emphasis added), is extraordinarily strong and may even be beneficial to survival but that it is nonetheless an (intellectual) injustice.

In what are described as the first of Nietzsche's "mature" works, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morality*, his objections to dogmatism as an affront to "intellectual conscience" and "honesty" become only clearer and more prevalent. The "perspectival 'knowing'" that makes its conspicuous appearance in the latter work has sometimes been appreciated as serving Nietzsche's opposition to dogmatism.[2] But in too many interpretations, it has become

2. While commentators have certainly not failed to connect Nietzsche's perspectivism to his attacks on dogmatism, few have employed the term 'dogmatism' in anything other than a colloquial sense. Clark (1990: 202) is a notable exception, since she takes Nietzsche to be using 'dogmatism' "as Kant did, for the belief that pure reason can know things-in-themselves." (It is interesting to note here that if Guyer 2008 is right about the pressure Pyrrhonism exerted on the development of Kant's critical philosophy, then Nietzsche may well be using the term 'dogmatism' as Kant did—namely as Sextus conceives it!) Hales and Welshon (2000: 17) employ

a dogma or doctrine all its own. The first significant discussion of "perspectivism" in the scholarship on Nietzsche in English (Arthur Danto's "Nietzsche's Perspectivism," a chapter in his survey *Nietzsche as Philosopher*)[3] did a great deal to promote this idea to the status of a "doctrine" in Nietzsche's work. In the years since, perspectivism has thus taken its place in the scholarship alongside Nietzsche's other significant "doctrines": the eternal return, the *Übermensch*, the will to power. The result has been that in the abundant scholarship on Nietzsche and "perspectivism" it has mostly taken for granted that what he offers us under that name is a theory of truth. Though there are, of course, subtle differences among the extant interpretations of Nietzsche's metaphor of perspectivism, the differences lie mainly in the details. In broad strokes, there has been widespread agreement—at least with respect to two points. The first (almost unquestioned) assumption of commentators on this issue has been simply *that there is a doctrine* of perspectivism central to the overall scheme of Nietzsche's thought and that it therefore demands unpacking. Second is the supposition that coming to a proper understanding of this doctrine depends upon fleshing out an account of Nietzsche's ontology or his theory of truth, of which his perspectivism is taken to be either a consequence or an expression.

My primary task in this chapter will be to challenge the second assumption, but the first warrants its own brief remark. On the face of it, it should be obvious that the attention paid to Nietzsche's perspectivism in the last half-century of scholarship is somewhat out of proportion to the relative scarcity of its occurrences in his writing. He mentions it by name [*Perspektivismus*] only a handful

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'perspectivism' in a way more typical in these discussions; they claim that its aim is to attack dogmatism, but they characterize this aim as entirely *rhetorical*, thus not philosophical. Most recently, Reginster (2006: 5) helpfully clarifies that "perspectivism" should be "understood to imply an opposition to all forms of dogmatic proselytizing."

3. Danto 1965. A few discussions of the meaning and significance of "perspective" in Nietzsche emerged before this time, of course; e.g., Hans Vaihinger's 1911 essay, "Nietzsche and His Doctrine of Conscious Illusion" (in Solomon 1973) and Hermann Nohl's "Eine historische Quelle zu Nietzsches Perspektivismus: G. Teichmüller, die wirkliche und die scheinbare Welt" (*Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophiche Kritik* 149: 106–15) in 1913. Later, the issue would be taken up in Martin Heidegger's published lectures on the will to power, and also in Morgan 1941. Danto 1965, however, appears to be the work responsible for bringing this issue to the forefront of Anglo-American Nietzsche scholarship.

of times in his work, published or unpublished. A small number of commentators have drawn attention to this discrepancy between the number of "perspective" discussions in Nietzsche and the (ever-increasing) treatments of it in the secondary literature. Robin Small, for instance, observes, "As it happens, Nietzsche uses the word *Perspektivismus* in only a few places, and in none of these does it refer to any philosophical doctrine. Rather he takes it to be synonymous with *Perspektivität*, which clearly refers to the property of being perspectival. It is this that Nietzsche attributes to all forms of human knowledge, and to all objects of human knowledge."[4] Small cautions, accordingly: "It is easy to overestimate the occurrence of the word 'perspective' in Nietzsche's later writings if one is using the English versions of Walter Kaufmann, since the German word corresponding to his 'perspective' is often *Optik* rather than *Perspektive*. . . . Kaufmann also translates *Blick* as 'perspective' in *Ecce Homo*."[5] To some extent, this translation legacy may explain the overwhelming temptation for commentators to fashion "perspectivism" as a theory of truth, for although straightforward "perspective" talk shows up infrequently in Nietzsche, he makes many provocative comments about truth. If one splices "perspectivism" and truth together right from the outset, Nietzsche has a great deal more to say about it.

Properly understood, the claim that all knowledge is perspectival does have important work to do in Nietzsche's philosophy. But taken on their own terms, the few passages in which Nietzsche actually mentions perspectivism simply do not support the weight of the interpretations that have been placed upon them. So in what follows, I retain "perspectivism" largely as a term of convenience, though I am inclined to regard my task here more as providing an interpretation of "Nietzsche's several remarks on perspective and perspectival knowing" than as unpacking the axioms of perspectivism qua doctrine.

4. Small 2001: 48. The final clause in this statement, by the way, in which Small attributes to Nietzsche the ontological thesis that all objects of human knowledge have "the property of being perspectival," shows that he takes the general approach I characterize in what follows.

5. Small 2001: 57 n. 42. These terms may in the end be entirely interchangeable, of course, but such a range of synonyms rarely is; we need an argument, in any case, for their interchangeability, which none of the standard treatments provides. On the infrequency of Nietzsche's use of "perspectivism," see also Cox 1999: 109–11.

The Metaphysical Readings of Nietzsche's "Perspective" Metaphor

We can see the terms for the continuing debate over Nietzsche's perspectivism qua doctrine as having been set originally by Danto's discussion, in which he takes Nietzsche's remarks about perspective as evidence for his development of a pragmatic account of truth, an account necessitated by his commitment to an ontology of radical flux. Relying chiefly on the now-famous *Nachlaß* comment that "there are no facts but only interpretations" (KSA 12: 315; WP 481), Danto concludes that "no distinction which we make, even the plainest distinction between thing and thing, has the slightest basis in reality. There are no distinctions between things because the concept of thinghood is itself already a fiction."[6] Here, Danto seems to be thinking of "things" and "facts" interchangeably; for him, the upshot of there being no facts is just that where we perceive substance and stability there is really only a chaotic flux. Since this is the case, Danto argues, then if it is possible for any of our beliefs to be true, they must be so in some unorthodox way. They cannot be true by virtue of correspondence to facts for the simple reason that there are no facts for them to correspond to. Thus, Danto requires Nietzsche to adopt as a new criterion of truth whatever "enhances and facilitates life."[7] Ultimately, he proposes that the terms "true" and "false" can have meaning for Nietzsche, but only pragmatically: "*p* is true and *q* is false if *p* works and *q* does not."[8] Perspectivism on Danto's reading, then, just captures the "no facts" insight—a metaphysical view that in turn demands this new way of understanding the concepts "true" and "false."

Later commentators have lined up along two sides of the battlefield staked out (perhaps unwittingly) by Danto. On the one side we find those who reject his attribution of a pragmatic theory of truth to Nietzsche but who agree on the centrality of the "no facts but only interpretations" comment to understanding what Nietzsche's references to "perspective" mean. A classic example of this interpretive approach is found in Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, in which he argues that this *Nachlaß* fragment commits

6. Danto 1965: 72.
7. Ibid., 71.
8. Ibid., 72.

Nietzsche to a sort of radical ontological pluralism.[9] Nietzsche's perspectivism (according to Nehamas) "seems to be precisely an effort to move away from the idea that the world possesses any features that are in principle prior to and independent of interpretation. In itself, the world has no features, and these can therefore be neither correctly nor wrongly represented."[10] Nehamas consequently ascribes to Nietzsche the view that all human beliefs are necessarily false or "that we are *necessarily incapable* of representing the world accurately."[11]

In the other camp we find commentators who understand perspectivism as a position on truth but *reject* the idea that Nietzsche thinks we can say nothing true about the world. Maudemarie Clark, for instance, whose *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* contains one of the clearest and most influential discussions of the issue, argues that Nietzsche's "statement of perspectivism [in the *Genealogy*] is a metaphorical expression of Nietzsche's neo-Kantian position on truth."[12] This position is Nietzsche's rejection only of a particularly strong version of the correspondence theory of truth (which she calls the "metaphysical correspondence theory"); more specifically, it is a rejection of Kantian things-in-themselves. Thus, Nietzsche's perspectivism (and the view of truth it represents) is, on Clark's interpretation, a sort of response to Kant's transcendental idealism.[13]

9. Nehamas 1985: 42.

10. Ibid., 45.

11. Ibid., emphasis added. I place the so-called "postmodern" interpreters of Nietzsche in this camp, though accounts similar to Nehamas's are given as well by, e.g., Ruediger Grimm (1977), who claims that for Nietzsche "the world has no univocal meaning" because "there is no world in itself" (69). Rather, he says, "reality for Nietzsche is a turbulent, enigmatic chaos of power-quanta and power-constellations locked in combat with one another for more power" (67). See also the more recent account by Christoph Cox (1999), who follows Nehamas in concentrating on the "ubiquity of interpretation" in Nietzsche's view of reality: "Against all realisms, Nietzsche maintains that every ontology is the construction of an interpretation and that no world would remain over after the subtraction of every interpretation. Against idealism, he argues that interpretations are not the productions of isolated subjects or minds but complexes of evaluation and power that traverse the entire spectrum of organic life and are discernible even in the inorganic world" (163).

12. Clark 1990: 128.

13. In the years since the publication of Clark's book, many commentators have followed her in putting Nietzsche in a reactive role vis-à-vis Kant. Most recently, see Green (2002). According to Hales and Welshon (2000), also, Nietzsche actually

Moreover, Clark thinks perspectivism reflects Nietzsche's having *overcome* just the sort of view that Nehamas attributes to him: the view that since human beliefs *necessarily* falsify the way the world is, no human belief is or could be true. On the (developmental) interpretation Clark offers, this "falsification thesis" is evident in Nietzsche's early works—a hangover from his intoxication with the work of Schopenhauer and from his (initially unreflective) acceptance of the distinction that Schopenhauer retains between appearance and reality. But Nietzsche repudiates both this distinction and the falsification thesis, she thinks, in his mature works.

Crucially, the two general approaches I have characterized only loosely above—each unified more by a sort of family resemblance than any strict loyalty to a single reading—share one common interpretive feature: all of them ascribe to Nietzsche ambitious and complex metaphysical doctrines on which his perspectivism is founded or of which it is a consequence or expression. For this reason, I gloss over the more subtle differences between them and refer to them collectively here as "the metaphysical readings" of perspectivism. I believe, by contrast, that perspectivism is neither a corollary nor the expression of any metaphysical view; rather, what force it has is purely epistemological. (It is important to note how this differs from

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holds several versions of perspectivism, but his "epistemic perspectivism," they argue, is parasitic on his concept of truth and his attack on the notion of the thing-in-itself (114–15). Thus, it has no independent aim; Nietzsche's epistemological views, on this reading, are a mere consequence of his metaphysical views. And Nietzsche's "truth perspectivism" they describe as a complement to his ontological views and his rejection of the thing-in-itself (18). See also Poellner (2001: 111), who conceives of perspectivism primarily as a metaphysical antirealism, i.e., the denial of strong metaphysical realism, roughly along lines drawn by Clark. Leiter (1994) describes himself as "in basic agreement with Clark" and her interpretation of perspectivism as ruling out strong metaphysical realism (335, 350). Cf. Leiter 2002, however, which is more circumspect about the metaphysical work perspectivism itself does. Though Leiter still conceives of perspectivism as a reaction to Kant's transcendental idealism, here he says (with respect to Nietzsche's mention of perspectivism in the *Genealogy*): "Notice, to start, that the focus of the passage is *knowledge* (more precisely the nature of knowing) and not *truth* per se (i.e., what actually is the case). Knowing could be perspectival in the sense described here, but truth might not be" (270). Anderson (1998), though he thinks that Nietzsche "conceives of perspectives along broadly Kantian lines" (3) and that his views on knowledge are best understood in terms of the Kantian legacy in epistemology and metaphysics, is similarly careful to formulate his readings of perspectivism in epistemological terms. Perspectivism, he says, captures "certain limitations on our knowledge claims" (2) and entails that there is "no justification for the posit of things-in-themselves" (12).

the claim that Nietzsche is offering an epistemology, a theory of knowledge, under the heading of "perspectivism." As I have already said, Nietzsche is no more an epistemologist than he is a metaphysician, on my view. Nevertheless, when he says that there is "*only* a perspectival 'knowing'," he does make a provocative and interesting epistemological claim—one worth investigating in its own right.)

Against these readings, I argue that we should not only resist thinking of perspectivism as the consequence of any metaphysical thesis Nietzsche holds (e.g., that reality is nothing but a chaotic flux, or that "strong metaphysical antirealism" is false), but we should understand it as a position that undermines the attempt to secure justification for all such theses. The character of perspectivism, too, is fundamentally Skeptical.[14] Perhaps the most important consequence of finally understanding it in this way is that it will demonstrate how Nietzsche remains agnostic on the metaphysical issues around which discussions of his perspectivism have heretofore revolved.

I do not mean to suggest here that any serious scholarly treatment of perspectivism has completely neglected its epistemological importance. Nehamas includes an account of "perspectival knowing" in his discussion that I think must be correct, at least in broad outline: "Knowledge," he says, "in contrast to 'knowledge', involves for Nietzsche an inherently conditional relation to its object, a relation that presupposes or manifests specific values, interests, and goals."[15] Clark, too, addresses the epistemological significance of Nietzsche's metaphor of perspectivism in the *Genealogy* (and comes close to suggesting, as I have, that its significance is exhausted by its epistemological implications) when she says that it "*amounts to* the claim that we cannot and need not justify our beliefs by paring them down to a set of unquestionable beliefs all rational beings must share."[16] Construed in this way, perspectivism is, according to Clark, a "rejection of Cartesian foundationalism."[17] As it turns out, however, this antifoundationalist position is *not* all perspectivism amounts to, because Clark

14. A number of commentators have observed that perspectivism has or may have skeptical implications, but typically in these discussions "skepticism" is taken in the colloquial sense indicated earlier; see the introduction.

15. Nehamas 1985: 50.

16. Clark 1990: 130, emphasis added.

17. Ibid.

says, "I believe it also invites us to recognize as incoherent the very idea of things-in-themselves."[18] Similarly for Nehamas: though he thinks that to refer to knowledge as "perspectival" is primarily to emphasize its (necessary) selectivity, he nevertheless believes that we "*must* . . . try to connect the falsification of which Nietzsche so often writes with the simplification which almost as often accompanies it in his texts (BGE 24, 229)."[19] Again, we should see these two readings as emblematic of broader interpretive trends on the issue of perspectivism: although many commentators discuss its epistemological ramifications, almost all of them claim that it must be doing *more*.[20] This is precisely the intuition we need to block.

If we examine the best textual evidence we have for Nietzsche's perspectivism, we will find little more than a commitment to the view that all knowing is "situated" in a sense to be explained presently. The claim that all knowing is perspectival is intended to undermine philosophical claims to "objectivity" that Nietzsche regards as symptomatic of the ascetic ideal. In what follows, I examine parallels between this account of perspectivism and one of the arguments for suspension of judgment standardly advanced by Pyrrhonists, and I illuminate what a suspension of judgment looks like in Nietzschean terms by drawing attention to his own urgent demand for *ephexis* in interpretation and by explaining what he has in mind and why his demand carries the urgency it does.

The Textual Evidence—An Exegesis of *Genealogy* 3: 12

The longest sustained discussion of perspectivism in Nietzsche's published work appears in the *Genealogy*. In 3: 12, Nietzsche introduces the visual metaphor for perspectivism that has become the starting

18. Ibid., 132.

19. Nehamas 1985: 50.

20. Notable exceptions are Anderson 1998 and Leiter 2002, mentioned above. See also Reginster (2000), who interprets perspectivism as a type of deflationism about justification; more precisely, that "there is no coherent notion of justification other than ratification in the terms provided by one's perspective" (40). This position he distinguishes, however, from skepticism, which he understands in the colloquial sense; cf. Reginster 2006.

point for so many discussions of it. Another look at this metaphor will show that it supports an interpretation that has not yet been offered in the literature. First, however, we should look at the passage in context: Nietzsche's task in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* is to provide an answer to the question of what the ascetic ideal *means* and to explain how it is that such an ideal has come to triumph despite its harmfulness to human beings. After examining the meaning of asceticism for artists and for priests, Nietzsche observes in *Genealogy* 3: 12 that the sickness he has just diagnosed in religious life occurs also in intellectual life—he turns our attention from the figure of the ascetic priest to the seeker of knowledge. Following his introductory sketch of the ascetic priest in the previous section, Nietzsche poses the question of what a purely *intellectual* expression of this ideal might look like: "Supposing that such an incarnate will to contradiction and anti-nature is prevailed upon to *philosophize*: on what will he vent his innermost capricious will?"[21]

What we discover in *Genealogy* 3: 12 is that this phenomenon is not unique to the figure of the artist or priest; in fact, it appears to have a fairly precise intellectual or "spiritual" analogue. The life of the ascetic priest, as we discover in the previous passage, is a life of "self-contradiction" insofar as the priestly type denounces as "evil" and intentionally frustrates all the instincts that would promote self-preservation, and especially those that promote self-preservation by making life enjoyable. Life itself is the object of priestly *ressentiment*, which is as much a desire for control and mastery as it is a feeling of biliousness and hatred: "Here a *ressentiment* without equal rules, that of an unsatiated instinct and power-will that would like to become lord not over something living but rather over life itself…; an attempt is made here to use energy to stop up the source of the energy; here the gaze is directed greenly and maliciously against physiological flourishing [*physiologische Gedeihen*] itself" (GM 3: 11). And just as the priest attempts to "use energy to stop up the source of the energy" and employs a "monstrous manner of valuation" to turn the instincts and desire for life against life itself, by placing the highest value on suffering and on beliefs and practices that frustrate the instincts of life, the ascetic ideal in philosophy "loves to turn reason against reason."

21. Quotations in this section will be from *Genealogy* 3: 12 unless otherwise noted.

Here, the desire for knowledge—that which starts the seeker of knowledge on his path of inquiry in the first place—is frustrated by the adoption of a perverse ideal ("objectivity," in a sense yet to be explained) under which the very thing sought is recognized as being unattainable. Like the priest who takes pleasure in self-flagellation, against all prudential reason the seeker of knowledge engages in some self-flagellation of his own by maintaining his ideal as the highest one and by persisting in his hopeless endeavor. This activity, like the priest's, is what makes his life "self-contradictory" and a "paradox." Thus the philosopher under the sway of the ascetic ideal enjoys a "lust [that] reaches its peak when the ascetic self-contempt, self-derision of reason decrees: 'there *is* a realm of truth and being, but precisely *reason* is *excluded* from it!' " Just as the ascetic priest adopts a highest ideal that calls for his own annihilation (qua flesh-and-blood human being), the ascetic thinker or philosopher adopts a highest ideal that calls for his own annihilation (qua thinker), and therein lies his peculiar sickness.

This sickness is characterized by the philosopher's embrace of "objectivity" (which Nietzsche keeps always in quotation marks in this passage) as an epistemic ideal. Although there is a sense of objectivity that Nietzsche will retain (which I distinguish in what follows), he asserts in *Genealogy* 3: 12 that in the hands of the intellectual ascetic, objectivity is "understood . . . as 'disinterested contemplation'." According to Nietzsche, the "pure knowledge" promised by this brand of objectivity is both symptomatic of an *unhealthy* ideal and a tendency toward self-contempt and also "an absurdity and non-concept." First, in taking up "objectivity" as his ideal, the ascetic philosopher announces his desire to annihilate whatever is uniquely his own—his own interests and prejudices, desires and affects, and the particular color they lend to his perceptual and cognitive experience. The ascetic "objectivity" Nietzsche rejects fantasizes a knowing subject without any subjectivity and a desire to erase oneself from one's own picture of the world. It exclaims: "To refuse to believe in the self, to deny one's own 'reality'—what a triumph!" We find a fine example of this expression in Bertrand Russell's classic *The Problems of Philosophy*:

> The true philosophic contemplation . . . finds its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating. Everything, in

> contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object. . . . By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect. The free intellect will see as God might see, without a *here* and *now*, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain.[22]

"Contemplation without interest" as Russell illustrates it is something that Nietzsche openly disparages, asking at the conclusion of *Genealogy* 3: 12, "But to eliminate the will altogether, to disconnect the affects one and all, supposing we were capable of this: what? would that not be to *castrate* the intellect?"[23]

Moreover, Nietzsche exhorts us to "guard ourselves . . . against the dangerous old conceptual fabrication that posited a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge'," indicating that ascetic "objectivity" is not only unhealthy, it is also erroneous in the sense described earlier in this chapter, that it is a fantastic projection or whole-cloth fabrication. This idea is not the result of honest investigation, but rather of the failure to investigate. And it is an illusion in the sense we have already seen that term employed in "On Truth and Lie"; namely, the "pure" subject of knowledge must be illusory since it rests on a conceptual confusion or impossibility.[24] Since "reason," "knowledge," and "spirituality" (understood as "the activity of the intellect") are always dependent upon and bound by subjective interests and affects, according to Nietzsche, they cannot be paired with such qualifiers as "pure," "absolute," or "in itself" without contradiction. "We" philosophers may guard against this lurking intellectual asceticism by keeping in mind that "there is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival knowing" (GM 3: 12). To see more clearly how this works, we can dig a bit deeper into the analogy Nietzsche proposes between visual and cognitive perspective.

22. Russell 1959: 160.

23. Nietzsche makes a similar point elsewhere—that the elimination of the self in the service of objectivity, even if it were possible, would not be desirable. In a lengthy and relentless attack (BGE 207), Nietzsche appropriates for his own critical purposes the very notion of "selflessness" that his philosophical predecessors (and successors, as Russell shows) idealize.

24. See chapter 2.

All instances of visual perception are characterized (or qualified) by some "point of view" of the perceiver: a viewer stands in a certain position relative to an object, there is a determinate distance between them, the lighting is dim or bright, colored or not, the medium is translucent or transparent, the viewer may be nearsighted or farsighted. In a similar way, the mental representations furnished by cognition are qualified by a number of features including the prior beliefs, cognitive capacities, and practical interests of the knower. These features "situate" the knower with respect to the world. We can characterize perspectivism, then, as the view that all knowledge is situated in this way (i.e., qualified by these cognitive background conditions, just as all instances of visual perception are qualified by the location and other relevant perceptual conditions). Insofar as viewing is an action that presupposes a subject, and insofar as that subject must be someplace or other at any given time, there can be no such thing as a view from no *place* whatsoever. And just as there is no visual experience that is unconditioned by the perceiver's point of view, neither will there be any knowledge unconditioned by the epistemic peculiarities of the subject. In short, there is no "view from nowhere": this claim must be the upshot of the metaphor offered at *Genealogy* 3: 12.[25]

This condition, if accepted, does away with the notion of ascetic objectivity Nietzsche wants to reject; but as I have suggested above it does not altogether rule out objectivity (in some appropriately amended sense). This is what Nietzsche calls the "future 'objectivity'" of the intellect: one that apparently has to do with developing one's awareness of and control over the "background conditions" of knowledge, rather than contemplating "without interest." Immediately after he declares that there is "*only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing'," he adds that "the *more* affects

25. The analysis of Nietzsche's visual metaphor for perspectivism is fairly straightforward, I think, though it should be noted that this particular formulation owes much to existing discussions. Almost everyone who has written on perspectivism in recent years has recognized the importance of *Genealogy* 3: 12 for developing an account of Nietzsche's epistemological views and has accordingly devoted serious attention to the metaphor. See, e.g., Clark (1990: 129–30), Leiter (1994: 344), and Anderson (1998: 2). Magnus (1988: 152–53) suggests that "perspectivism derives some of its intuitive force from the emerging popularity of the still-picture camera in Nietzsche's time and can be understood as a generalization of its point." This image illustrates "Nietzsche's claim that knowing, like seeing and representing, is always from some point of view or other."

we allow to speak about a matter, *the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, *our 'objectivity'* be" (GM 3: 12, final emphasis added). Lest we think that perspective-bound seeing is too limiting, Nietzsche is quick to remind us that we can *change* our point of view, one time or many times, to fill out our picture of an object.[26] We can walk around an object, examine it under various lighting conditions, look at it from close up or far away; or we can use other instruments, like magnifying lenses, to inspect its surface more closely. Nowadays we can use such technologies as X-ray and ultrasound to "see inside" objects whose surfaces seemed unyieldingly opaque. All of these enhancements and adjustments of our perceptual apparatus, including the simple changes of position by which we view an object from different sides, promise to put us in an increasingly better epistemic position with respect to the object through the accretion of visual perspectives on it.

Effecting similar changes in our cognitive apparatus, of course, may be a more complicated affair: we would have to become aware of our prior beliefs, the relevant drives and the affective states and interests that condition those beliefs, and learn how to manipulate them; we would have to adopt entirely new modes of valuation. Nietzsche realizes that this is a tall order. That is why he says:

> To see differently in this way for once, *to want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity'—the latter understood not as 'disinterested contemplation' (which is a non-concept and absurdity),[27] but as the capacity to have one's pro and contra *in one's power*, and to shift them in and out: so that one knows how to make precisely the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether everyone will be able to succeed in effecting the kind of control Nietzsche envisions, his point in this passage is that all the objectivity we could

26. Leiter (1994) refers to this as the "plurality claim" of perspectivism: "The more perspectives we enjoy—for example, the more angles we see the object from—the better our conception of what the object is actually like will be," or "the more we will know about its actual nature" (344–45). In the cognitive case, of course, what is relevant is the number of "interests we employ in knowing the object."

27. Note how this way of construing the conventional understanding of "objectivity" reinforces the point about conceptual contradictions and illusions, discussed above.

reasonably require is in principle available: to ask for "contemplation without interest" is to ask the impossible.

The Skeptical Character of Perspectivism

In the previous section, we saw how Nietzsche introduces the celebrated visual metaphor of perspectivism in the context of an attack on a particular notion of epistemic objectivity, which he connects with the ascetic ideal. But does the perspectivist metaphor do more than this? I think it does do more, though still not as much as has been claimed for it. I believe that perspectivism results in a deeply skeptical intuition that works not only against ascetic objectivity but also against the further epistemic goals and values of those who take it as an ideal. The intellectual ascetic does not value this brand of objectivity for its own sake, it seems, but for the sake of the fruit he thinks it will bear; he values it *extrinsically*. What he desires above all else and considers an *intrinsic* good is secure knowledge about the real natures of things. That, after all, is supposed to be the reward of "true philosophic contemplation." The knowledge or possession of such truths merits the highest value in the "monstrous" system of valuation adopted by the ascetic philosopher. Insofar as perspectivism is effective in undermining this idealization of truth as intrinsically valuable, it will also be precluded from playing the sort of metaphysical role (e.g., as a theory of truth) that commentators have frequently supposed it does.

If the aim of ascetic objectivity is to reach the truth about the real natures of things, what is the aim or end of our allowing "*more* eyes, different eyes . . . to observe one thing" and "*more* affects . . . to speak about one thing" ("our 'objectivity'," as Nietzsche describes it)? According to Nietzsche, by learning how to take account of and manipulate these affects, our "concept" of the object of investigation becomes "more complete." Will we ever secure *complete*, exhaustive knowledge of objects in this way? If we examine once again the consequences of the visual metaphor, it seems the answer must be "no." For one thing, it clearly follows that there will be an upper limit to the number of perspectives I can enjoy on any one object, owing simply to my own finitude. So there are physical reasons, and there may be conceptual ones as well, for thinking that we can never have "all possible perspectives" on any object. Just as there is no "view from nowhere," there is also no "view from

everywhere"—that is, no God's eye view—according to perspectivism. This differs from the idea that there is no view from nowhere (and that knowledge is always qualified) by its suggestion that, in addition, human knowledge is always incomplete.[28] Nietzsche, therefore, need not demonstrate the unattainability of complete and adequate knowledge of the world; to do so would find him allied with Academic skeptics as Sextus presents them, the proponents of negative dogmatism. His strategy is on the contrary to draw our attention to the "contradictory impossibility" and "absurdity" of the "true philosophic contemplation" as described by Russell.

In addition, though, simply multiplying perspectives—those views of an object that we have always and only *against some background*—can give rise to skeptical worries. What we expect is that our visual impression of an object will be *enhanced* by our looking at it from different angles and under various conditions, but this does not happen in every case. Sometimes our senses give us conflicting information. That different points of view yield different and perhaps incompatible conceptions of ordinary objects is sufficient to generate a familiar set of skeptical concerns: the relativity of perception is the oldest and best-known source material for skeptical challenges. In the classic case of the tower that looks round from a distance and square when we come closer, for instance, we receive two incompatible reports from our senses, which cannot both be true. For if we believe that a physical object such as a tower cannot genuinely instantiate two contradictory (or even contrary) properties (in the same way at the same time)—on pain of violating the basic principle of non-contradiction[29]—then at a minimum we are forced to conclude that a choice must be made about which description

28. This consequence, also obvious enough, has likewise been noted in the literature. Leiter (1994) calls this the "infinity claim" of perspectivism: "We will never exhaust all possible perspectives on the object of vision" (or of knowledge). "Thus," he says, "we will never…have a final and complete view of the object's actual…nature" (344–45). Recognizing this same point, Clark (1990) says there is "an important sense in which our capacity for truth is limited, namely, that there are always more truths than any human being can know. We are, after all, finite creatures with a limited amount of time to discover truths." However, she says in the same passage, "That there are many truths I do not know gives me no reason to doubt the truth or reliability of any of my present beliefs" (135). I hope to demonstrate the falsity of this claim in what follows.

29. Or more accurately, an ontological version of it, as Hankinson (1995: 157) proposes: rather than a principle about propositions, the ontological version of the

represents the "real" state of affairs. In order to make our choice, we must call upon further criteria (e.g., what the science of optics tells us about the relevance of physical proximity or adequate lighting to accurate visual perception). In the tower case, the decision seems fairly straightforward; but it is important to note that in the absence of reliable second-order criteria, or where the theory that supports our decision is in question, we have no nonarbitrary way of deciding which of the two conflicting sense reports to privilege. Skepticism gains a foothold by challenging the notion that there are any legitimate criteria by which we might make this choice.

In the ninth book of Diogenes' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* we find just such an argument, directly from the "situated-ness" of human perception to skeptical conclusions. In what he lists as the seventh of the ten modes (the primary sources differ on the order of the modes), Diogenes reconstructs the conclusion of this argument tersely: "Since, then, it is not possible to observe these things apart from places and positions, their real nature is unknowable" (DL IX 86). By "places and positions," Diogenes refers to just the sorts of "background conditions" we have considered here in the case of visual perception: the distance between the viewer and the object, the position of the object relative to the viewer, and so on.[30] "In this mode," Diogenes tells us, "things which are thought to be large appear small, square things round; flat things appear to have projections, straight things to be bent, and colorless colored" (DL IX 85). Because this is so, he concludes tersely, we do not know how these things are in themselves.

But what line of reasoning is at work here? And how are we to understand the conclusion and its significance? Unfortunately, this is virtually all Diogenes has to report on this skeptical argument, and he leaves both of these questions unanswered. Fortunately, however, Diogenes is neither the only nor the best source for the ten modes, and we can look to Sextus Empiricus, the central source for Pyrrhonian skepticism, to spell out this same argument in a bit more detail. In *Outlines of Skepticism*, Sextus lists this argument as the fifth mode, calling it "the one depending on positions and intervals and places" (PH I 118). As in his accounts of the other modes, this one

principle of noncontradiction would simply say that an *X* cannot have the properties *F* and *not-F*, or perhaps *F* and *F** (in the same way at the same time).

30. "The *seventh* mode has reference to distances, positions, places and the occupant of the places" (DL IX 85).

is accompanied by a rich catalog of examples, from the pedestrian tower case and the oar that looks bent in the water to more entertaining and exotic observations: "Eggs appear soft in the bird but hard in the air. Lyngurion [amber] appears liquid inside the lynx, but hard in the air.[31] Coral appears soft in the sea, but hard in the air. And sound appears different when produced in a pipe, in a flute, or simply in the air" (PH I 119). The reference to the "appearance" of sound reminds us that the Pyrrhonists mean more than just visual perception; even an argument can "appear" valid to a Skeptic.

Returning to the argument itself, Sextus summarizes the force of the fifth mode in this way: "Since, then, all apparent things are observed in some place and from some interval and in some position, and each of these produces a great deal of variation in appearances, as we have suggested, we shall be forced to arrive at suspension of judgment by these modes too" (PH I 121). Both Diogenes and Sextus make the basic "perspectivist" point here that perception is always qualified by the point of view of the perceiver. Moreover, each perception will be qualified uniquely. This results, crucially, in conflicts between appearances: an object has appearance A from perspective P, contrary appearance $A^{\star}$ from perspective $P^{\star}$, and so forth.[32] But so what? we may ask (especially of Diogenes). Sextus has an answer: these conflicts of appearance force upon us just the kinds of choice we discussed above. The Pyrrhonist then takes it as his task to demonstrate that no such choice is justified; for instance, they cannot be made without running afoul of one of the further modes of Skepticism. Since no choice is warranted, we are "forced" to suspend judgment on the real nature of the object in question—the very issue his dogmatic opponent desired to settle. Sextus's full argument runs as follows:

> For anyone wishing to give preference to some of these appearances over others will be attempting the impossible. If he makes his declaration simply and without proof, he will not be credible. But if he wants to use a proof, then if he says the proof is false, he will overturn himself, and if he says the proof is true, he will be required to

31. Here, Annas and Barnes 1985: 103 inserts a helpful comment: "Lyngurion is a kind of amber, so-called from the belief that it was formed from the congealed urine of the lynx."

32. Thus, Sextus's opening comment: "The fifth argument is the one depending on positions and intervals and places—*for depending on each of these the same objects appear different*" (PH I 118, emphasis added).

> give a proof of its being true, and another proof of that, since it too has to be true, and so on ad infinitum. But it is impossible to establish infinitely many proofs. And so he will not be able to prefer one appearance to another with a proof either. But if no one can decide among the above appearances either without proof or with proof, suspension of judgment is inferred: we are no doubt able to say what each thing appears to be like given this position or that interval or this place, but we are not able, for the above reasons, to declare what it is like in its nature. (PH I 121–23)

The first dilemma that Sextus forces upon his imaginary dogmatic opponent catches him up in one of the five modes attributed to Agrippa; here, the mode from hypothesis (asserting an unargued-for premise).[33] Next, Sextus runs him aground on the mode from infinite regress. Having exhausted the available options, Sextus says, suspension of judgment follows.

Still, we may not be moved by the Pyrrhonist's argument. After all, our perceptual lives are full of the conflicts of appearance Sextus and Diogenes mention, but we do not go about mired in perplexity about how to solve them. I am not in doubt about the genuinely straight shape of the stubbornly bent-seeming oar when I observe it in the water because I know that the angle of refraction of light

33. It is well worth noting the frequent appearance in Nietzsche's work of arguments resembling some of the modes of Skepticism. In chapter 2, I examined arguments in which Nietzsche appeals to the differences in perception that one might suppose track the different perceptual apparatus of various animals, which recall "the argument according to which animals, depending on the differences among them, do not receive the same appearances from the same things" (PH I 40); Sextus discusses this as the first of the ten modes of Aenesidemus. In the first few of these modes, Sextus also claims that suspension is brought about not only by the differences noted, but by the fact that no one who is a party to the dispute can adjudicate in it (see, e.g., PH I 59). Nietzsche appeals to this Pyrrhonian favorite in *Twilight*: "*the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by the living, who are an interested party, a bone of contention, even, and not judges; not by the dead for other reasons" (TI 'Socrates' 2). In addition, the fourth mode of the five modes attributed to Agrippa is frequently invoked by Nietzsche. According to this "hypothetical" mode, "our interlocutor claims to assume something by way of concession and without proof" (PH I 164–77, esp. I 173; cf. DL IX 88–89). Compare Nietzsche's lengthy rant in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Philosophers have all demanded (with ridiculously stubborn seriousness) something much more exalted, ambitious, and solemn as soon as they took up morality as a science: they wanted morality to be *grounded*,—and every philosopher so far has thought that he has provided a ground for morality. Morality itself, however, was thought to be 'given'" (BGE 186). In general, Nietzsche's diatribes against "faith" take this form.

changes in the water in a way that has a predictable effect on the appearance of the oar.[34] There is a theory we can appeal to that explains the phenomenon. In fact, unless we happen to be physicists studying the properties of light, we will generally take the theory for granted, making our appeal to it so quickly and almost unconsciously that the conflict of appearances does not affect our ability to interpret our experience. But to think that this appeal to theory will quiet the Pyrrhonist is to underestimate him. As we have said, his skepticism gets a foothold precisely by challenging the legitimacy of such appeals. Beyond his being able to draw on other modes of skepticism that force the dogmatist into circularity, regress, or the like, a Pyrrhonist even in Sextus's era can point to a variety of competing optical theories (widely available at the time) to challenge the choice of one theory over others that seem to do the same explanatory work. The argument advanced at the level of perception works equally well at the level of theory, and the Skeptic's conclusion, here as before, is that we cannot but suspend judgment on the issue at hand. We can see how this challenge, if it is successful, yields a skeptical technique that can be used to undercut the results of not only scientific but just about any other investigations. And this outcome suits the Skeptic's largely ad hominem ends. Skepticism in antiquity is primarily a critical enterprise, and its aim is not to propound positive views of its own but to discredit those of the dogmatists.

Would Nietzsche thus be committed to skepticism about the results of scientific as well as metaphysical inquiry? Not necessarily. Nietzsche, like the Skeptic, takes aim at a very specific target—in Nietzsche's case, those dogmatists who neglect or deny what he elsewhere calls "*perspective*, the basic condition of all life" (BGE P; cf. BGE 34). By way of illustration, he points to Plato's metaphysical theory of the nature of the soul and its relationship to the Good, calling it specifically "a dogmatist's error" (BGE P). So his skepticism here shares not only the ad hominem spirit of Pyrrhonism but its scope as well, being most concerned with claims that transcend those for which we could have empirical evidence. As we saw earlier, the proposition that "knowing" or cognizing is like perceiving implies that it is "situated" in much the same way: it is always

34. Cf. the discussion of the fifth mode in Annas and Barnes 1985, in which they consider in more detail the answers that could be made on the Skeptic's behalf.

qualified by interests, desires, and affects. Scientific activity in particular and intellectual inquiry in general proceed "honestly" to the extent that they maintain an awareness of this perspectival nature of knowledge. "We see," he explains in *The Gay Science*, "that science too rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science" (GS 344). The point is reiterated later in the *Genealogy*, with a further explanation: "Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as science 'without any presuppositions'; this thought does not bear thinking through, it is paralogical: a philosophy, a 'faith', must always be there first of all, so that science can acquire from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist" (GM 3: 24). There is even the suggestion that it can be used to advantage: the one who "knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge" will be that much better at interpreting the data both in observation and reflection (GM 3: 12).

Confronted with conflicting claims about metaphysical objects or competing views about the underlying structure of reality, however, we suspend judgment—these are not questions that should interest us—because a decision could be made only on the basis of an interest-independent criterion that is not available. Peter Poellner makes a similar point in his discussion of Nietzsche's perspectivism, one that may help distinguish these two types of claims. According to him, metaphysical explanations, for instance about "why the contents of experience are the way they are," should not be confused or "mistakenly assimilated to explanations in everyday and in scientific contexts":

> In the latter we have fairly clear and broadly agreed criteria for what makes explanation A 'better' than explanation B (in science, explanatory virtue is very closely linked to predictive success). In metaphysics we have no such criteria. Assuming for the moment that there are sophisticated versions of physicalist realism, idealism, panpsychism, or theist creationism which are internally coherent, there simply is no procedure agreed among competent inquirers for determining what would make any one of these metaphysical 'explanations' better than another.[35]

On this account, though, it would be just as audacious to deny as to assert the truth of claims like the one Nietzsche singles out as the

35. Poellner 2001: 117. Strangely, Poellner nevertheless denies that Nietzsche's position ends in skepticism.

height of asceticism in philosophy: "*There is* a realm of truth and being, but reason is *excluded* from it!" (GM 3: 12) The verification conditions of such claims are incompatible with epistemic capabilities that are perspectivally conditioned.

Nietzsche's Suspension of Judgment

In the Pyrrhonian literature, the connection between the perceptual and cognitive limits that the fifth mode (or the seventh mode, on Diogenes' presentation) brings to light and the suspension of judgment (*epochē*) that is supposed to follow from those limits—not to mention their overall emphasis on suspension of judgment—are much more obvious than they are in Nietzsche. Even after we have considered a number of passages that speak in favor of doubt and against dogmatism, caution on any front, not to mention the subtle suspension of judgment practiced by the Pyrrhonists, may still seem to be an odd thing to attribute to him. However, even in some of his most bombastic works, Nietzsche indicates that what sets his thought apart from those thinkers he criticizes is in fact a similar attitude. And in these texts, we get an important glimpse of how Nietzsche's training as a classical philologist informs his philosophical outlook.

Nietzsche saw himself as a philologist until the very end of his productive career, and philology is a discipline that advances by means of a certain kind of (at least methodological) skepticism: it is part of the business of philology to question the boundaries of established authorial canons, to challenge the authenticity of manuscripts, and so on.[36] Philologists, Nietzsche declares in *The Gay Science*, are "the destroyers of every faith that rests on books"

36. At least, it was so in Nietzsche's time, when philology as we know it was still struggling to define its tasks and clarify its role in the academy. Porter (2000) contends that "the tendency to skepticism (or 'Pyrrhonism')—broadly speaking, a hermeneutics of suspicion—was more or less a fixed feature of classical philology from its inception. Evaluation (*krisis*), the highest critical art recognized by the Alexandrians in the age of Callimachus, after all involved the capacity to distinguish spurious from authentic texts. Still, methodological skepticism took on a new symbolic value from the eighteenth century onward, as classical philology strove to wrest for itself the status of a full-fledged science (*Wissenschaft*) amid the emerging and competing academic disciplines in Germany" (38). On the competing traditions in nineteenth-century German philology see also Whitman 1986.

(GS 358) and, it might be said, other "faiths" besides. At that point at which scientific inquiry becomes subservient to "truth" as an unconditional ideal, it loses the virtue of honesty and the genuine capacity for relentless investigation and suspicion that were the very source of the respect Nietzsche expresses for the sciences. This attitude is evident, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "You must forgive an old philologist like me who cannot help maliciously putting his finger on bad tricks of interpretation: but this 'conformity of nature to law', which you physicists are so proud of, just as if——exists only because of your interpretation and bad 'philology'" (BGE 22). There is no need to see this statement as standing in tension with Nietzsche's frequent praise of the sciences and their methods. What he condemns in this passage is the physicist who talks proudly or arrogantly about nature "as if"—we can now venture to fill Nietzsche's lacuna—as if his hypotheses about it managed to nail down a truth about the deep structure of reality. That view is one that could never itself be confirmed by the methods endorsed by that science. Moreover, how could it be demonstrated, given the perspectival conditions on human knowledge? The "conformity of nature to law," then, is not so much a proper scientific hypothesis as a practical principle that would guide scientific work, something the physicist (if he accepts it) must take on faith as he turns to the investigation and application of the "laws" themselves.

At least two questions present themselves here, however. First, doubt about this view may seem simply unwarranted: What counterargument should lead us to question nature's conformity to law? Second, why should "good philology" require suspension of judgment as a response? What does the one have to do with the other? First, recall that the Pyrrhonist motivates suspension of judgment primarily by invoking either conflicts of appearance or conflict between competing theoretical explanations. What happens in the absence of an apparent conflict? As we might have suspected, the Skeptic does not give in. For though there may be no conflict on the horizon, the Skeptic will say, we cannot rule out the possibility of future conflict. The fact that an explanatory hypothesis has no current competitor worthy of serious consideration does not entitle us to embrace it and consider the case closed, for it is easy enough to point to instances in the past in which a theory whose truth had come to be taken for granted is overthrown. This skeptical trope is so pervasive, in fact, that in his study of the Greek Skeptics, R. J. Hankinson even coins a special Dickensian term for it, calling

it the skeptic's "Micawber Policy": "Far from being a desperate expedient to preserve an authentically Skeptical stance in the face of overwhelming evidence (as some think), there is actually much to be said for it. After all, until 1543 (and in fact considerably thereafter) the vast preponderance of evidence suggested that the earth was stationary."[37]

Thus, in the spirit of providing an equipollent argument to oppose the physicist's supposition about the lawlike character of nature, Nietzsche proposes that we should not treat it as established because, as he says in the same passage, "somebody with an opposite intention and mode of interpretation [i.e., "opposite" cognitive background conditions] could come along and be able to read from the same nature, and with reference to the same set of appearances, a tyrannically ruthless and pitiless execution of power claims" (BGE 22). That is to say, there might well be another interpretation with an opposing conclusion that is equally consistent with the phenomena. Moreover, we seem to have no obvious resources with which to adjudicate the dispute.

What is interesting to note here is that the claim with which Nietzsche chooses to oppose that of the "physicists" is the one so frequently attributed to him as another central metaphysical "doctrine," the "will to power." But it is never emphasized, indeed seldom even acknowledged by commentators, that although the description in this passage is invested with all of Nietzsche's usual force and vivacity, he ascribes it to an imaginary third person as an explicitly hypothetical statement: "Somebody could come along," he says, with a different interpretation, and "this sort of interpreter would show the unequivocal and unconditional nature of all 'will to power' so vividly and graphically," although "this interpreter

37. Hankinson 1995: 30. Cf. Sextus Empiricus's introductory remarks on the ten modes: "In another sense we sometimes oppose present things to present things . . . and sometimes present to past or future things. For example, when someone propounds to us an argument we cannot refute, we say to him: 'Before the founder of the school to which you adhere was born, the argument of the school, which is no doubt sound, was not yet apparent, although it was really there in nature. In the same way, it is possible that the argument opposing the one you have just propounded is really there in nature but is not yet apparent to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument'" (PH I 33–34). Sextus's comment about such arguments being "really there in nature" is a good example of his occasional infelicity with his own technical vocabulary; we will notice Nietzsche doing the same thing at times.

might nevertheless end up claiming the same thing about this world as you, namely that it follows a 'necessary' and 'calculable' course, although *not* because laws are dominant in it, but rather because laws are totally *absent*." Before we can latch on to this competing hypothesis, however, Nietzsche continues: "Granted, this is only an interpretation too—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well then, so much the better" (BGE 22). So much the better, indeed, if the point of the exercise is *not* to determine which of these opposing views reflects the way things are in themselves but to demonstrate the absurdity of thinking we can resolve the conflict. The value of the "will to power" hypothesis—in this passage, clearly—lies in its balancing and opposing the pronouncements of "proud" and overly ambitious physicists.

Before we turn to the question of what makes the physicists' mode of interpretation "bad philology," it is well worth observing that this is not Nietzsche's only explicit appeal to the notion of "will to power" as an equipollent argument—as an argument, that is, intended to balance and oppose a dominant, dogmatic viewpoint. In the *Genealogy*, he makes the same move in the passages that precede his well-known discussion of the origin and purpose of punishment. Attempting to combat the supposition that democratic principles are themselves written into the natural order of things, Nietzsche draws our attention in the Second Essay to the violence readily observable in the natural world, and in a particularly Sextan moment declares, "To talk of justice and injustice *in themselves* is devoid of all sense; *in itself* injuring, doing violence, pillaging, destroying naturally cannot be 'unjust', insofar as life acts *essentially*—that is, in its basic functions—in an injuring, violating, pillaging, destroying manner and cannot be *thought* at all without this character" (GM 2: 11). As I discuss in chapter 6, Sextus's treatise "Against the Ethicists" (M XI) is devoted to arguing against the claim that anything is good or bad or just or unjust "by nature"; that is, nothing is either good or bad "essentially" or "in itself." Sextus argues so vigorously for this position that he could easily be charged with advancing a positive claim of his own—an antirealist position on the nature of value—were he not so careful to remind his readers that his task is merely to counter (with arguments of whatever strength is necessary) the rashness of his Dogmatic opponents. Similarly, Nietzsche reasons that if his opponents are right about the "unjust" nature of violence and barbarism, then surely those things ought to be the exception rather than the rule. But the appearances, the phenomena, do not bear this

out: "From the highest biological standpoint, conditions of justice can never be anything but *exceptional conditions*, as partial restrictions of the true will of life—which is out after power" (GM 2: 11). Thus, Nietzsche concludes, "a legal system conceived . . . say in accordance with Dühring's communist cliché that every will must accept every other will as equal, would be a principle *hostile to life*" (GM 2: 11).

Just how strong a claim about "the true will of life—which is out after power" is Nietzsche committed to in virtue of this argument? He reiterates it in the next passage, this time complaining about Herbert Spencer, who Nietzsche says defined life "as an ever more purposive inner adaptation to external circumstances" (GM 2: 12). "In so doing, however, one mistakes the essence of life, its *will to power*; in so doing one overlooks the essential pre-eminence of the spontaneous, attacking, infringing, reinterpreting, reordering, and formative forces, upon whose effect the 'adaptation' first follows" (GM 2: 12). Before we conclude that Nietzsche, flying in the face of his own constant indictments of those philosophers and scientists who invent whatever is necessary to vindicate their own presuppositions and thinly veiled moralities, invents a force called "will to power" to shore up his own critique of morality, we should pause to consider why he reminds us of the ubiquity of violence apparent in nature and history:

> I emphasize this main viewpoint of historical methodology all the more because it basically goes against the presently ruling instincts and taste of the times, which would rather learn to live with the absolute randomness, indeed the mechanistic senselessness of all happening than with the theory of a *power-will* playing itself out in all happening. The democratic idiosyncrasy against everything that rules and desires to rule, the modern *misarchism* (to create a bad word for a bad thing) has gradually transformed and disguised itself into something spiritual, most spiritual, to such an extent that today it is already penetrating, is *allowed* to penetrate, step by step into the most rigorous, apparently most objective sciences. (GM 2: 12)

Nietzsche's project in the *Genealogy* is to oppose the "presently ruling instincts" of the modern era, with its "democratic idiosyncrasy." As we noted at the end of chapter 1, in this modern era, the dogmatists have won, and the Skeptical physician will avail himself of arguments of whatever strength is necessary to combat advanced cultural decadence and such entrenched asceticism as Nietzsche finds. Here too, then, the value of the "will to power" hypothesis lies in its balancing and opposing the pronouncements of "proud" and

overly ambitious scientists—ones who, in pretending to lay claim to "objectivity" in the ascetic sense, have lost sight of the perspectival character of knowledge. In other words, they have lost the honest skepticism of the genuine philologist.[38]

We can gain further insight into what makes the physicists' (and others') mode of interpretation "bad philology" by looking at another, later passage that makes the connections I have described even more explicit. Near the end of a particularly visceral assault on Christian dogma in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche assails its opposition to "all *intellectual* [*geistigen*] well-constitutedness" (A 52).[39] So, on top of his several other complaints about Christianity—for instance, that it has devastating effects on higher culture—Nietzsche here suggests that there are *intellectual* grounds for objecting to it. Among those reasons, he includes the theologian's "incapacity for philology":

> Philology should be understood here in a very general sense, as the art of reading well,—to be able to read facts *without* falsifying them through interpretation, *without* letting the desire to understand make you lose caution, patience, subtlety. Philology as *ephexis* in interpretation: whether it concerns books, newspaper articles, destinies, or facts about the weather—not to mention 'salvation of the soul'. (A 52; cf. D 84)

Philology, understood in a broad sense as Nietzsche does here, is an interpretive art. Though he often uses the language of *textual* interpretation, much of his talk is metaphorical in these contexts, and his use of 'interpretation' is by no means restricted to the exegesis of academic or philosophical texts. We are doing important interpretive work whenever we perceive and try to understand the everyday, phenomenal world—hence his addition of newspaper articles,

38. See also GS 319: "Our sort of honesty has been alien to all founders of religion and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge," that is, by questioning those experiences. "But we," on the other hand, "we others who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment—hour after hour, day after day." This passage is one of many in which Nietzsche indicates that intellectual honesty has chiefly to do with scrutiny and the willingness to entertain doubts.

39. Kaufmann's translation; for *geistigen*, Norman retains the more literal 'spiritual'. In light of the epistemological focus of this passage, I think there are good reasons to prefer Kaufmann's version, which might otherwise seem contentious.

destinies, and even the weather.[40] And to do it well, Nietzsche says, is to employ "caution, patience, [and] subtlety." Now perhaps these attitudes alone would not indicate that a genuine suspension is what Nietzsche has in mind. But he makes the further claim in this passage that philology *means* "*ephexis* in interpretation." As Nietzsche is well aware, the Greek term *ephexis* means "a stopping or checking," and it comes from the verb *epechein*, which itself means "to hold back" or "to check." In Hellenistic skepticism, "holding back" or refraining from judgment is precisely what characterizes the activity of a Skeptic; the term *epechein* is the *source* of the Pyrrhonian skeptics' concept *epochē*. "Suspension of judgment (*epochē*)," Sextus tells us, "gets its name from the fact that the intellect is suspended (*epexetai*) so as neither to posit nor reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters being investigated" (PH I 196). Hence, the Skeptics referred to themselves also as *aphektikoi*. To think of philology "as *ephexis* in interpretation" indicates that what makes good interpretation or good philology *good* is a type of suspension of judgment on the metaphysical matters Nietzsche is worried about.[41] The same sentiment is echoed throughout Nietzsche's works, even where he does not use the term *ephexis*, where he emphasizes caution and disdains the rush to judgment. Of his own practice he says, "Philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still and to become slow—...this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read *well*, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers" (D P: 5).

Many commentators have noticed Nietzsche's hostility to dogmatism. But most have failed to appreciate the point that if his perspectivism is deployed as part of the attack on dogmatism, it will defeat Nietzsche's purpose if perspectivism, in the end, just stands

40. By this metaphor, I believe Nietzsche means to emphasize the similarity between the *act* of interpreting texts and the *act* of interpreting, say, observational or scientific data and not—as has been proposed (most notably by Nehamas 1985)—to propose a similarity between *the world* and *a text*.

41. In this passage and others, Nietzsche singles out the refusal to engage in doubt of any kind as the hallmark of Christianity's lack of "*intellectual* well-constitutedness." For the Christian, he says, "Doubt is already a sin" (A 52). I will take up the connection between skepticism and sin, or rather between doubt and immoralism, in chapter 6.

in for an equally dogmatic position. A recognition of the likeness between perspectivism and Skepticism, and an understanding of the roots of that skepticism in a tradition with which Nietzsche is well familiar, should together force us to appreciate his unwillingness to defend the audacious positions attributed to him by the metaphysical readings. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, it should illuminate the connection between Nietzsche's view of knowledge and his commitment to psychological health, thereby bringing Nietzsche's role as philosophical psychologist into (appropriately) sharper relief.

CHAPTER 5

Skepticism and Health

Late in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche emphasizes that "the sick are the greatest danger to the healthy; it is *not* from the strongest that harm comes to the strong, but rather from the weakest" (GM 3: 14). In the interest of preserving this health and strength, he says, it is imperative that it not become the task of the robust to tend to the infirm. Thus, he continues, "the higher *must* not degrade itself to a tool of the lower, the pathos of distance *must* also keep their tasks separated to all eternity!" These urgent declarations, in addition to the mocking tone with which he refers to "'saviors' for the sick" in this important passage, ought to have us conclude that Nietzsche simply cannot be bothered with the health of the "lower"—that is, the majority of humankind—either because such concern is itself inimical to one who is "higher" or simply because, for those whom he has diagnosed as sick, the prognosis is so grim as to make such efforts futile. Nietzsche, who writes as a cheerful convalescent himself, is of course an exceptional case. But as he explains in *Ecce Homo*:

> I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: this is possible—as any physiologist will admit—*as long as you are basically healthy*. Something with a typically morbid nature cannot become healthy, much less make itself healthy; on the other hand, for something that is typically healthy, sickness can actually be an energetic *stimulus* to life, to being more alive. (EH 'Wise' 2)

Nietzsche is mostly pessimistic about the chances for recovery of the "typically morbid"; nothing in his corpus decisively rules out the possibility that even the most widespread illnesses, while perhaps not terminal, are chronic or incurable.

In light of all this, it should perhaps strike us as strange that Nietzsche's philosophy is often characterized as fundamentally *therapeutic*. When Nietzsche is not expressing his utter indifference to how his ideas will be received ("And do they taste good *to you*, these fruits of ours?—But of what concern is that to the trees! Of what concern is that *to us*, us philosophers!" [GM P: 2]), he is expressing his contempt for disciples and followers. He actively resists being read as a redeemer, employing parody to put off any reader looking for a program to follow. In this spirit, he has Zarathustra exclaim: "Indeed, I counsel you to go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And even better: be ashamed of him!... You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra! You are my believers, but what matter all believers! You had not yet sought yourselves, then you found me. All believers do this; that's why all faith amounts to so little" (Z 1 'On the Bestowing Virtue' 3). He reiterates this sentiment, indeed these very lines, emphatically in the preface to *Ecce Homo* as "the exact opposite of what a 'wise man', 'saint', 'world redeemer', or other decadent would say in this situation" (EH P: 4) and insists again in the concluding chapter: "I do not *want* any 'true believers'" (EH 'Destiny' 1). As early as *Daybreak*, Nietzsche warns, "Do not think for a moment that I intend to invite you to the same hazardous enterprise" as the one he undertakes (D P: 2).

Even if Nietzsche *were* therapeutically inclined, we might ask, who could be the beneficiaries of his efforts? A select group, perhaps, of those "who have ears" to hear him or who "have eyes capable of seeing this work in the depths" (D P: 1)—although, of course, even for that "one must be made" since "nobody is free to have ears for Zarathustra" (EH P: 3–4). Or perhaps his audience would be those oft-mentioned "philosophers of the future" whose time is yet to come. After all, he says, "it will be a while before my writings are 'readable'" (GM P: 8). Supposing Nietzsche possessed the ambition to develop a therapeutic program or took it to be his task to do so, and supposing we could identify the demographic to whom he would market it, his critique of moralists and "physicians of the soul" and his suspicion of the very universality of their claims—to say nothing of his skepticism about the nature of the

relationship between cause and effect—would put him in no real position to *recommend* a reliable route to health.

For the same reasons, Sextus Empiricus does not *recommend* Pyrrhonism, at least not in any conventional sense. His handbook is not a Protreptic; it serves, rather, simply as a report on what sort of practice seems to have brought about health in his own case. He describes it as "fortuitous"—rather than an occasion for self-congratulation—when the Skeptics "come upon" equipollent argument in the course of their investigations and suspend judgment, for the good they were seeking follows upon this suspension (PH I 26). As Nietzsche reflects in *Ecce Homo* on his intellectual achievements and on the state of perfect health, "the perfect brightness and cheerfulness"[1] that he claims is reflected throughout his work—a health so robust that it is compatible even with great physiological torment—he does so not with pride, but with *gratitude* to the instincts that have led him in matters large and small to do what would preserve his strength and restore his health. He is careful to avoid ambitious speculations about what habits will in general cause which effects, and he does not offer recommendations to others; he assiduously avoids doing so. Instead, he simply relates—and celebrates—what seems to have brought about his own healthful condition.

The foregoing considerations make a prescriptive reading of Nietzsche, I believe, difficult to motivate or sustain. On the other hand, though, Nietzsche's preoccupation with the "health" of human beings and with what constitutes their success or failure is obviously one of which we must take account, as it spans his entire productive career. It is the framing question of the *Genealogy*, in which Nietzsche's project is in large part to diagnose the condition of human beings—that is, whether they are "flourishing" or not—by treating their value systems as symptoms or signs of that condition. In the preface he reflects on how "the problem of the origin of evil haunted me" and how eventually it was transformed into a different problem, one about the nature of human flourishing and what contributes to or detracts from it:

> Under what conditions did man invent those value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have*? Have they inhibited

1. In this passage (EH 'Wise' 1), he refers specifically to the "brightness and cheerfulness" of *Daybreak*.

> or furthered human flourishing [*das menschliche Gedeihen*] up until now? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or, conversely, do they betray the fullness, the power, the will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future? (GM P: 3)

And health is the leitmotif of *The Gay Science* as well. In the 1887 preface to that work, Nietzsche observes, "For a psychologist there are few questions that are as attractive as that concerning the relation of health and philosophy" (GS P: 2). As a work, *The Gay Science* is *about* the relationship of health to philosophy; more specifically, it is about precisely what kind of philosophy issues from a "healthy" as opposed to a "sick" or "weak" constitution. It opens with a meditation on convalescence and closes with three passages that tie together the central themes of cheerfulness [*Fröhlichkeit*], how that cheerfulness distinguishes Nietzsche's philosophical methodology from others', and the importance of *health*. What I want to stress here is that there is surely no understanding this book, much less what Nietzsche takes to be the ideal "philosophical life," without examining both what he means by "health" and its essential relationship to "cheerfulness." For " 'Gay Science'," he tells us, signifies nothing other than "the saturnalia of a mind that has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure"—that is, *resisted in a patient way* (i.e., without anxiousness or fuss, without "losing patience") and also *resisted as a patient* (i.e., one who suffers or undergoes something, like a pathological condition)—"and is now all of a sudden attacked by hope, by hope for health, by the *intoxication* of recovery" (GS P: 1). So much for Nietzsche's gaiety, then, "the jubilation of returning strength." What any of this has to do with science, or rather investigation and the pursuit of knowledge, has yet to be clarified.

Before turning to that task, we should note that Nietzsche's concern for health arises at two levels—one is cultural, the other personal. In the *Genealogy*, we learn that no one has yet raised the question of the value of values but that such investigation must be undertaken since everywhere in Europe, and even more widely, Nietzsche finds the sickness and decadence of the ascetic ideal and the slow, steady progress toward nihilism—progress that can be halted, if at all, only by a thorough revaluation of values. Nietzsche never took himself to have completed such a project, of course; in *Ecce Homo* he clearly regards that as a task yet to be accomplished—one to which all his prior work, including *Ecce Homo* itself, has been only a prolegomena. The preface opens with a programmatic remark:

"In the expectation that soon I will have to confront humanity with the most difficult demand it has ever faced, it seems imperative for me to say *who I am*" (EH P: 1). The "most difficult demand" is clearly the revaluation of all values, to which Nietzsche alludes later in the same work when he invokes "the shattering lightning bolt of the *Revaluation*, a book that will rack the earth with convulsions" (EH 'Books: CW' 4). There, as elsewhere, we learn that it is not for everyone to undertake such a revaluation—Nietzsche is peculiarly suited to the task. Why?

He offers what seem to be different reasons at different times. The first hinges on the rejection of "objectivity" in its pejorative sense and the importance of his "perspectivist" insight, the Skeptical character of which we have already examined. For in *Ecce Homo*, he explains: "I have a hand for switching *perspectives*: the first reason why a 'revaluation of values' is even possible, perhaps for me alone" (EH 'Wise' 1). Elsewhere, he appeals to health as the indispensable prerequisite for what he took to be the most pressing task of a "gay science," the revaluation of values:

> *The great health*.—We who are new, nameless, hard to understand; we premature births of an as yet unproved future—for a new end, we also need a new means, namely, a new health [*einer neuen Gesundheit*] that is stronger, craftier, tougher, bolder, and more cheerful [*stärkeren gewitzteren zäheren verwegneren lustigeren*] than any previous health. (GS 382)

Nietzsche contrives a similarly colorful description of the new and "stronger [*stärkeren*] type of skepticism" whose development he forecast in *Beyond Good and Evil*; namely, "that more dangerous and harder new type of skepticism . . . the skepticism of audacious [*verwegenen*] manliness," which "does not believe but does not lose itself in the process"[2] and which he said would be due "to the unconquerably strong [*starken*] and tough [*zähen*] virility of the great German philologists and critical historians (viewed properly, all of them

2. Nietzsche might have said "does not believe *and* does not lose itself in the process," for as he says later, in *The Anti-Christ*, "The 'man of faith' [*Der 'Gläubige'*] does not belong to *himself*, he can only be a means, he needs to be *used up*, he needs someone to use him up. He instinctively holds a morality of self-abnegation in the greatest honor" (A 54). This point echoes the scathing criticism of the man of "disinterested knowledge" at BGE 207: "He is only a tool, we will say: he is a *mirror*." I shall return to this point below.

were also artists of destruction and dissolution)" (BGE 209)[3]—terms in which Nietzsche will describe himself, as we shall see in the following chapter, in *Ecce Homo* (i.e., as "the *destroyer par excellence*" [EH 'Destiny' 2]). And his further qualification of "the *great health*" as a condition "that one doesn't only have, but also acquires continually" (GS 382), suggests that this condition, like Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment, is a state not of *being*, but of *doing*; it is never a static state. Both of these conditions, Nietzsche's health and Skeptical *epochē*, require active maintenance by restless inquirers and investigators who do not "remain stuck" to any persons or ideas (BGE 41) and who remain free of the "prisons" of conviction (A 54).

As I argue in this chapter, however, the echoes are more than merely suggestive. Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment is alleged to bring about health in its practitioners. They are "philanthropic" (note Nietzsche's reference to his own "cheerful and philanthropic" manner in *Ecce Homo* [EH P: 2]) and "wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (PH III 280). To this end, they regard arguments "like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matters present in the body" (PH II 188). Pyrrhonism, then, is chiefly concerned with health, and what brings it about or destroys it is by and large a matter of the methods of investigation one employs.

Thus, on the one hand we have a promisingly explicit link forged by the Pyrrhonists between health and science, if the latter is construed broadly and methodologically, as Nietzsche seems to have thought of it. For "on the whole," he says, "the procedures of science are at least as important a product of inquiry as any other outcome: for the scientific spirit rests upon an insight into the procedures, and if these were lost all the other products of science together would not suffice to prevent a restoration of superstition and folly" (HH 1: 635). And on the other hand, we have a link forged by Nietzsche himself between science and skepticism in the continuation of this passage from *Human, All Too Human*:

> There are people of intelligence who can *learn* as many of the facts of science as they like, but from their conversation, and especially from the hypotheses they put forward, you can tell that they lack the spirit of science: they have not that instinctive mistrust of devious

3. The translation of BGE 209 is Kaufmann's; on the translation of this and surrounding passages of *Beyond Good and Evil*, see the introduction, nn. 21 and 22.

> thinking which, as a consequence of long practice, has put its roots down in the soul of every scientific man. For them it is enough to have discovered any hypothesis at all concerning any matter, then they are at once on fire for it and believe the whole thing is accomplished. To possess an opinion is to them the same thing as to become a fanatical adherent of it and henceforth to lay it to their heart as a conviction. (1: 635)

The "spirit of science" could hardly have been described better by Sextus himself: the nature of investigation is not about the accumulation and possession of facts, and it is above all opposed to fanaticism. To inquire [*skeptesthai*] is to approach the world curiously but with an attitude of mistrust or suspicion; it is to exercise *ephexis* in interpretation. This is no theoretical position (e.g., no "commitment to mistrust") but an "instinct" developed after "long practice." Sextus recounts how "men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil" (PH I 12). Some such men come across equipollent dispute and become known as Pyrrhonists for their suspension of judgment; most others, however, abandon their investigations to become adherents of some Dogmatic school or other, which is where their investigations come to an end. These latter men are dead ringers, we might say, for Nietzsche's "people of intelligence" who nevertheless lack the spirit of science. So we are now on the way to knowing what science, Skeptically conceived, could have to do with health and psychological well-being, if not yet with gaiety.

Troublingly, however, the healthy condition that is supposed to constitute the end or aim [*telos*] of Skepticism, which Sextus describes as "tranquility [*ataraxia*] in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us" (PH I 25), hardly seems reconcilable with a Nietzschean account of health and well-being. *Ataraxia* in general and the Pyrrhonists' practice in particular have often been linked with indifference and impassivity: "According to some authorities the end proposed by the Skeptics is insensibility [*apatheia*]; according to others, gentleness [*praotēs*]" (DL IX 108). The skeptic's life is described as one free of risk—and consequently, free of the excitement that accompanies risk.[4] The skeptic pursues

4. Hankinson 1995: 30, 306.

the study of natural philosophy not passionately but "quietly," on this received view. Rather than lose sleep over the riddle of nature's mysteries, the Pyrrhonian skeptic will "potter gently along doing a little mild investigating."[5] But with the achievement of *ataraxia*, the skeptic experiences "a withdrawal from truth and real existence [that] becomes, in a certain sense, a detachment from oneself."[6] Once he has attained *ataraxia*—according to this anesthetic characterization of that state—the skeptic's dispassionate life "will be a hollow shell of the existence he enjoyed, and was troubled by, prior to his skeptical enlightenment. Such is the price of peace and tranquility, however," concludes Myles Burnyeat, "and the skeptic is willing to pay it to the full."[7]

A Skeptical (or even a Stoic or Epicurean) sage of the Hellenistic era maintains his tranquility and calm, it seems, at the cost of denying his passionate nature and by renouncing care and concern—precisely those things prerequisite, we might suppose, for living the richest possible life and for taking on (to say nothing of succeeding in) great tasks. Unable to reflect on anything, he would be equally unable to become excited about anything or to undertake any project with real enthusiasm. Jonathan Barnes has charged that the Skeptic could be capable of experiencing little more than bovine contentment. If Skepticism produces such insensitivity and encourages detachment from oneself, some say, then so much the worse for the Skeptic. Yet this conception of the end of Skepticism is inextricable from Pyrrhonian practice; Sextus calls "the causal principle of skepticism . . . the hope of becoming tranquil" (PH I 12). It is what gets the Skeptic started, and it seems to be the reward of Skeptical practice. If there is no sense in which Nietzsche can accept *ataraxia* as a healthy objective, then, it will be difficult to see how Pyrrhonism could provide the best model for understanding his philosophical project.

Here, "the pointer to the *right* path," as Nietzsche says was given to him by the etymological insight described in the First Essay of the *Genealogy* (GM 1: 4), and an answer to our potential objection, rests in a sort of genealogy of 'tranquility' [*ataraxia*], a more expansive concept with a more complex conceptual lineage than is sometimes

5. Ibid., 30.

6. Burnyeat 1980: 37.

7. Ibid., 41–42. But see also Annas 1993 and Warren 2002 on the Epicurean take on *ataraxia*.

appreciated. The meaning of 'tranquility' to contemporary ears, and certainly to Nietzsche's, is the kind of calm, even bovine, state that he clearly found despicable; it is characteristic of a decadent modern age that has grown weary of itself:

> Such human beings of late cultures and refracted lights will on the average be weaker human beings: their most profound desire is that the war that they *are* should come to an end. Happiness [*das Glück*] appears to them, in agreement with a tranquilizing (for example, Epicurean or Christian) medicine and way of thought, pre-eminently as the happiness of resting, of not being disturbed, of satiety, of finally attained unity, as a 'sabbath of sabbaths'. (BGE 200)

As we know from the *Genealogy*, the slave revolt in morality effected a violent and perhaps irrevocable transformation of the concepts of 'good' and 'bad'. Christian thought, and even philosophical thought after Plato, also managed successfully (on Nietzsche's account) to transform the meaning of suffering, which thereafter became an *objection to life*. For the Christian, who raged indignantly against the senselessness of suffering, and for philosophers of the Hellenistic era (as Nietzsche's mention of Epicureanism here suggests), 'tranquility' meant a palliative and was synonymous with rest and the absence of all distress and, if necessary, all desire. But before Plato, and especially (though not exclusively) for the Greeks of "the glorious but likewise so gruesome, so violent world of Homer" (GM 1: 11), suffering was fully compatible with a "good conscience" and was not understood necessarily as an objection to life. For these stronger and healthier souls there would have been no need to understand *ataraxia* so narrowly, as suffering's opposite. And indeed, upon closer inspection we will find that the roots of both the Epicurean and late Pyrrhonian senses of this concept make more than enough room for thinking of it not negatively, as the avoidance of suffering, but in a wholly positive way, as a state of psychophysical balance and an indication of strength, life, and health—and in fact, *as a state of cheerfulness*.

For Nietzsche, to philosophize *out of health* and to philosophize *out of cheerfulness* are one and the same thing. In thinking of cheerfulness as health or as a necessary component of it and not merely as a feeling that accompanies it accidentally, his predecessor in antiquity, a thinker who long held his interest, is the pre-Platonic atomist philosopher Democritus of Abdera (fifth–fourth century BCE). Democritus was not a Pyrrhonist, though he was often enough

taken for one that Sextus Empiricus is compelled to devote a discussion in the *Outlines* to the distinction between his own views and those of the Democriteans (PH I 213–14; cf. DL IX 72).[8] His biography is included in the same chapter of Diogenes' *Lives* that retells the life of Pyrrho and his followers; reportedly, Timon praised him highly as a "keen-witted disputant, among the best I ever read" (DL IX 40). In this chapter, I will examine the depth and substance of Nietzsche's interest in the Abderite, according to whom "the end [*telos*] of action is tranquility [*euthumia*], which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion. This he calls well-being [*euesto*] and many other names" (DL IX 45). Democritus' *euthumia*, translated more often and perhaps more accurately as 'cheerfulness', is a conceptual forerunner of *ataraxia*, the term employed widely in the Hellenistic era to designate the aim of philosophical activity. Once this connection is fully appreciated, it will be clear how the cheerfulness of convalescence that Nietzsche describes in *The Gay Science* brings new meaning to the term "healthy skepticism."

The End of Skepticism

As I have already suggested, there is good reason to be reluctant to characterize Nietzsche's work as *therapeutic* in any conventional sense; that would commit him to a great deal more willingness to dispense advice and write prescriptions than can be found in his writing. But I think he can well be thought of as a eudaimonist,[9] for his having put questions of value first and foremost in terms of doing

8. At the close of book I, Sextus discusses only three other "persuasions" or schools: Cyrenaicism (1: 215); Academic skepticism, unsurprisingly (1: 220–35); and, somewhat confusingly, Medical Empiricism (1: 236–41).

9. In fact, I believe that Nietzsche is *best* thought of as a eudaimonist, though not, as some have suggested, a virtue theorist (e.g., Solomon 2003) or a perfectionist (e.g., Hurka 2007). While both of the latter belong to the general category of eudaimonistic approaches to ethical theory, they would commit Nietzsche to many more substantive and universal claims about the good for human beings than I believe his texts can support. In addition, where Nietzsche is interpreted as propounding a virtue theory, the principle whereby he would determine which traits of character are to count as virtues is often left out of the picture. If there is such a principle clearly elucidated in Nietzsche's work, I have yet to find it; and without one Nietzsche

well, living well, and being well, and for the intuition he apparently shares especially with the Hellenistic philosophers that philosophical practice is in some sense justified by or its success measured by its contribution to human "flourishing."

Eudaimonia, a compound term derived from *eu-* ('well') and *daimon* ('demon', 'spirit' or, simply, 'divinity'), is an elastic concept: 'flourishing' or 'well-being' are among the most familiar ways of rendering the term in English, though it could be thought of also as 'blessedness', which has the virtue of being nicely reconcilable with Nietzsche's emphasis on fate and his own good fortune in having turned out well. Translators of Aristotle, who is the first figure in antiquity from whom we have whole surviving treatises devoted exclusively to ethics as an independent science, and who establishes at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics* that the activity of every human life aims at some ultimate good, have traditionally used 'happiness': as far as the name of this ultimate good goes, Aristotle says, "most people generally agree; for both the many and the cultivated call it happiness [*eudaimonia*], and suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy."[10] Further developments of this view came to include the atomistic hedonism of Epicurus and his followers, who made pleasure (and the absence of pain) the end of all human activity, and who motivated their physical theory by claiming that if we subscribe to their atomistic picture of things, we shall be free from the unhappiness attendant on the fear of death (and meddling gods) and live a more pleasant life as a result. In Stoic ethics, happiness is a matter of living in accordance with what is appropriate [*oikeion*], according to one's nature. Basically, by the Hellenistic era, virtually every major school of thought identified the goal of philosophy, and indeed of living, with *eudaimonia*.[11] Many or even most of them, furthermore, characterized it more specifically as *ataraxia*;[12] the word is formed from an alpha privative

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can be said to have at best a laundry list of characteristics to recommend as virtues, which falls crucially short of a virtue theory proper.

10. *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a 18–20), trans. T. Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

11. McPherran (1990) puts the point succinctly: "'Happiness' was the generic aim of every self-respecting philosophical system of the day" (136).

12. The claim that all the major Hellenistic schools did in fact accept *ataraxia* as the ultimate good is not beyond dispute. The extent to which they did so is challenged, for instance, by Striker 1990.

(which operates just like the English prefix 'un-') and the verb *tarattein*, "to trouble."

The Greek Skeptics were no exception. Their skeptical practice precluded their establishing by independent arguments that *ataraxia* (or anything else for that matter) is in fact the highest good or is good *in itself*. Yet they, like their rival Hellenistic schools, openly accepted *ataraxia* as the *end* of their practice. How they could have done so without implicitly committing themselves to a substantive view that violates Skeptical hygiene is not obvious. Many commentators accept that the Pyrrhonists simply adopted a position readily available in their era and widely endorsed by their rivals—that one philosophizes in order to live the best sort of life, namely one that is free of troubles—and that they did so provisionally and "without holding opinions," as Sextus so often says.[13] To make better sense of this feature of Pyrrhonism, however, and to dispel the suspicion that the Skeptic helps himself here to a view to which he is not entitled, we must distinguish between two senses of 'end' that track the distinction between the proto-Pyrrhonist, who begins investigating *in order to* become tranquil, and the full-fledged Pyrrhonist, for whom a tranquil state is simply *where he ends up*. Both senses are intimated by Sextus in his explanation of why the Skeptics say that their end or aim [*telos*] is tranquility: "Now the Skeptics were hoping to acquire tranquility by deciding the anomalies in what appears and what is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspended judgment. But when they suspended judgment, tranquility followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body" (PH I 29). The proto-Pyrrhonist, like the Dogmatist, seems implicitly committed either to a causal claim ("resolving anomalies brings about tranquility")

13. McPherran (1990) makes a much bolder claim: "Like their Hellenistic brethren," he says, "the Pyrrhonists were moral naturalists, thinking that since they possessed an accurate appraisal of human nature, and a methodology uniquely sensitive to it, they could deliver what no other school could: genuine human happiness" (136). I think this reading, though it obviously commits the Skeptics to a number of fairly robust beliefs, may be sustainable, at least on the "urbane" understanding of Skepticism defended in chapter 1. Furthermore, it has the virtues of highlighting the Skeptics' concerns with health and well-being and making good sense of Skepticism as a kind of medical practice. However, although Skepticism *could* perhaps be read as entailing a naturalistic moral theory, I think it *need not* be read this way. The clarification is important for our purposes, since a great deal of what I take to be the attractiveness of Skepticism for Nietzsche hinges on its avoidance of anything that could count as a theory of morality.

or to a hypothetical imperative ("one ought to resolve anomalies if one desires tranquility"), whereas the mature Skeptic just reports the facts: "I suspended judgment, and tranquility followed."

It should come as no surprise if the Pyrrhonists draw special attention to the tranquility that is alleged to follow their suspension of judgment; since the Skeptical Way exists in contradistinction to the Dogmatic, it functions as a more effective (not to say cheekier) means of criticism for the Skeptics to maintain just that view of the good propounded by Dogmatists and then thumb their noses when they succeed where the Dogmatists fail to attain it. In their role as critics and diagnosticians, the Sextan Skeptics observe that if *ataraxia*, literally "freedom from trouble," is taken to be the good, then the "dogmatic affliction of conceit" and the "rashness" characteristic of the Dogmatists is incompatible with the good (PH III 281).[14] The Skeptics regard Dogmatic "conceit and rashness" in matters of opinion as pathological. What Nietzsche reports about his own case in *Ecce Homo* echoes this view:

> It is my privilege to have the finest sense for all signs of healthy instincts. I do not have any sickly features; even in times of widespread illness I do not get sick; you won't find a single trace of fanaticism in my character. You will not find any signs of presumptuous or pathetic [*pathetisch*] behavior at any point in my life. The pathos of poses is *not* a component of greatness. (EH 'Clever' 10)

The claim that "even in times of widespread illness" Nietzsche gave no sign of pathology makes little sense without the clarification that he is here dismissing as unimportant the physical illnesses he is known to have suffered. The circumstances of his failing eyesight and consequent migraines and his gastric ailments are, as he would have it, entirely eclipsed by the immeasurably more robust psychological health he claims for himself; they are practically of no moment in comparison. The real obstacle to a full-fledged health is "fanaticism," a psychological condition.

According to the Skeptics' diagnosis, too, the Dogmatists' desire for knowledge has something of the fanatic about it, which makes them exemplars of the very asceticism that Nietzsche exposes in the science of his own day and in the "will to truth, to 'truth at

14. See also PH I 20, 177, 186, 205, 212, 237; II 17, 21, 37, 95, 251, 253; III 2, 79, 235 and 280, all of which make passing reference to "conceit and rashness" as typical of Dogmatists.

any price', this youthful madness in the love of truth" (GS P: 4). Dogmatists place a high premium on achieving epistemic security, and their philosophy proceeds on the basis of crucial presuppositions about knowledge beyond whether it is attainable or unattainable, stable or unstable—most important, presuppositions about its value. I showed in the last chapter how, according to the Skeptical physician's diagnosis, Dogmatists are under the impression either that knowledge (discovering the truth) is good intrinsically or else that it is a route to happiness and freedom from disturbance (and hence an extrinsic good). Either way, they seem to be misguided, and we can now say more clearly why that is the case.

In the first instance, if the Dogmatist pursues knowledge for its own sake (because he thinks it an intrinsic good), then he has already committed himself to a judgment about something that is "unclear" or under dispute and that he is incapable of demonstrating (i.e., a purported fact about the value of knowledge). Often, what is thought to be a good turns out to be an evil, and vice versa, or else the same thing appears good to one person but not good to another. Owing to the endless disputations about such matters, the Pyrrhonists argue, we cannot say whether anything might be good or bad in itself.[15] We might consider as an analogue Nietzsche's contention that the will to truth betrays an implicit value commitment, and hence betrays one's "morality": "'Knowledge for its own sake'—this is the final snare morality has laid; with it, we become completely entangled in morals once again" (BGE 64). Knowledge *for its own sake* is opposed to knowledge *for the knower's sake*; the one who pursues it has already denigrated himself by devaluing his own subjective impressions (that is, he has abandoned "*perspective*, the basic condition of all life") and yielded to the "castration of the intellect" that "disinterested contemplation" implies. As shown in the previous chapter, this pursuit of objective knowledge is the modus operandi of the ascetic intellectual and his peculiar "mode of valuation," and for Nietzsche it is symptomatic of its own kind of sickness: "What *compels* one to this, however, this unconditional will to truth, is the *belief in*

15. The arguments Sextus presents for this conclusion will be more clearly illuminated below, and I will explore the Pyrrhonists' use of arguments from disagreement in ethics in chapter 6.

the ascetic ideal itself, even if as its unconscious imperative—do not deceive yourself about this,—it is the belief in a *metaphysical* value, a value *in itself of truth* as it is established and guaranteed by that ideal alone" (GM 3: 24). And as Nietzsche will go on to say in *The Anti-Christ*, "The 'man of faith' [*Der 'Gläubige'*] does not belong to *himself*, he can only be a means, he needs to be *used up*, he needs someone to use him up. *He instinctively holds a morality of self-abnegation in the greatest honor*" (A 54, emphasis added). In this respect then, Nietzsche and the Skeptics agree in treating the Dogmatic pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself not as a noble pursuit but as a sign of disease.

In the second instance, Dogmatists value knowledge not intrinsically but instrumentally, as a remedy for the not-knowing they find restless or unfulfilling, in some cases even disturbing—they are "*troubled* by the anomaly in things" (PH I 26). For these individuals, the point of investigating is to terminate investigation; like scratching an itch, the objective is to satisfy a need or end some discomfort. While the arguments on opposing sides of every issue bring the Skeptic around to suspension of judgment, they cause discomfiture for the Dogmatist, who experiences uncertainty as troubling, as a form of suffering: "Unfamiliar things are dangerous, anxiety-provoking, upsetting,—the primary instinct is to *get rid* of these painful states. First principle: any explanation is better than none" (TI 'Errors' 5). In the most acute cases, perhaps, he will satisfy Nietzsche's hypothesis that "a man like this . . . will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is for an end to the war that he *is*" (BGE 200), and he would "rather lie dying on an assured nothing than an uncertain something" (BGE 10). But this kind of attitude, as Nietzsche is at pains to demonstrate, is nihilism and a sign of battle fatigue, hardly characteristic of the kind of "carefree, mocking, violent warrior" that "wisdom" wants.[16] Instead, it betrays the "metaphysical need" that Nietzsche explicitly identifies as a weakness.[17] As a rule, human beings have an ardent desire to adopt some ideal or system of values that validates their own existence and gives meaning to their lives. This drive, a symptom of weakness in Nietzsche's view, is a need for both stability and

16. Z 1 'Reading and Writing'; cf. the epigram that precedes the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*.

17. See, e.g., BGE 12, 230; HH 1: 37; GS 110, 151; and A 23.

meaning, and it accounts in large part for the tenacity of much ascetic thinking:

> Metaphysics is still needed by some, but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself in scientific-positivistic form among great masses—the demand that one *wants* by all means something to be firm (while owing to the fervor of this demand one treats the demonstration of this certainty more lightly and negligently): this is still the demand for foothold, support—in short, the *instinct of weakness* that, to be sure, does not create sundry religions, forms of metaphysics and convictions but does—preserve them. (GS 347)[18]

In the Dogmatist's case, however, attempts to silence the demands of this "metaphysical need" turn out to be largely futile. For even when he takes himself to have settled a question, the freedom from disturbance (*ataraxia*) he expects does not follow, according to the Pyrrhonist. Finding himself troubled by some conflict of appearances, the Dogmatist desires an explanation. After vigorous investigation, he settles upon an explanatory hypothesis and considers the issue solved. Perhaps, if he is particularly confident about his theory, he does a little proselytizing or—encouraged by the receptiveness of others who have been troubled by the same phenomenon and are ready for an explanation—even founds a school. As his reputation gets around, however, he experiences challenges to his theory from all corners, and now must turn his energy and attention to defending it. According to Sextus Empiricus, this is invariably the source of new anxieties for the Dogmatists:

> When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change and they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. (PH I 27)

Nietzsche, too, warns in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the acceptance of truth as unqualified good comes with dangers of its own:

> Stand tall, you philosophers and friends of knowledge, and beware of martyrdom! Of suffering 'for the sake of truth'! Even of defending yourselves! You will ruin the innocence and fine neutrality

18. On a similar note, see A 54.

> [*Neutralität*][19] of your conscience; *you will be stubborn towards objections and red rags*, *you will become stupid, brutish, bullish* if, while fighting against danger, viciousness, suspicion, ostracism, and even nastier consequences of animosity, you also have to pose as the world-wide defenders of truth. As if 'the Truth' were such a harmless and bungling little thing that she needed defenders!...In the end, you know very well that it does not matter whether *you*, of all people, are proved right, and furthermore, *that no philosopher so far has ever been proved right*.[20] You also know that every little question-mark you put after your special slogans and favorite doctrines (and occasionally after yourselves) might contain more truth than all the solemn gestures and trump cards laid before accusers and courts of law! (BGE 25, emphasis added)

The situation is the same as with someone whom we might imagine to be miserly or excessively greedy.[21] Believing that wealth is good, the greedy person desires to acquire as much as possible and feels himself deprived if he does not have it. Displays of wealth around him make him jealous and resentful, causing him all sorts of misery. But he is resolute in his pursuit of wealth, perhaps passing up opportunities for other goods because his excessive valuation of money makes him blind to them. And as his wealth grows, he is wildly happy about it, and he relishes thinking of himself as "a rich person"; he begins to lose sight of the fact that *in itself* his fortune has no genuine value, as he becomes insatiable and even further fixated. That he has amassed a fortune, however, does him no good, for no sooner has he done so than he begins to fear losing it. Having invested it with the power to make him happy, or even *complete*, he could suffer its loss only cruelly, if at all. Now, his life is consumed with the project of safeguarding his assets—again, perhaps at the expense of any number of other opportunities or goods. Not only

19. For *Neutralität*, Norman has 'objectivity', which is not only less literal and which obscures what is a clearer resonance with the *ephectic* stance of the Pyrrhonist, but which also runs afoul of Nietzsche's worries about "objectivity" as an epistemic ideal, in *Genealogy* 3:12 and elsewhere.

20. Note the parity of reasoning behind Nietzsche's remark that "no philosopher so far has been proved right" and the Skeptics' constant refrain that all philosophical issues remain undecided. I will look closely at arguments from disagreement in chapter 6.

21. Using one of Sextus's own examples, such an illustration is put to good use by McPherran 1990: 146.

is he beset by worsening psychological troubles, he also loses out on life in some important respect; he fails to flourish.

The Trouble with Suffering

Dogmatism is thus an obstacle to the tranquility that the Skeptics, who suspend judgment, achieve. Although the Skeptic does not argue for the positive claim that tranquility is good "by nature" or good in itself, he pretty clearly regards his having arrived at such a state as "fortuitous" and nowhere denies the pleasantness or desirability of his freedom from trouble. In some respects, Nietzsche has to agree that the Skeptic is in fact better off. For one thing, his investigative behavior does not betray the weakness of the "metaphysical need." He is driven instead by genuine, innocent (perhaps even childlike) curiosity, as are Nietzsche's "attempters":

> A new breed of philosophers is approaching. I will risk christening them with a name not lacking in dangers. From what I can guess about them, from what they allow to be guessed (since it is typical of them to *want* to remain riddles in some respect), these philosophers of the future might have the right (and perhaps also the wrong) to be described as *those who attempt* [*Versucher*]. . . .
>
> Are they new friends of 'truth', these upcoming philosophers? Probably, since all philosophers so far have loved their truths. But they certainly will not be dogmatists. It would offend their pride, as well as their taste, if their truth were a truth for everyone (which has been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations so far). (BGE 42–43)[22]

It does indeed belong to a Skeptic qua Skeptic—that is to say a Skeptic qua investigator (*skeptikos*) and seeker (Zetetic, from *zētein* ['to search']—that things remain unresolved; that much is attributable to their appreciation of the equipollence of argument. So the Skeptics avoid one pernicious weakness typical of Dogmatists. And

22. The sentiment is echoed in what is likely to be Nietzsche's most-quoted preface: "Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists [*sofern sie Dogmatiker waren*], have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart?" (BGE P).

again, insofar as the Skeptic avoids the unreflective and unreasonable attachment to the unconditional value of "objectivity" and "truth at any price" that are symptomatic of infection by ascetic ideals, he is certainly healthier. Surely, however, Nietzsche would deny that avoiding illness is sufficient for robust health. We know what perils the Pyrrhonist avoids, but we must know more about what he is alleged to gain. So we must ask, "What of Pyrrhonian tranquility itself? What can be said in its favor?"

It is worth noting briefly that when the Skeptic identifies happiness with freedom from troubles, he has in view primarily psychological troubles and not troubles *tout court*. "We do not," Sextus clarifies, "take Skeptics to be undisturbed in every way—we say that they are disturbed by things which are forced upon them; for we agree that at times they shiver and are thirsty and have other feelings of this kind" (PH I 29). The Skeptic does not aim for an anesthetized state or for complete withdrawal or complacency. Recall that that is one of his charges against the Dogmatist, insofar as the Dogmatist ceases to investigate! It is the *Dogmatist*, under this description, who desires nothing more than freedom from pain—in particular, the pain of uncertainty. As at least Sextus sees it, the Skeptic is the only one who remains intellectually alive: he continues to inquire. And he does so not *in spite of* his suspension of judgment but *because of* it and even as a way of maintaining it.

Sextus accepts, then, that certain troubles are consistent with the attainment of *ataraxia*; he may still suffer hunger pangs or insomnia or, like Nietzsche, migraine headaches. His tranquility does nothing to alleviate these feelings, and he has no expectation that it will. Thus, Skeptical *ataraxia* is consistent with at least some sufferings. But for Nietzsche, once again, this is not enough:

> Every philosophy that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some *finale*, a final state of some sort, every predominantly aesthetic or religious craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above, permits the question whether it was not illness that inspired the philosopher. (GS P: 2)

The fact that Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* is not a resting state ("a *finale*"), since *epochē* is sustained only by constant and restless investigation, is helpful here, but the "freedom from disturbance" the Pyrrhonist accepts as a definition of happiness still looks like an apt, even an obvious and inevitable target. Similarly with Nietzsche's

proclamation in *Twilight of the Idols* that "the price of *fertility* is to be rich in contradictions; people stay *young* only if their souls do not stretch out languidly and long for peace. . . . Nothing is more foreign to us than that one-time desideratum of 'peacefulness of the soul', the *Christian* desideratum; there is nothing we envy less than the moral cow and the fat happiness of good conscience" (TI 'Morality' 3).[23] What we might think of as the Pyrrhonist's "richness in contradictions" will not save him from Nietzsche's critique if the *ataraxia* he enjoys is in any way a repudiation of suffering as such, for nothing could be clearer in Nietzsche's philosophy than that if

> you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts; and the latter is perhaps the mother of the former—the *religion of snug cosiness*. Oh, how little do you know of the *happiness* of man, you comfortable and good-natured ones! (GS 338)[24]

Of the relatively few commentators who have examined Nietzsche's relationship to the ancient skeptics in any detail, most identify this apparent point of contention between them as the limit of their correspondence. Adi Parush, in an early study on the prospects of a connection between Nietzsche and Pyrrhonism, concludes that:

> Nietzsche sided with Pyrrho's attacks on the dogmatists, and because of these, called him the most original figure after the pre-Socratics [in WP 437]. Nevertheless, Nietzsche is mockingly critical of the way of life he thinks Pyrrho prescribes. . . . It is true that [the Pyrrhonist's]

23. Nietzsche's appreciation of the instrumental value of suffering (e.g., in GS 295, where he explicitly expresses gratitude to illness as a means of escape from "enduring habits") and of the capacity for suffering as a measure of strength or character can be seen in many passages, often linked explicitly to "cheerfulness." He states, for example, that "some people need open enemies if they are to rise to the level of their own virtue, virility, and cheerfulness" (GS 169); and, "With this Homeric happiness in one's soul one is also more capable of suffering than any other creature under the sun" (GS 302).

24. The centrality of precisely this view to Nietzsche's critique of morality in the *Genealogy* can, of course, hardly be overstated. Reginster (2006: 12) argues persuasively that, "the central focus of Nietzsche's revaluation is the view that suffering is 'evil' and 'ought to be abolished' (BGE 225)"; see his chapter 4 for an extended discussion of Nietzsche's objection to this view.

> *ataraxia* is based on living a quiet, unperturbed life, devoid of tension (which is probably why Nietzsche compares him to the Buddhist).[25]

Richard Bett, in one of the most recent and certainly most well-informed and careful treatments of the issue, appeals to Raoul Richter, whose 1904/1908 volumes on the history of skepticism begin with the Greeks and end with Nietzsche:

> Richter sees, of course, that temperamentally, or in terms of the practical attitudes and ways of life that they recommend, Nietzsche and the Greek skeptics are poles apart; the Greek skeptics, or at least the Pyrrhonian skeptics, recommend skepticism for the *ataraxia*, the untroubled existence, it supposedly promotes, whereas for Nietzsche the avoidance of trouble and strife is decidedly not a priority.[26]

Finally, Dan Conway and Julie Ward, making probably the boldest claim for the philosophical similarity between Nietzsche and Sextus, attempt to present them both as "misunderstood skeptics."[27] Yet they too clearly feel compelled to treat this as a point of departure. They understand the practical dangers Nietzsche and Sextus find in dogmatism more or less correctly,[28] but they conclude with the caveat that Nietzsche "does not agree [with Sextus] that tranquility (*ataraxia*) constitutes psychic health. According to Nietzsche, the Pyrrhonian identification of the good life with quietude and tranquility is emblematic of nihilism. Ever the pathologist, Nietzsche contends that the desire for tranquility is symptomatic of decadence."[29] Unlike Parush and Bett, however, they do not seem to regard this disharmony as particularly damaging to their conclusion that Nietzsche and Sextus are birds of a feather. In their view, that Nietzsche roundly rejects the ethical goal of Pyrrhonism does not at all tarnish the skeptical luster of Nietzsche's position. In this curious estimation, however, they seem to go against the vast majority of commentators on the Greek tradition, who hold that

25. Parush 1976: 534–35; Nietzsche compares Pyrrho to a "Buddhist" in *The Anti-Christ* (see §§20–22).

26. Bett 2000a: 68.

27. Conway and Ward 1992: 193.

28. Ibid., 203: "More important than any logical error is the *practical* error that dogmatism embodies. Nietzsche believes that an equation of 'life-threatening' with 'true', coupled with the priority dogmatism ascribes to truth, engenders for the dogmatists an *absurdum practicum*, i.e., a life devoted to the pursuit of conditions inimical to life itself."

29. Conway and Ward 1992: 216–17.

adopting *ataraxia* as the goal of Pyrrhonian practice is part of what it is to be a Pyrrhonist; that is, it is integral to that particular brand of skepticism.

The ethical component of Greek Skepticism is part of what is supposed to be distinctive about it, after all, especially when compared to its modern descendants.[30] Original sources, such as the fragments of Timon, support this reading, as Richard Bett has argued: "The main message [of Timon's reports of Pyrrho's calm disposition] is that the source of other people's trouble is their holding of opinions and their engaging in theoretical enquiry; Pyrrho achieves his extraordinary degree of tranquility through not holding any opinions and refraining from all theorizing."[31] R. J. Hankinson emphasizes the centrality of the Pyrrhonist's ethical posture: "The choice of *ataraxia* as the end or goal of Skepticism (PH I 25) is not unimportant; for the major Hellenistic schools of philosophy, the Stoics and the Epicureans, agreed that tranquility was the proper aim of philosophizing."[32] And other scholars of Pyrrhonism agree, even where they find the promotion of its ethical program as regrettable as Nietzsche is alleged to have done. Jonathan Barnes, for instance, who takes Pyrrhonism to have greater and more explicit therapeutic pretensions than I find it to have, calls the physician Sextus a "quack" in the introduction to his translation (with Julia Annas) of *Outlines of Scepticism* and claims that he finds it "difficult to take this sort of thing seriously."[33] Nevertheless, he echoes what I would call the received view of the ethical component of Skepticism when he says that whatever the odds against its success as a therapeutic program, it is in fact "offered as a recipe for happiness. After all, skepticism is an ancient philosophy; and ancient philosophies were, in general, offered as recipes for happiness."[34]

For reasons already given, I disagree with Barnes, who really is in many respects a hostile contemporary source for ancient Skepticism, that the Pyrrhonists can rightly be described as offering "recipes." Others have been similarly suspicious. Gisela Striker, for instance,

30. Hankinson 1997: 8: "The concept of the ultimate end or goal of action, the supreme *telos* in terms of which the whole of the rest of one's life is to be structured . . . is of paramount importance in Greek philosophy."

31. Bett 2000b: 73; cf. Annas 1993.

32. Hankinson 1995: 29.

33. Annas and Barnes 2000: xxxi.

34. Annas and Barnes 2000: xxx.

argues that "Greek theories of happiness from Plato to Epicurus were attempts to spell out what sort of a life one would have to lead in order to have good reasons for feeling tranquil or contented; they were not recipes for reaching a certain state of mind."[35] Sextus, at least, is too circumspect to be caught in such a facile contradiction. And Nietzsche's aims, on my reading, are similarly limited to descriptive ones; he has no recipes for us either. Setting aside questions about whether and what the Skeptic "recommends," our question is whether the Skeptic's mere acceptance (on even the thinnest understanding of "acceptance") of a quiet and unperturbed life necessarily runs afoul of Nietzsche's charge that if "you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts . . . —the *religion of snug cosiness*" (GS 338). My answer is that it need not; those who answer differently have by and large *overestimated* Nietzsche's rejection of tranquility and *underestimated* its complexity in the ancient sources.

Just as the ascetic ideal means different things to different types of thinkers, Nietzsche allows that what is commonly called "peace of soul" may be variously interpreted. In the same passage of *Twilight of the Idols* in which he excoriates "the moral cow and the fat happiness of good conscience," he explores some of these interpretations:

> In many cases, of course, 'peacefulness of the soul' is just a misunderstanding,—something *else* is really happening, but without knowing what to call itself. A couple of cases, bluntly and without bias. 'Peacefulness of soul', for instance, can be the gentle diffusion of a rich, animal nature into a moral (or religious) sphere. Or the beginning of fatigue, the first shadow of evening, of any type of evening. . . . Or an unselfconscious gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called 'love of humanity'). Or the quieting down of a convalescent who is tasting everything as if for the first time and who waits. . . . Or the condition following an intense gratification of our ruling passions, the well-being of rare satisfaction. Or the sort of weakness that age brings to our will, our desires, our vices. Or laziness that has been persuaded by vanity to dress itself up as morality. Or the emergence of certainty, even a terrible certainty, after the suspense and torture of a long uncertainty. Or the expression of maturity and mastery in the middle of doing, making, effecting, willing, a tranquil breathing, an *attained* 'freedom of the will'. . . . *Twilight of*

35. Striker 1990: 97.

> *the Idols*: who knows? perhaps this is just a type of 'peacefulness of the soul' too. (TI 'Morality' 3)

In some of these "meanings" of the concept "peace of soul," Nietzsche's own attitude is clearly visible: for instance, in "the unconscious gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called 'love of humanity')." Nietzsche's reference to his own "love of humanity," his "cheerful and philanthropic way" (EH P: 2), noted earlier, prefaces the work in which he credits himself (again, stomach ailments notwithstanding!) with having cultivated the best of nutritional instincts and claims that "the question of *nutrition*; the 'salvation of humanity' is much more dependent on this question than on any theological oddity" (EH 'Clever' 1). He describes his own tone as "halcyon" [*halkyonischen*] in explicit contrasts to the "fanaticism" of prophets and preachers (EH P: 4). And of course we find in the quiescence of "a convalescent who is tasting everything as if for the first time and who waits" an apt summary of the attitude he describes as constitutive of the "gaiety" and joyousness of recovery in the preface to *Gay Science*. What is there to prevent his appropriating "peace of soul" as "the expression of maturity and mastery in the middle of doing, making, effecting, willing"? Is there any precedent among the predecessors of Sextus's thought for characterizing such a state as *ataraxia* in the positive terms Nietzsche sets out in this passage from *Twilight of the Idols*?

Democritus's Gay Science

I have already mentioned briefly Nietzsche's thorough familiarity with the fragments of Democritus,[36] the result of a number of years in the late 1860s that Nietzsche spent poring over the issue of their authenticity and planning a (regrettably unfinished) reconstruction of his philosophical system. Nietzsche's research for this project was, in fact, one of the primary sources of his familiarity with Sextus's skeptical treatises. Nietzsche's discovery of Democritus dovetailed fortuitously with his discovery of Friedrich Lange's *History of Materialism*, in which Democritus plays a central role, and his enthusiasm may have been inspired by Democritus's rigorous materialism, though it was certainly not confined to that arena: he attended

36. See chapter 1.

carefully to Democritus's thoughts on music and rhythm and to what Democritus had to say about ethics.[37] According to Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*, "Thrasyllus listed [Democritus's] works, arranging them in tetralogies as with the works of Plato" (DL IX 46ff.). The reproduction of this table of contents shows that his works on ethics are said to include a treatise *Peri Euthumia* ["On Cheerfulness"]. In light of the time and attention Nietzsche devoted to Democritus during his early years as a classicist and Nietzsche's affectionate remarks about Democritus even late in his career (KSA 13: 293; WP 428), and in light of the "cheerfulness" emphasized by both thinkers in their pursuit of inquiry, it will be worth examining Democritus's conception of well-being for the clarity it may be able to provide here.

Democritus is known to us primarily as the innovator of ancient atomism, and of course he impressed Nietzsche on this account as well. As a young scholar, Nietzsche had recognized already the contribution of Democritus's naturalistic system—which sought to banish religious and mystical explanation—to the "de-deification" of nature he would later encourage (GS 109, BGE 230): "Of all the more ancient systems," he writes, "the Democritean is of the greatest consequence. The most rigorous necessity is presupposed in all things. . . . Now, for the first time the collective, anthropomorphic, mythic view of the world has been overcome" (PPP 125). But Democritus was a thinker of encyclopedic interests, and he wrote on a wide range of subjects, as Nietzsche observes admiringly in his lecture on Democritus when he compares him to "a pentathelete in ethics, physics, mathematics, music and the arts" (PPP 123). Indeed, the majority of the extant fragments (roughly two-thirds of those we have reason to regard as authentic)[38] are concerned with ethics

37. See the second chapter of Porter 2000 ("The Poetry of Atomism and the Fictions of Philology") for a well-rounded account of Nietzsche's multifaceted interest in Democritus—especially in the critical potential of atomism.

38. The authenticity question that first brought Nietzsche into contact with Democritus has been particularly vexed, and every commentator on Democritean ethics has been compelled to address it at one time or another. For an evaluation of Nietzsche's contribution to the literature, see Porter 2000, chap. 2. For a good summary of the evidence, both pro and contra, on including the Democrates fragments and on other issues of authenticity, see C.C.W. Taylor 1999: 223–27. See also, however, Taylor's original interpretation, which relies heavily on the Democrates fragments (Taylor 1967), as well as Kahn 1985: 2–4; Curd 2001: 156 n. 17; and Annas 2002: 169. I concur with Annas's conclusion that "the shaky status of our evidence

and moral psychology. A contemporary of Socrates, Democritus shares the familiar Socratic concern for the well-being of the soul: "Blessedness [*eudaimonia*] and wretchedness [*kakodaimonia*] belong to the soul [*psychēs*]" (D24 [DK B170]), he says.[39] These some two hundred fragments of Democritus have been said to "constitute the most important body of material for the history of philosophical ethics and psychology before the dialogues of Plato."[40] According to C.C.W. Taylor, Democritus "is the earliest thinker reported as having explicitly posited a supreme good or goal, which he called 'cheerfulness' or 'well-being', and which he appears to have identified with the untroubled enjoyment of life."[41]

In what remains of Democritus's reflections on ethics, the bulk of which we find preserved in the collections of the fifth-century CE anthologist Stobaeus (John of Stobi), Democritus posits as his conception of the ultimate good for human beings *euthumia*, which is most often translated as 'cheerfulness', although the meaning of this term, like *eudaimonia*, is difficult to capture in a one-word translation. It might be rendered more literally by the phrase "being in good spirits," which accords well with other terms Democritus uses (though apparently with less frequency) to

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about Democritus' ethics can be greatly exaggerated," and I will not address the issue further here.

39. See also D25 (DK B171): "Blessedness does not reside in herds or in gold; the soul is the dwelling-place of the guardian spirit." All citations of the fragments of Democritus and all translations quoted here and in what follows are from Taylor 1999. For each citation, I provide the reference to Taylor's text first, with the Diels-Krantz concordances given parenthetically.

40. See Kahn 1985: 1, which makes the same claim for Heraclitus, in spite of Heraclitus's notorious obscurity.

41. Taylor 1999: 227. This claim for Democritus's significance for ancient ethics may also be found, e.g., in Vlastos 1945 and Kahn 1985. Nill 1985 provides an extended discussion and defense of the claim that Democritus advanced a systematic ethical theory, although Striker 1990 rejects this claim. Striker credits Epicurus, a later follower of Democritus, with being "the first philosopher who tried to bring tranquility into the framework of an eudaimonist theory—significantly, by arguing that it is a sort of pleasure," and she expresses doubts that Democritus himself "produced anything like an argument to show that *euthumia* is the human good, the goal of life, or identical with happiness" (1990: 98–99). The most detailed and most recent treatment of the issue, however, is in Warren 2002. Doxographical sources for Democritus's significance to ethics in antiquity include Cicero (*de Finibus* V 8: 23, 29: 87), Seneca (*On Tranquillity of Mind* 2: 3), Theodoretus (*Cure for the Ills of the Greeks* 11: 6), Stobaeus II 7: 31 (citing Arius Didymus), and Clement (*Miscellanies* 2: 130).

refer to the ultimate good, including *euesto* [well-being][42] and *eudaimonia* [happiness][43]. In their interpretations of Democritean cheerfulness, later doxographers—notably Cicero and Stobaeus—chose the terms *tranquillitas* and its Greek equivalent *ataraxia* to refer to this condition. This doxographical innovation, however, threatens to obscure the potentially important differences between *euthumia*, which seems to be Democritus's preferred term for the good, and the *ataraxia* that the Hellenistic schools (the Stoics, Skeptics, and Epicureans) claimed their philosophical agendas would promote. While there may be a legitimate ancestry between the two concepts (Cicero, at least, clearly saw them as belonging to a cluster of nearly interchangeable concepts), it is important not simply to conflate *ataraxia*, a passive state that may indeed be incompatible with suffering, discomfort, and perhaps even strong feelings of any kind, with its more robust and more positive predecessor, Democritean *euthumia*.

To illuminate Democritus's conception of well-being and to emphasize its common contours with Nietzsche's view, I begin by quoting fragment 191—the longest extant fragment from Democritus on ethics—somewhat at length, since it gives the fullest succinct account of what leads to *euthumia* and what life is like for those who do not attain it:

> For men achieve cheerfulness by moderation in pleasure [*terpsios*] and by proportion [*summetria*] in their life; excess and deficiency are apt to fluctuate and cause great changes in the soul. And souls which change over great intervals are neither stable nor cheerful. So one should set one's mind on what is possible and be content with what one has, taking little account of those who are admired and envied, and not dwelling on them in thought, but one should consider the lives of those who are in distress, thinking of their grievous sufferings, so that what one has and possesses will seem great and enviable, and one will cease to suffer in one's soul through the desire for more. . . . Therefore one should not seek those things [e.g., wealth, fame], but should be cheerful at the thought of the others, comparing one's own life with that of those who are faring worse, and should congratulate oneself when one thinks of what they are suffering, and how much better one is doing and living than they are. For by maintaining that frame of mind one will live more cheerfully

42. D121 (DK B257).
43. D24 (DK B170), D25 (DK B171).

> and will avert not a few evils in one's life, jealousy and envy and malice.[44]

Bracketing for the time being Democritus's apparent exhortation to reach the good by engaging in what looks like a little therapeutic *Schadenfreude*,[45] we should begin by examining his characterization of the nature of health. The achievement of *euthumia* is described as the achievement of a state of balance or symmetry [*summetria*] in the soul. A *psuchē* that admits of such symmetry will be one not given to undergoing great changes or movements [*megalas kinēsias*]; it will have stability. It is not impossible, of course, that the curious concept of a soul that "does not move around" but "remains stable" is intended purely metaphorically. But since we know that Democritus has a materialist conception of the soul (like everything else, it is composed of atoms),[46] it is most reasonable to assume that he is speaking in terms of the soul's physical constitution and condition.[47] In any case, the use of physical language to describe the soul here is not out of place. It is also important to note that the Democritean *psuchē* is not a closed system (it is neither detached nor insulated from external influences); as we know from Democritus's theory of perception, the *psuchē* is constantly assailed by impressions that threaten to change its constitution and disrupt its harmonious state. Its ideal condition, therefore, is in no way a resting or static state—Democritean psychophysics do not allow for such a thing.[48]

44. D55 (DK B191).

45. See Hankinson 2000 for more on Democritus's reputation for laughter; cf. GS 324.

46. "[Democritus] says that the soul is the same as the mind, and is composed of the primary, indivisible bodies, and is a source of motion because of their smallness and shape. He says that the sphere is the most mobile of shapes, and that mind and fire are of the same nature" (107b [DK A101]; cf. Aristotle, *de Anima* 405a8–13).

47. Charles Kahn expresses some skepticism about the conjecture advanced by von Fritz and Vlastos "that the *kinēseis* of the soul are ultimately to be interpreted in terms of its atomic constitution" (Kahn 1985: 14). He suggests that the natural reading of *eustathēs* in fragment 191 is "in terms of lived experience, not psychophysics." I would urge, however, that Democritus's materialistic view of the soul makes the psychophysicalist reading the most plausible one. See the original argument for this position in Vlastos (1945: 582–85).

48. Vlastos (1945: 585) concurs. The absolute rest of the Democritean soul is, on his view, excluded "through the intrinsic mobility of the soul-atom" (see also his n. 40). Of course, as James Porter has reminded me, the same is true of Epicurus, since their soul-atoms are the same atoms! Epicurus, nevertheless, endorses the "restful" or more anesthetic conception of *ataraxia*. This discrepancy may go some way

So I submit that for Democritus, the ideally conditioned soul is the one that demonstrates the greatest resilience or shock resistance, and that this is how we should understand Democritus's requirement that the cheerful *psuchē* also be *eustathēs* [stable]. Most generally, *eustathēs* carries the meaning of "well-based" or "well-built"; metaphorically, it conveys the sense of "steady," "steadfast," or "firm." It might even be rendered by "firmly planted," and as a requirement of character it resonates deeply with Nietzsche's even more emphatic demand to "examine the lives of the best and most fruitful people and peoples and ask yourselves whether a tree which is supposed to grow to a proud height could do without bad weather and storms: whether misfortune and external resistance . . . do not belong to the *favorable* conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible?" (GS 19) Both thinkers recognize the sort of connection between "body" and "soul" that makes it natural to refer to the latter in terms that might at first seem appropriate only to the former.

According to Nietzsche, the most admirable individuals demonstrate a quality of thought best described in terms of physical prowess; for example, when he says, "There are certain tricks of the spirit by which even great minds betray that they come from the mob or half-mob; the gait and stride of their thoughts especially plays the traitor: *they cannot walk*" (GS 282, emphasis added). In thought just as in movement, one can be poised, graceful, confident, and balanced, or else cumbersome, halting, lame, or weighed down by the "spirit of gravity." A Democritean reading of these comments makes excellent philosophical sense of what can otherwise appear as frivolous remarks or mere metaphors and illustrations, as in *Twilight of the Idols*, when Nietzsche proclaims that "thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a *type* of dancing" (TI 'Germans' 7).[49]

It is worth noting in passing that this statement about what constitutes proper thinking follows directly Nietzsche's declaration that, "Learning to *see*, as I understand it, is close to what an

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toward explaining why Nietzsche is more often critical of Epicurus, on the grounds that Epicureanism is nihilistic; for both Epicurus and Democritus, the soul atoms coming into a state of complete rest *would in fact mean death*, yet Epicurus nevertheless appears to endorse a restful conception of *ataraxia*.

49. For further comparisons of intellectual to physical grace, see GS 366 (on thinking as "dancing"), GS 380 (on "lightness"), and BGE 208 (on the need for "balance, a center of gravity, and perpendicular poise . . . in body and soul").

unphilosophical way of speaking calls a strong will: the essential thing here is precisely *not* 'to will', to be *able* to suspend the decision [*die Entscheidung aussetzen können*]" (TI 'Germans' 6; Nietzsche's emphasis). Of course, the ability to suspend decision—with emphasis on "ability"—*is* the Pyrrhonists' definition of their practice. Sextus writes, "Skepticism is an ability [*dunamis antithetikē*] to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility" (PH I 8). The description of skepticism as an ability rather than, say, a philosophical position or school of thought is integral to the Pyrrhonists' attempt to remain light by avoiding dogmatic commitments. Like the "seekers" in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, "Mainly the question is how light or heavy we are—the problem of our 'specific gravity'. One has to be *very light* to drive one's will to knowledge into such a distance and, as it were, beyond one's time.... One must have liberated oneself from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy precisely us Europeans today" (GS 380). I shall have more to say below about the connection between the condition of the soul praised by Democritus and the avoidance of conviction. Here, however, it suffices to realize that for both Nietzsche and Democritus, insofar as balance or stability is the chief feature of health and cheerfulness, it is the stalwart and resilient *psuchē* that stands the best chance of maintaining that ideal condition.

Though the animate soul can never be completely at rest, the notion of characterizing "violent organic motion" in the soul as anathema to one's (mental) health is common in Greek medical treatises, according to Vlastos. This supports his reading of stability of the soul "not as a passive state but as a dynamic quality, able to withstand external shock without losing its inner balance."[50] He is picking up here, surely, on an alternate meaning of *eustathēs*, which in physiological contexts refers to a "sound" or "healthy" state of the body (as does *euthumia*). On the basis of further reports of Democritean physiology (mainly via Theophrastus), Vlastos cautions us "against defining the physiological optimum in terms of absolute rest. The opposite to the 'great movements' of B. 191 [the

50. Vlastos 1945: 583.

fragment quoted above] would therefore be a *dynamic equilibrium*."[51] Whereas *The Gay Science* spoke of "great health" as a prerequisite of spirits who would undertake the most difficult task of revaluating values, the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* appeals to a notion of dynamic tension to make the same point when Nietzsche says that the struggle against Plato "has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals" (BGE P). Whereas "European man" experiences this tension *as* distress and perennially attempts, "in a grand fashion, to unbend the bow," stronger individuals will stand, buzzing with tension, ready to take on the challenge that Nietzsche issues.

Euthumia, unlike *ataraxia*, may be understood best as something like a dispositional property of *psuchai*, much as we would say "brittleness" is a dispositional property of glass. That is to say, there are certain conditions that will be requisite for the property's exhibiting itself—more specifically perhaps, certain adverse conditions. For Nietzsche, who constantly emphasizes that strength of character is developed and revealed under duress (even by suffering), the difference is crucial. Nietzsche asserts that "open enemies are indispensable to some people if they are to rise to *their own* kind of virtue, manliness, and cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*]" (GS 169). Such conditions are necessary to both the development and the demonstration of "spiritual" strength. Similarly, it is not clear that the spirit who is *euthumos* [cheerful] could dispense with those conditions of adversity under which its resilience develops. Democritus writes that "ease is the worst of all teachers for the young"[52] and that "thrift and hunger are useful, and expense too at the right time. It is the mark of the good man to discern."[53] In that sense, a life entirely without suffering or difficulty may not be preferable from the standpoint of achieving cheerfulness and stability, even if it is clearly preferable from the standpoint of the Hellenistic philosophers' aiming at *ataraxia*. The life of the Stoic sage or the Epicurean is compatible

51. Ibid., 585, emphasis added.

52. D43 (DK B178).

53. D93 (DK B229). On the conditioning of the soul, see also D44 (DK B179), "Children who are not allowed to take pains . . . would not learn letters or music or athletics," and D47 (DK B182), "Learning achieves fine things through taking pains." On hard work, see D107 (DK B243): "All toils are pleasanter than ease, when people achieve the goal of their toil or know that they will reach it."

with suffering, as Lucretius is at pains to convey. But *their* feats of self-mastery, while impressive on some level, are accomplished primarily through the disassociation of the self from its circumstances. Pain can be managed or made tolerable, but all in all it is unwelcome: these Hellenistic thinkers are offering strategies for *managing what cannot be avoided*.

That point informs Nietzsche's view of the Stoics[54] as ascetic figures and his consequent rejection of their ideals. "Is our life really so painful and burdensome," he writes, "that it would be advantageous for us to trade it for a fossilized Stoic way of life? Things are *not bad enough* for us that they have to be bad for us in the Stoic style!" (GS 326; cf. 306) Although Democritus describes "moderation of pleasure" as the route to *euthumia* in fragment 191, he should not be taken as advocating asceticism or what Nietzsche describes as "negative virtues"—"virtues whose very essence is negation and self-denial" (GS 304). While *ataraxia*, a close relative of *apatheia* ("freedom from passions," "unaffectedness"), is frequently read as tranquility at the price of regrettable impoverishment, Democritus's *euthumia* conveys an openness to life with its full measure of pleasures and pains.[55] "Moderation" in his sense means not self-denial but increased selectivity with respect to pleasure: "One should choose, not every pleasure," he says, "but pleasure in what is fine [*kalōn*]."[56] The individual who chooses wisely, the cheerful soul, "rejoices [*chairei*] sleeping and waking, and is strong [*errotai*] and free from care [*anakēdēs*]," whereas "the unwise live without delighting in their life."[57] For all these reasons, it is philologically imprudent

54. As well as of the Epicureans and Christians mentioned in BGE 200; discussed above.

55. Barnes (1979), perhaps unsurprisingly, disagrees. He quotes D94 (DK B230), "A life without feasts is a long road without an inn," but he suggests that "Democritean festivity will be a fairly sober and earnestly intellectual business, a symposium rather than a pub-crawl" (231). I find his treatment of Democritus, as his treatment of Sextus, unnecessarily uncharitable.

56. D71 (DK B207); this shows that Democritus is not a hedonist in an Epicurean sense. See D99 for Democritus's Schopenhauerian account of the cycle of want and satiety that is distinctive of the bodily pleasures. Furthermore, his position reveals a further difference with Epicurus, who says that he spits upon what is fine [*kalōn*] when it doesn't bring him pleasure, suggesting that for Epicurus pleasantness is the final arbiter of value.

57. D39 (DK B174), D64 (DK B200); see also D94 (DK B230): "A life without feasts is a long road without an inn."

to read too much of Stoic asceticism, Epicurean hedonism, or even the Hellenistic Skeptics' *apatheia* back into the concept of *euthumia* offered by Democritus.[58]

To be sure, Democritus appears to be interested in issuing moral exhortations to guide our conduct in daily life; Nietzsche is clearly not. Nietzsche will not find much of interest, we may assume, in the several little homilies against activities such as sleeping during the day (which indicates "distress of mind or idleness or lack of education")[59] or hoarding wealth[60] or profiting through "wicked deeds."[61] On the other hand, a consideration of Democritus's moralizing tendencies urges a return to fragment 191[62] and to the question I bracketed earlier. Consider again Democritus's requirement that the cheerful man reduce the overall number of desires he has by comparing his life to those worse off than he. This bit of advice looks as distinctly un-Nietzschean as placid contentment ever did. Not only does it appear to counsel us to cultivate ascetic tendencies, but it strongly suggests that we should do so not through genuine self-mastery but by self-deception and revisionism! One should consider the lives of those who are worse off "so that what one has and possesses will *seem* great and enviable."[63]

There are two things we should note about Democritus's moral directives; and on both counts, I think, Nietzsche has something in common with Democritus's strategy and his aim, even where he would depart from the content of Democritus's positive morality more narrowly considered. First is that in this fragment (and in other extant fragments) Democritus's chief concern appears to be to ward off *pleonexia*, a kind of insatiable acquisitiveness, lest it become pathological and harmful to the individual psyche. *Pleonexia* is often thought of as "greed," and its harmfulness was widely acknowledged

58. And this in spite of the important historical connections between Democritean *euthumia* and (especially) Epicurean *ataraxia*, on which see Warren (2002), who gives an account that differs from mine.

59. D76 (DK B212).

60. D86 (DK B222).

61. D82 (DK B218): "Wealth acquired by wicked deeds makes the disgrace more apparent." See also D84 (DK B220), D85 (DK B221), and the comments about the sort of misdeeds (e.g., promise breaking) that Democritus thinks make us "wicked." "The wicked do not keep the oaths they swear in extremities once they have escaped from them" (D103 [DK B239]).

62. D55 (DK B191).

63. Ibid., emphasis added.

in ancient ethics. It is not a sin, obviously, since analyses of it appear long before Christianity, but Aristotle clearly treats it as a problematic if not straightforwardly vicious characteristic (unlike, say, the simple incontinence that can keep one from behaving virtuously).[64] And it is at the root of the same unrestrained indulgence lobbied for by Socrates' interlocutors Gorgias and Thrasymachus. The drive always to possess more than one has tends to increase under its own momentum, and Democritus clearly regards it as dangerous. But this concern, particularly when coupled with his characterization of "jealousy and envy and malice" as "evils" [*kēras*] in fragment 191, is a psychologist's worry and not unlike Nietzsche's analysis of the destructive effects of *ressentiment* and the "metaphysical need" of those dogmatists who have so clumsily and unsuccessfully aimed to "possess" truth (BGE P).

Second, it is important to avoid imposing (anachronistically) religious interpretations on the ethical fragments of Democritus, even though such fragments as 191 and those on "wickedness" may sound to contemporary ears as if they condemn "sinful" behavior. The whole of Democritus's thought was antiteleological and antimythological in character, and the ethical writings should be no exception. Where Democritus condemns behavior as "shameful" we must keep in view that it is not intrinsically so (Democritus is not a realist about value); if behavior is shameful, it is so because of the deleterious effects it has on the quality of an individual's life. Insofar as he insists that this is the case, Democritus's ethical views constitute a radical departure from the views of his contemporaries (consider the moral philosophy of Socrates). According to James Warren, "[Fragment 191] advocates a radical reassessment of and dissent from convention. The Democritean ideal is presented as unlike any contemporary view of success and prosperity."[65] Charles Kahn goes one step further, suggesting that Democritus effects a sort of revaluation of contemporary Greek values:

> Whereas Socrates' appeal is ultimately to reason or cognition, to the judgment of 'one who has knowledge' and to 'the *logos* which seems

64. Aristotle's position is not altogether clear: some passages associate *pleonexia* with vice (e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* 1122a2–3), while other passages call that association into question (e.g., 1130b19–20). See Young 2006 for a fuller account, especially pp. 190–92.

65. Warren 2002: 47.

> best upon reflection' (*Crito* 47d ff., 46b), Democritus's appeal is to an inner standard that is less principled and more personal: 'Do not feel more shame before men than before yourself…' ([DK] B264).… The force of this expression can only be understood in the light of *the traditional shame standard of Greek morality, which is here stood on its head*. In place of the hero's code, which identifies his self-respect with his status in the eyes of others, Democritus proposes an inner 'law for the psyche'.… The Democritean sage is a free spirit, traditionalist in many respects, dissident in others.[66]

Even if we cannot extrapolate from the extant fragments of Democritus a fully systematic ethical theory that belongs under the provocative heading *Peri Euthumias*,[67] Democritus's originality and his contributions to moral psychology in antiquity certainly piqued Nietzsche's interest. And his identification of *euthumia* (a concept taken by later doxographers as functionally equivalent to *ataraxia*) with "a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition" (DL IX 45) obviates the need for those who see the Pyrrhonian character of Nietzsche's thought to treat his vituperative remarks about the goal of Skepticism as in any way decisive. But where does Democritus fit—if he does at all—within the skeptical tradition?

Democritus and the Skeptical Tradition

Though it may seem odd to say so, at least at first glance, Democritus can be and has been counted as an important figure in the ancient skeptical tradition for reasons both philosophical and historical. What is known about Democritus's epistemology is preserved by a variety of sources: Aristotle, Cicero, and, of course, Diogenes Laertius, but also by Sextus Empiricus, who discusses some of his views approvingly although he is often more concerned to demonstrate how the atomist school differs from the "Skeptical persuasion."[68] Aristotle presents a fairly straightforwardly skeptical view that he attributes to Democritus at *Metaphysics* 1009b7ff., for

66. Kahn 1985: 28, emphasis added.

67. A worry expressed with varying degrees of strength in Barnes 1979: 228–33; Striker 1990; Annas 1993; and others.

68. According to Sextus in *Against the Mathematicians*, Democritus holds that "to know what kind of thing each thing is in reality is impossible"; see D21 (DK B8).

the same reasons that Sextus reports in *Outlines of Skepticism*: "The philosophy of Democritus is also said to have something in common with Skepticism, since it is thought to make use of the same materials as we do. For from the fact that honey appears sweet to some and bitter to others, they say that Democritus deduces that it is neither sweet nor bitter, and for this reason utters the phrase 'no more' [*ou mallon*], which is Skeptical" (PH I 213–14).

But the fragment that has, more than any other, invited the skeptical readings of Democritus (both ancient and modern) is a bit of testimonia from Diogenes Laertius: "Democritus, getting rid of the qualities, where he says 'By convention hot, by convention cold, but in reality atoms and void' and again 'In reality we know nothing, for truth is in the depths'" (DL IX 72). On the basis of the "by convention" fragment, which is confirmed widely by ancient sources,[69] many readers have arrived at the view that Democritus held some deeply skeptical (or at any rate epistemically pessimistic) attitudes[70] and have even suggested that Democritus must have thought that many or all of our empirical beliefs are false. Though this view does not sound like the Pyrrhonism we know from Sextus Empiricus (who emphasizes the equipollence of arguments, but not the inapprehensibility of things, which would get him entangled in metaphysics), the writings of Pyrrho's pupil Timon suggest that the early Pyrrhonists (Pyrrho and Timon at least) did hold that things were inapprehensible,[71] a position Sextus refined only later in an attempt to render the arguments of Pyrrhonism more philosophically sound.

69. Including Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians* VII 135–40 and VIII 184; Galen, *On Medical Experience* 15.7 and *On the Elements according to Hippocrates* 1.2; and even Stobaeus, who summarizes the view by saying that, "Democritus [and others, including the Eleatics and Protagoras] say that the senses are false" (Taylor 1999: 145; cf. Testamonia in the same volume, pp. 182f.).

70. E.g., Barnes (1979: 257–62), Kirk et al. (1983: 409–13) and O'Keefe (1997). Others have been tempted to read some of the Democritean fragments as skeptical, though they have thought such readings irreconcilable with the preponderance of conflicting fragments. Thus, some commentators rest with the view that no coherent epistemology may be attributed to Democritus. See, e.g., Taylor 1967, Sedley 1992, and McKirahan 1994.

71. This reading is defended by Bett 2000b. In fact, Bett argues persuasively for a "metaphysical reading" of an important passage from Aristocles of Messene (a Peripatetic philosopher active in the first century BCE or CE), which would make Pyrrho's skepticism almost unrecognizable as such on the model provided in Sextus's *Outlines*.

There are, in addition, historical ties linking Democritus with the players we recognize as most valuable in the Pyrrhonian tradition. This pedigree is established by the succession of teacher-pupil relationships related by Diogenes Laertius in Books IX and X of his *Lives*, in which he describes Democritus, a student of Heraclitus, as a cohort and perhaps a teacher of the contemporary[72] Abderite philosopher Protagoras (DL IX 53), best known for his proclamation that "man is the measure of all things," on the basis of which he himself is often connected with the skeptical tradition. More significantly, though, the succession described in these two books of *Lives of the Philosophers* establishes Democritus's influence on Pyrrho himself,[73] who Diogenes says "used to refer to Democritus above all."[74] In general, we are wise not to make too much of these alleged associations. James Warren, for instance, is wary of "the artificiality of the compilation of all such successional lists" and suggests that we be "cautious about accepting wholeheartedly any of the connections they suggest. They were often compiled with a view to aligning thinkers only on the basis of a certain strand of their thought, and motivated by a desire on the part of later philosophers to construct for themselves an antique and noble lineage."[75] For these and other reasons, he casts doubt upon the actual historical accuracy of any relationship (teacher-pupil or otherwise) between, for example, Protagoras and Democritus. However, to one who is slightly more inclined to take at face value Diogenes' biographical anecdotes—as Nietzsche seems to have been—this succession would have been highly suggestive.

What teachings Pyrrho referred *to* when referring to Democritus is, unfortunately, unknown. Surely, it would not

72. The two are, at least, rough contemporaries, although a precise chronology is difficult to establish here, given that the dates of both thinkers (Democritus especially) are disputable. For an excellent discussion of Diogenes' successions in books IX and X (with a comparison to the account found in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*), and of how much of them we ought to take seriously, see Warren 2002: 10–28.

73. Via Metrodorus and Anaxarchus (DL IX 58, 63).

74. DL IX 67; see also Eusebius, who says, "Pyrrho started from Democritus in a sense" (*Praeparatio Evangelica* XIV 6: 4). In *Against the Mathematicians*, Sextus records Democritus's claim "that everything is false, and every appearance and opinion is false" (VII 53), which contributed significantly to the acquisition of Democritus's skeptical reputation.

75. Warren 2002: 12.

have been the atomistic physics, which both Timon and the later Pyrrhonists (like Sextus) repudiated as Dogmatic. It is likely that the epistemological sayings of Democritus most liable to skeptical interpretation (like those discussed above) were what inspired these words of praise from Pyrrho and his pupil. Richard Bett points to Timon's laudatory description of Democritus as an *amphinoon leschēna* ("two-minded discusser")—an approving reference either to Democritus' use of *ou mallon* arguments or else to the ambivalence some interpreters noted in his attitude toward the status of appearances.[76] What is especially interesting in Bett's account, however, is his attention to the context of DL IX 67 (which is often overlooked by commentators on the connection between Democritus and Pyrrho), in which we find the remark about Pyrrho's frequent allusions to Democritus. According to Bett:

> Diogenes has just been reporting various anecdotes that illustrate Pyrrho's indifference to convention and to hardship. . . . Democritus is mentioned, then, in the course of an account of Pyrrho's attitudes to life; so we might expect that it would be Democritus' attitudes to life for which Pyrrho particularly admired him. And, in fact, Democritus' ethical thinking seems to contain plenty with which Pyrrho could have found himself at home.[77]

This conjecture distributes the weight of the appreciation the early Pyrrhonists expressed for Democritus more evenly between his epistemological and his ethical writings,[78] and it is suggestive to think that this is what Nietzsche has in mind also when he writes, among a series of notes on Democritus from 1867 to 1868, that the writings

76. Bett 2000b: 156ff.. Bett is also careful to point out how Democritus's use of these arguments differs in important ways from Sextus's. For Sextus, *ou mallon* indicates that something is "no more this than that," and the result of such arguments is inevitably suspension of judgment. For Democritus and perhaps for Pyrrho, too (if Bett is right), *ou mallon* will have been used to convey "the failure of sensations and opinions to be true" (157). On the reading Bett offers here, however, he emphasizes that Pyrrho may be said to have held that "sensations and opinions [if not true] are not false either," while "Democritus will have held that sensory impressions do falsify the true nature of things" (2000b: 157).

77. Bett 2000b: 159.

78. In what follows, Bett maintains the received view of *euthumia* as a virtually synonymous forerunner of *ataraxia* and does not appear open to the suggestion of the important differences between them that I have tried to highlight here. See Warren 2002, however, for further discussion of the *differences* between the two concepts.

on ethics demonstrate the "core" of Democritus's thought.[79] In any case, the teachings of Democritus clearly exerted some influence not only on the eponymous founder of Pyrrhonian skepticism and his followers, but on Epicurus as well, who was also a direct intellectual descendant of Pyrrho's (again, according to Diogenes' succession),[80] though this was an inheritance Epicurus worked hard to downplay. Finally, it is worth noting that the Democritus presented in Diogenes' *Lives* is in some sense the most skeptical Democritus we have, and this is the Democritus of Nietzsche's seminars, as his source material indicates (PPP 120–30).

The skeptical reading of Democritus, like almost everything else about this shadowy character, is not uncontroversial.[81] Fortunately, whether Democritus's own views ought to be considered as skeptical is not an issue that must be settled here, since the question of what Nietzsche takes away from his lengthy engagement with Democritus is independent of the purely philological issues of whether or not Democritus argued (in treatises now lost) for a systematic ethical eudaimonism, whether Democritus would have accepted or rejected *ataraxia* as an unqualified synonym of *euthumia*, and even whether Democritus's epistemology can accurately be cast as skeptical. (It is independent of these issues, that is, with the constraint that there is some reasonable and philologically sound way of arriving at either interpretation. And in fact, it seems that in each case, there is.) At any rate, Nietzsche's work on Democritus would certainly have provided him with the raw material for a model of human flourishing that he made more and more his own over the course of his career, and could even have prompted the epistemologically "pessimistic" claims we find in such early writings as "On Truth and Lie," whose skeptical provenance may by now be clearer.

79. "Die ethischen Schriften also zeigen, wie in der ethischen Seite der Kern sein<er> Philosophie liegt" (FS 3: 350).

80. See DL IX 64 and X 7, 13.

81. Patricia Curd has recently argued, perhaps most forcefully, that it is a mistake to cast Democritus in a skeptical light. She contends that Democritus's positive ethical views preclude any meaningful skepticism about knowledge and that the skeptical reading is not forced upon us by those fragments that have typically been cited as evidence for Democritean doubt; see Curd 2001. This thesis stands in opposition not only to the skeptical Democritus recognizable in earlier commentaries (e.g., Barnes 1979 and Kirk et al. 1983) but also to the treatments of Democritus as a skeptic that we find in the doxographical tradition.

Many years later, when Nietzsche reflects how his "current way of thinking is to a high degree Heraclitean, Democritean, and Protagorean" (KSA 13: 293; WP 428), we should note that what these three figures have in common is that (1) they contribute more than any other thinkers of whom we have record to the landscape of ethical thought and psychology prior to Plato, and that (2) all three figures play a pivotal role in the development of the skeptical traditions that arose after them (many founded by their students). While some have, in the case of Democritus, tried to deny any connection between the epistemological views, the atomism, and the ethics,[82] it is not difficult to draw the necessary connections between the beliefs to which one assents and the quality of his or her life, where that quality is in large part determined by the condition of the *psuchē*. Indeed, it is often difficult to resist drawing those connections.

So a genealogy of 'tranquility' reveals that like ascetic ideals, it too has different meanings for different types of human beings, and in particular for sick and healthy human beings. And while the Epicurean and Christian longing for peace is unsuitable as an aim for strong and healthy souls, *euthumia* is an ideal perfectly suited to one who undertakes to expose and attack it. Democritus's emphasis on cheerfulness was widely enough known that he was sometimes called "the laughing philosopher," and later writers took this either as a reference to his treatise on cheerfulness or else to indicate especially his readiness to laugh at others.[83] For Nietzsche, who says, "Laughter means: to gloat [*schadenfroh sein*], but with a good conscience" (GS 200), both ways of laughing—out of cheerfulness or at others—can be of service to his critical project. In the preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*—Nietzsche's "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," written upon reflection in 1886—he exclaims: "You ought to learn the art of *this-worldly* comfort first; you ought to learn to laugh, my young friends, if you are hell-bent on remaining pessimists. Then perhaps, as laughers, you may someday dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil—metaphysics first" (BT P 7). And in the *Genealogy*, published the following year, he says, "All I care to have pointed out here is this: in the spiritual sphere as well, the ascetic ideal has in the meantime only one kind of real enemy and

82. See, in particular, Barnes (1979) as well as Bailey (1928), against whom Vlastos (1946) argues.

83. E.g., Seneca, *de Ira*, ii.10.

injurer: the comedians of this ideal—for they arouse mistrust" (GM 3: 27).[84] To refuse to take moral ideals seriously is to put them down, to regard them as if from above and from a great distance and to cast upon them the ultimate suspicion. To do so is also, in Nietzsche's case, to claim to live without them. This bold claim is the one captured in his self-described "immoralism," to which I now turn.

84. On laughter, see also GM P: 7; GS 1, 177 and 324. Note also the readiness to laugh as a characteristic of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, "the soothsayer, the sooth-laugher" (Z 4 'Higher Man' 17–20).

CHAPTER 6

Skepticism as Immoralism

The examinations of health and its conditions in the previous chapter and of Pyrrhonism in those prior have put us in a position to appreciate more keenly the connection Nietzsche has in mind in *The Anti-Christ* when he says, "Since sickness belongs to the essence of Christianity, the typical Christian state of 'faith' *has* to be a form of sickness, the church *has* to condemn all straight, honest, scientific paths to knowledge as forbidden paths. Doubt is already a sin" (A 52; cf. D 89). To identify *faith*, strong conviction without sensitivity to evidence, *as a form of sickness*, in addition to its revealing the kind of commitment to ongoing inquiry that is characteristic of the Skeptical persuasion, suggests a quite straightforward connection between *doubt* (which opposes faith) and *health*. If dogmatism is pathological, the capacity for doubt is indicative of health ("Objections, minor infidelities, cheerful mistrust, a delight in mockery—these are symptoms of health. Everything unconditional belongs to pathology" [BGE 154; cf. TI 'Socrates' 10])—perhaps even of such a state of health as would threaten to erode the very foundations of Christianity. Of course, anyone who appreciates Nietzsche's thought will realize that it amounts to a great deal more than a localized attack on Christianity; because Christian morality is "a type of morality that has attained dominance and validity in the form of morality as such" (EH 'Destiny' 4), the consequences of such an attack will necessarily be more far-reaching. In fact, Nietzsche exposes symptoms of the same

illness, the same asceticism, in all corners of the modern world, in all aspects of intellectual and social life, and not just in religious moralities.

Moral ideals everywhere masquerade as secular worldviews, and it is surely partially explanatory of the overwhelming victory of the ascetic ideal that its centrality to the most fundamental values of modern liberalism has been so thoroughly obscured. This has certainly been true of the practice of philosophy, as Nietzsche so often reminds us:

> I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown. (BGE 6)

Christopher Janaway has recently argued that Nietzsche's philosophy is presented the way that it is to force upon us the realization that "the core of philosophy . . . is a belief in the unconditional value of truth. . . . In setting up the pursuit of truth as an unconditional value, one is not only mimicking Christianity's ideal of self-denial in the face of a single absolutely valuable 'other', but enacting a value that is literally moral: that of being truthful at all costs."[1] Although they would claim to have risen above superstition, religion, and the purely speculative, the sciences too dangerously court a relationship with truth that approaches worship, prompting Nietzsche to worry that this is just faith in another guise. In the closing sections of the *Genealogy* (GM 3: 23–28), he asserts that these two, "science and the ascetic ideal, they do, after all, stand on one and the same ground—I have already suggested that this is so—: namely on the same overestimation of truth" (GM 3: 25).[2] And throughout his career, Nietzsche famously—or infamously—decries the rise of social and political forms of discourse that champion individual rights, gender equality, democratic education, and other hallmarks of Enlightenment thinking for the asceticism he finds lurking within

1. Janaway 2007: 5.

2. As I have shown in previous chapters, Nietzsche's own admiration for the sciences focuses on its methodology rather than its results. See, e.g., HH 1: 635 and 256, in which Nietzsche insists that the value of science is not to be measured by its results but by the extent to which it "furthers ability": "an increase in energy, in reasoning capacity, and in toughness of endurance" are the rewards of science.

them. The "*democratic* movement," he says succinctly, "is the heir to Christianity" (BGE 202).

If he is right about the overwhelming pervasiveness of ascetic moral imperatives and sentiments not just within religion but also in scholarship, science, politics, and even culture (as his final denouncement of Wagner exemplifies), then it will be no surprise if the skeptic is everywhere—even outside the Church, where doubt is explicitly a sin—treated as a rogue and as a threat to the stable order of things. In being the enemy of dogmatism in all its forms, skepticism is a fortiori the enemy of morality in all those senses in which Nietzsche is the enemy of morality. Insofar as he opposes the universality of moral claims and their presumptuousness in purporting to prescribe values for everyone as part of an overarching theory of the good, and especially insofar as such theories rest upon speculative principles, those supported by "the worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge, not the best of all" (HH 1: 9), he opposes morality qua dogmatism. One of the earliest contentions of this investigation has been that once we recognize the Pyrrhonism of Nietzsche's approach to philosophy, the tightness of the connection between his metaphysical and epistemological views and his critique of morality becomes more visible. In this chapter, I argue that not only are the skeptical attitudes and strategies I have exposed in Nietzsche's works a *necessary* part of that important critique, they may also be seen as *sufficient* to constitute a position worthy of the name Nietzsche gives it: *immoralism*.

Skeptical "Immoralism"

In his final work, *Ecce Homo*, under the heading "Why I Am a Destiny," Nietzsche declares: "I am by far the most terrible human being who has ever existed" (EH 'Destiny' 2). Although, he continues, "this does not mean that I will not be the most charitable. I know the joy of *destruction* to a degree proportionate to my *strength* for destruction,—In both cases I obey my Dionysian nature, which does not know how to separate doing no from saying yes. I am the first *immoralist*: which makes me the *destroyer par excellence*" (2). Now, Nietzsche claims a lot of "firsts" for himself—in this same work, for instance, he claims to be the first psychologist, elsewhere the first philologist. Unfortunately, however, his claim to be the first immoralist (in addition to its being, like the other claims, pretty clearly

hyperbolic) is undermined by a critique, dating back to antiquity, of the very Skeptics I have been examining. The Pyrrhonian skeptics stood apart, distanced themselves, from every moral theory as they found it; they were a group of thinkers in the face of whose practice no moral theory could be left standing. They attacked—indifferently and with what Nietzsche might have called a good conscience, as a matter of psychological health and well-being and intellectual "cleanliness"—not just the individual prescriptions of this theory or that theory, but *theorizing* as such. The Pyrrhonian skeptics can in this respect be said to have occupied a position "beyond good and evil," precisely by having put themselves past all theorizing about it. In suspending judgment about values, the Skeptic detaches himself from them and lives without the belief that anything is good or bad by nature.

This thoroughgoing lack of moral commitment was an alleged deficiency not infrequently singled out by critics. Aristocles of Messene (a Peripatetic philosopher active in the first century BCE or CE), for instance, in a lengthy attack on skepticism that is preserved in Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel* (XIV 758c–763d), takes particular issue with the Skeptics on this point. Quite apart from any of the purely scholastic worries we have seen raised about skepticism (e.g., whether it is internally consistent or even plausible or whether its arguments are any good), Aristocles asked *what kind of person* the skeptic could be, what kind of citizen, counselor, physician, or friend would such a person make? Commentators both ancient and modern worry: "What evil thing would [the Skeptic] not dare to do, seeing that he thinks nothing to be really bad or shameful, just or unjust?"[3] The charge that the Skeptic is a kind of moral monster—unreliable, unprincipled, and unpredictable, literally a danger to his community—is illustrated in a number of ancient sources, and it has not lost its force and vivacity even today. Gisela Striker, commenting on what she regards as the quite fortunate differences between Pyrrhonian skepticism in antiquity and the version associated with Robert Fogelin, one of its most recognizable contemporary proponents, claims that it is understandable that opponents of Skepticism—and perhaps also ordinary people—"found the Skeptic's stance morally suspicious."[4] It is thus that Diogenes Laertius, whose

3. Annas 1986: 19.

4. Striker 2004: 20; see also Annas 1986: 19–23, and Nussbaum 1994: 313–15.

history of Skepticism Nietzsche knew intimately, reports that some Dogmatists claimed that the Skeptic "would not shrink from killing and eating his own father if commanded to do so"—by a tyrant, for instance (DL IX 108). Indeed, Striker says, "one must assume that the Skeptic will feel no regret if he ends up doing something that his community considers as wrong, and that might be an uncomfortable thought for those who live around him."[5]

Long before Nietzsche set about making us uncomfortable, then, there were the Pyrrhonists, who did not call themselves "immoralists," of course, but whose attitude toward morality (really, whose attitude toward *moralizing*) is echoed in Nietzsche's thought and once again provides for us an excellent model on which to understand his approach to ethics—or, more accurately, his *retreat* from ethics and from the entire enterprise of philosophizing about morality (an enterprise that turns out to be irreducibly moral). While the Skeptics' suspension of judgment about the real existence of values may not, on its own, appear "terrible" enough to merit the label "immoralism," we would do well to observe that their radically detached attitude toward morality "precludes any half-way serious practical commitment to any moral project,"[6] and precisely there is where the Skeptic's ephectic attitude begins to take on a more sinister aspect, as Aristocles and other opponents of skepticism have been quick to point out. It is precisely the sinistrality of doubt that makes Christianity condemn it, and its corrosive effect on faith, as a sin.

That Nietzsche takes this condemnation as a symptom of the decadence and illness that is peculiar to Christianity demonstrates that he not only appreciates but indeed celebrates this point. The Skeptic's threat to morality is not limited—as Aristocles might have us think—to what he *in fact does* nor even to what he *might do*; his suspension of judgment, his utter indifference, and the infuriating neutrality of the halcyon spirit who looks at morality "more coldly, more distantly, more prudently, from a greater height" (D P: 5) are already "morally suspicious." This connection between skepticism and immoralism, made explicit in *The Anti-Christ* 52, is preserved in a number of other places in Nietzsche's corpus. In the 1886 preface to *Daybreak*, for instance, Nietzsche claims that with this work he

5. Striker 2004: 21.
6. Annas 1986: 21.

will have "commenced to undermine our *faith in morality*" (D P: 2). Mere critical reflection on the subject of good and evil has heretofore been "too dangerous a subject":

> Conscience, reputation, Hell, sometimes even the police have permitted and continue to permit no impartiality.... As long as the world has existed no authority has yet been willing to let itself become the object of criticism; and to criticize morality itself, to regard morality as a problem, as problematic: what? has that not been—*is* that not—immoral? (D P: 3)

Nietzsche understands that problematizing morality by fomenting suspicion, by promoting doubt, is sufficient for "immorality." He makes this point unequivocally again in the preface to the *Genealogy* by warning that for anyone who makes morality a problem and who lingers over this problem long enough, "the belief in morality, in all morality totters" (GM P: 6). But, again, we must be clear that this doubt is not methodological. Nietzsche is not trying to raze morality to its foundations so as to establish something "firm and lasting" in the science of ethics, either based on aesthetic principles or the so-called will to power or anything else; he does not take the trouble to dismantle all of the baroque edifices of conventional morality only to turn around and erect one of his own. Indeed, he cannot, on pain of running afoul of his own critique. Thus, "impartiality," suspension of judgment, is not a means to an end; it is the end. However, since impartiality is inimical to the very nature of moral authority, it is sufficient to the purpose. It is therefore in virtue of just such an impartial stance, a genuine suspension of judgment, and only in virtue of such a stance that Nietzsche qua "immoralist" can set himself in opposition to morality—to *all* morality, to morality as such.

Moral Skepticism in Nietzsche

This skeptical reading of Nietzsche's immoralism will be especially helpful insofar as the attempt to develop a coherent understanding of that position has so far been haunted by its own apparent "scope" problem. Since Nietzsche not infrequently makes such sweeping claims as to suggest that he rejects not only this or that moral system, but morality *itself*, there have been those who believe Nietzsche's immoralism commits him to the rejection of any

value that could count as moral.[7] In the Anglo-American scholarship on Nietzsche, some early commentators attempted to mitigate the force of Nietzschean "immoralism" by casting it in fairly narrow terms, such that he attacks only Christianity or certain theories of morality (for instance, those that encourage pity [*Mitleid*] as a moral attitude),[8] but not morality as such. In some cases, this approach has been motivated by practical concerns: for instance, the worry that if Nietzsche rejects morality altogether, replacing moral reasoning and rules with only the hazy vision of an ultrapowerful human (even transhuman) figure who gives vent to his every cruel impulse without a "bad conscience," then any atrocity or cruel act is licensed. Thus the mitigated interpretation of Nietzsche's immoralism is for some commentators simply an attempt to correct the dangers of painting with too broad a brush (as for instance in the reading offered by J. P. Stern, who once claimed—absurdly—that "no man came closer to the full realization of self-created values than A. Hitler"[9]). However, as we will see, the fact that Nietzsche's position does nothing to allay such a worrisome threat is an integral part of what gives it its bite, which we ought to do everything we can reasonably do to preserve.

If my interpretation has so far been on track, it will be clear that Nietzsche's immoralism sets its sites on more than mere Christianity, and that he does not even limit his critical examination of values to explicitly *moral* systems; ascetic values, remember, lurk everywhere. More and more, scholars are rightly attempting to come to terms with Nietzsche's immoralism in a way that gives it its full due, reading its scope as broadly as possible without allowing it to yield to a somewhat less mortal, more academic threat—self-refutation. Structurally, the issue of the scope of Nietzsche's immoralism and the scholarly treatment of it parallels nicely the issue of the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē* and the scholarship devoted to that. Maudemarie Clark's discussion of immoralism brings out the parallel nicely, in fact, illustrating how it returns us to the starting point of our investigation with an allusion to "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense":

> An immoralist does not simply ignore morality, or deny its right to our compliance, but claims that morality is a bad thing that should be

7. See, e.g., Foot 1992.
8. E.g., Danto 1965 and Kaufmann 1974.
9. Stern 1979: 86.

> rejected. Immoralism therefore seems to be defensible only from the viewpoint of a morality, which makes it appear to be as self-refuting as another notorious Nietzschean claim, that truths are illusions.[10]

We dealt with the latter of these two apparently problematic views in chapter 2. Just as I did there, in my analysis of that early and infamous claim about truth, I will suggest here that Nietzsche's immoralism is best handled as a form of skepticism—specifically, a Sextan skepticism about morality.

At this point in our investigation, the intended sense of "skepticism about morality" should be well established, and indeed it could probably pass without further discussion had it not been recently said that "almost everyone" by now already agrees that Nietzsche is a moral skeptic.[11] In the most current literature, this claim is generally taken to mean (1) that he is a skeptic about morality *and nothing else*, and (2) that he *denies* that there are any objective facts about morality, which is to say that he is an antirealist, which is to say that he is not a skeptic at all in the Pyrrhonian sense of that term. He does not suspend judgment, so the story goes; rather, he takes a position—and a fairly strident one at that—on the existence or nonexistence of a class of particularly spurious or "queer" entities. Thus I find myself at odds with a growing orthodoxy in the scholarship on Nietzsche in these two respects, and the differences demand some further discussion.

With respect to (1) above, it appears that the majority of commentators who attribute moral skepticism to Nietzsche do deny explicitly that it is part of a wider skeptical practice. What is called Nietzsche's skepticism about the objectivity of morality is supposed to be a distinct, free-standing position; Brian Leiter has recently appealed to what he calls "a modest consensus . . . among Anglophone interpreters of Nietzsche" that Nietzsche is not a skeptic about truth or knowledge.[12] We should now recognize that this line of interpretation reflects a distinctly modern understanding of skepticism, shaped by comparatively parochial twentieth-century epistemological concerns. Such skepticism is, again, *essentially* local, focusing on a restricted set of claims, practices or presuppositions against the

10. Clark 1994: 15.

11. Leiter 2009: 1.

12. Leiter (2009: 1) includes among representatives of this view Maudemarie Clark (1990, 1998), Christopher Janaway (2007), Peter Poellner (2001), John Richardson (1996), and himself (1994, 2002: 268–79).

backdrop of an otherwise un-skeptical worldview. For Nietzsche, however, as for the Pyrrhonists, "Skepticism about values is part of a general skeptical approach to *all* beliefs, not a localized choosiness resting on the soundness of beliefs in other areas."[13]

We have seen how this ambitious, even outrageous-sounding claim has made concerns about the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē* particularly acute, and it should be clear how the same vexing issue may arise, and with the same urgency, for one who claims generally to reject *all* value judgments. But at this point, two considerations come to the fore. One is that rejecting a Pyrrhonian interpretation of Nietzsche in favor of a more tightly constructed reading of his critique of morality will not circumvent the scope problem. Those interpretations according to which Nietzsche's alleged skepticism is restricted to moral judgments or systems engender scope problems of their own. Proponents must explain what is to count as a "moral system" in the relevant sense, for instance, and *why* his skepticism should be restricted to claims about morality in that sense. The attempt to resolve such issues is responsible for generating much of the scholarship on Nietzsche in recent years, and the interpretive disputes persist. If we read Nietzsche's suspicion about values on the model provided by the Greek Skeptics, however, it will make clear how Nietzsche can claim—without circularity or contradiction—to be revaluating *all* values and challenging the belief in *all morality*, which is surely what he intends to do:

> This problem of the *value* of compassion and of the morality of compassion . . . appears at first to be only an isolated matter, a lone question mark; whoever sticks here for once, however, and *learns* to ask questions here, will fare as I have fared:—an immense new vista opens up to him, a possibility takes hold of him like a dizziness, every sort of mistrust, suspicion, fear springs forth, the belief in morality, in all morality totters,—finally a new challenge is heard. Let us speak it aloud, this *new challenge*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*. (GM P: 6)

Happily, we will no longer have to worry about how to make Nietzsche's ethical philosophy consistent with his critique—because he has no such philosophy. If the Pyrrhonist's claim to live without belief, his claim not to dogmatize, can be made coherent, then so

13. Annas 1986: 13.

can Nietzsche's claim to live without or beyond *morality*, and it can be done in the same way, given the aforementioned parity of structure between the issue of the scope of Nietzsche's "immoralism" and the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*.

As we must bear in mind, to challenge the Pyrrhonist by raising problems about the precise scope of the belief he claims to eschew and to expect an answer grounded in a theoretical account is again to misunderstand what distinguishes his variety of skepticism from modern varieties. Descartes, of course, sought a principle by means of which he could distinguish reliably self-evident (and therefore "foundational") from spurious propositions; the Skeptic has, and seeks, no such principle. Pyrrhonism is not a theory, as we have seen, but a practice—one largely destructive of theory building, and one that is reported to produce psychological health. And from the standpoint of his psychological investigations, we might say, Nietzsche (like the Pyrrhonist) is more interested in what it is about you or me that might account for our need for just such a principle, for the conviction that such an a priori sortal principle simply *must* be forthcoming.

To turn from the first of my departures from the "scholarly consensus" mentioned earlier, that (1) Nietzsche is a skeptic about morality *and nothing else*, to the second point of departure, that (2) he denies that there are any objective facts about morality: It has admittedly become conventional in the twentieth-century literature on metaethics to use 'skeptic' basically as a synonym for 'antirealist', one who denies the existence of objective moral properties and facts. J. L. Mackie's 1977 work *Ethics* opens with the unequivocal claim, "There are no objective values," and it does so directly under the heading "Moral Skepticism."[14] Perhaps it was this move that licensed the use of the term 'moral skeptic' to describe antirealists (or 'irrealists') as well as, on occasion, subjectivists and error theorists. Recently, the provocative moniker 'moral nihilist' has even been offered up to describe those who hold that there are no moral facts—the better to highlight their similarity to atheists in theological discourse.[15] At any rate, the central question seems to have come down to the metaphysical one of whether there are objective moral

14. Mackie 1977: 15.

15. See Peter J. Graham's review of Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's *Moral Skepticisms* (Oxford University Press, 2006) in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2007.03.19 (http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=9123).

facts. If this is the issue, then what I want to say is that we ought to refer to those who answer this question in the affirmative as 'moral realists' proper and those who answer it in the negative as 'moral antirealists'. But the original meaning of 'skeptic', denoting *those who maintain a suspension of judgment* on the metaphysical point at issue, really ought to be recovered along with Nietzsche's positive estimation of the Greek skeptics and allowed to do some work in this debate. Recent conventions notwithstanding, the use of the term 'skepticism' to denote antirealism foments misunderstanding and is at best imprecise; at worst, it has the effect of obscuring completely the important and philosophically interesting avenue of response that I take to be central to understanding Nietzsche's views on morality and how those views serve his larger philosophical project. Like the Skeptics, who do not adduce views of their own but merely refute propositions advanced by others and undermine their convictions (DL IX 74), and in keeping with the methodological scruples of the good philologist, Nietzsche's work is critical, not constructive; "this art does not so easily get anything done" (D P: 5). If successful, the methods employed by the Pyrrhonists neither establish new systems nor prove that there are no viable systems to be established; yet they make abundantly clear how Nietzsche could understand himself as "the *destroyer par excellence*" (EH 'Destiny' 2).

Moral Disagreement in Nietzsche and in the Skeptics

We can easily appreciate how different this reading is from the one that would make Nietzsche a moral antirealist, but a thorough defense of it needs to address some of the reasons that have been offered for this popular attribution of antirealism to Nietzsche in the first place. One of the most cogent and succinct recent defenses of Nietzsche's moral antirealism has been offered by Brian Leiter.[16] I propose to look at his formulation of the argument in some detail here, first because it rightly identifies and draws our attention to

16. Leiter 2009. Prior defenses of this antirealist reading appear in Leiter 2001 and 2002 (146–55). For very different versions, see Danto 1963, Nehamas 1985, Hunt 1991, and Reginster 2006. Cf. Clark and Dudrick (2007), who defend Leiter's moral antirealist reading of Nietzsche through the publication of *Human, All Too Human* but then argue for a realist reading of Nietzsche's later works.

an intriguing and heretofore mostly overlooked set of considerations that inform the position he ascribes to Nietzsche, and second because one of the passages he adduces as textual evidence for his interpretation is importantly relevant to the interpretation I have been developing here but, I argue, should lead to a very different conclusion.[17]

In the essay "Moral Skepticism and Moral Disagreement in Nietzsche," Leiter argues that "Nietzsche is a moral [antirealist] in the sense of affirming the *metaphysical* thesis that there do not exist any objective moral properties or facts."[18] He has argued elsewhere that the "central argument for anti-realism about value [in Nietzsche] is *explanatory*: moral facts don't figure in the 'best explanation' of experience, and so are not real constituents of the objective world."[19] To this argument, Leiter has added another set of considerations that he takes to motivate, independently, Nietzsche's antirealism. These considerations are also explanatory, "not with respect to our moral experiences *per se* but rather with regard to the phenomenon of moral disagreement."[20] The persistence of disagreement about morality has of course been frequently exploited as a challenge to moral realism. Support for these arguments from disagreement is typically anthropological, focusing on differences among first-order moral claims made by individuals or on the discrepancies in moral practice across cultures and epochs. And there are such appeals to be found in Nietzsche.[21] As Leiter rightly notes, however, the substance of Nietzsche's approach "is a bit different":

> For what he calls attention to is not 'ordinary' or 'folk' moral disagreement, but rather what seems to me the single most important and embarrassing fact about the history of moral theorizing by

17. I am deeply grateful to Brian Leiter for permission to discuss this essay, which was presented at the annual "History of Modern Philosophy" conference at New York University, November 8, 2008.

18. Leiter (2009) actually says, "Nietzsche is a moral skeptic in the sense of affirming [this] *metaphysical* thesis" (4), adding parenthetically, "I will refer to this [view] hereafter as simply 'skepticism about moral facts'." For the sake of clarity, however, I will call this an 'antirealism' about moral facts.

19. Leiter 2002: 148; see Leiter 2001 for a more detailed version of the "best explanation" argument.

20. Leiter 2009: 7.

21. See, e.g., GS 43, "What laws betray," in which Nietzsche discusses laws of the eighteenth-century Muslim sect of the Wahhabis and some customs of the Romans, and how these appear to contemporary European sensibilities.

> philosophers over the last two millennia: namely, that no rational consensus has been secured on *any* substantive, foundational proposition about morality.[22]

The failure of philosophy to have put skeptical concerns to rest is of course cited by Kant as a primary impetus for the development of his critical philosophy. But this shameful state of affairs has not appeared only recently, to modern thinkers. In antiquity, the persistence of disagreement and its suitability for Skeptical ends was frequently noted. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE—40 CE), for instance, devotes some discussion to precisely this circumstance in his *de Ebrietate* (§§193–205), emphasizing that persistent disagreements plague not only the unreasonable or untutored, but even those who have devoted serious and sustained effort to their resolution. To put the challenge in Nietzsche's own words: "Why is it that from Plato onwards every philosophical architect in Europe has built in vain?" (D P: 3)

The idea here is that if there were some (objective) fact of the matter that could help us adjudicate not just disputes between, say, cultures regarding this or that practice but among competing ethical theories themselves—disputes, that is, not about *what* things are good, but about *why* good things are good—it is utterly implausible to suppose that two thousand years of dedicated work by the sharpest and most talented thinkers could have failed so miserably to discover it. The best explanation, therefore, for this long history of embarrassing failure may seem to be that no such fact of the matter exists. Of course, the "moral skeptic" I have in mind may readily admit that this explanation is compelling, without conceding that it is decisive. Rather, he will insist on drawing our attention to the gap that remains between any *explanation*, even the best one currently on offer, and conclusive *demonstration* of the metaphysical thesis Nietzsche is said here to affirm. But we still need a clearer account of why the argument from disagreement should motivate suspension rather than antirealism.

The argument from disagreement is well known in contemporary metaethics, but, as Leiter has suggested, what makes Nietzsche's version of it unique is primarily its focus not on the incompatibility of "first-order" moral judgments but on the "amazingly intractable" differences between the "philosophical

22. Leiter 2009: 7–8.

theories about morality that purport to license [those] particular judgments by answering foundational questions."[23] ("A philosophical theory," he adds, "for purposes here, is a discursive and systematic account of correct moral judgment and action.") This emphasis gives Nietzsche's version of the argument from disagreement greater philosophical depth and interest than its modern competitors: it threatens the very project of theorizing philosophically about morality. But this challenge is not unprecedented; Leiter recognizes that it goes back to antiquity, and he includes, as a supporting passage that he says is representative of Nietzsche's remarks about moral philosophy and moral philosophers and that "bears directly on the argument . . . at issue here," a fragment from Nietzsche's notebooks from the spring of 1888.[24] Under the heading, "Philosophy as *décadence*," Nietzsche observes:

> It is a remarkable moment: the Sophists touch on the first *critique of morality*, the first *insight* into morality . . .
>
> —they place the plurality (the local conditionedness) of moral value judgments alongside one another
>
> —they intimate that every morality [can be] justified dialectically,—that it makes no difference: that is, they conjecture how every foundation of a morality must necessarily be *sophistic*—
>
> —a proposition that has subsequently been demonstrated in the grandest style by the ancient philosophers from Plato onwards (down to Kant)
>
> —they postulate as the first truth that 'a morality in itself', a 'good in itself' does not exist, that it is fraudulent to speak of 'truth' in this domain (KSA 13: 14 [116]; cf. WP 428)

The Greek Sophists, as Leiter points out, capture Nietzsche's attention for their clever deployment of the fact of disagreement to challenge not just this or that moral judgment but all attempts to offer reasons for morality.

23. Ibid., 10–11.

24. Ibid., 13. I want to emphasize that this is certainly not Leiter's only textual support for his claim about Nietzsche's use of arguments from disagreement; it is the first of several passages he cites, and all the rest are from Nietzsche's published writings. Here, however, he has selected a passage that is obviously consistent with the position Nietzsche is committed to in print, that bears on the issue in a particularly clear way, and that does provide additional insight into the importance of the argument, as well as its structure and source. I focus on it here because I take it to be even more helpful in sorting out Nietzsche's view than Leiter's analysis reveals.

However, it is important to note that according to Nietzsche here the Sophists just touch upon [*streifen*] this insight; they don't invent it. Rather, what the Sophists display in making this move is their subtle aptitude for the opportunistic employment of arguments already available and their talent for harnessing the prevalent "Greek instinct" of their time to their own advantage. The real provenance—historical and philosophical—of the argument from disagreement is in fact Pyrrhonian. Also called the "mode deriving from dispute," it belongs to the five modes attributed to Agrippa; according to this mode, Sextus explains, "we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment" (PH I 165). Nietzsche is well aware of the argument's heritage, as he makes clear in the other half of this notebook fragment, which is not quoted by Leiter. Picking up at the end of the passage just cited, Nietzsche continues:

> Just where was *intellectual integrity* in those days?
>
> The Greek culture of the Sophists had grown out of every Greek instinct: it belongs as necessarily to the culture of the Periclean age as Plato does *not*: it has its predecessors in Heraclitus, Democritus, in the scientific types of the old philosophy; it finds expression, for example, in the high culture of Thucydides.
>
> —and it was ultimately proved right: every advance in epistemological and moralistic knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] has *restored* the Sophists…
>
> our way of thinking today is to a large degree Heraclitean, Democritrean and Protagorean…it would suffice to say that it [is] *Protagorean*, because Protogoras combined within himself the two elements that are Heraclitus and Democritus
>
> Plato: a *great Cagliostro,*—think how Epicurus judged him; how Timon, the friend of Pyrrho, judged him—
>
> Is perhaps the integrity of Plato beyond doubt?…But we know at least that he wanted to have *taught* as absolute truth what he did not deem to be even a conditional truth: namely, the special existence and special immortality of 'souls' (KSA 13: 14 [116]; cf. WP 428)

The Sophists stand opposed to Plato, but their cultural heritage is a skeptical one. That Nietzsche has Pyrrhonian "predecessors" in view here is evident not just from his passing mention of Pyrrho and Timon (Pyrrho's student). With the exception of Thucydides, virtually *all* the figures he mentions and sets against Plato in the latter half

of this passage, as well as the fact *that he sets them against Plato* (a point to which I will return later), reveal that this is the case.

Here we need to remember that Heraclitus, Democritus, Protagoras, Pyrrho, and Timon are among the dozen or so figures whose biographies are included in the ninth book of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*. So these are figures Nietzsche knows very well and whom he is already inclined to think of together. Of course, Heraclitus, Democritus, and Protagoras are not themselves Pyrrhonists. Yet the fragments containing Heraclitus's well-known observations about opposites (for example, "Sea is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious" [frag. 61]) drew enough attention for their skeptical overtones even in antiquity that Sextus Empiricus, in *Outlines of Skepticism*, takes special care to distinguish his practice from the views of "the Heracliteans" (PH I 210–12, "That the Skeptical persuasion differs from the philosophy of Heraclitus"; cf. DL IX 73). The same is true of Democritus, as I observed in the previous chapter, and also Protagoras; Sextus devotes independent discussions to these three figures in particular at the end of the first part of the *Outlines*, distinguishing his position from each of theirs in an effort to forestall confusion (PH I 213–14, 216–19; on Democritus, cf. DL IX 72). In the case of Democritus, the relativism about secondary qualities of objects that is implied by his dictum "by convention sweet, by convention bitter, in reality atoms and void" was the potential source of confusion (in spite of his dogmatic physical theories, which Sextus points out); in the case of Protagoras, one need only examine his defense of the so-called "man-measure" doctrine against Socrates in the *Theaetetus* to understand how he might (even if mistakenly) be thought to be in league with the Skeptics, for the way in which his doctrine would, like theirs, undermine the metaphysical realism aggressively promoted by Plato. So a successful challenge to realism about value, as encapsulated by the argument from disagreement, need not result in anti-realism, and from the point of view of the Pyrrhonist, of course, it cannot—that would be merely a negative dogmatism about values.

Often enough, however, we find Nietzsche apparently throwing this caution to the wind and embracing a view that sounds much more straightforward—and more dogmatic: "*There are absolutely no moral facts*," he declares in *Twilight of the Idols* ('Improving' 1, Nietzsche's emphasis). Value is a projection, an illusion, something imposed upon the world by human beings. Such claims have heretofore lent strong support to

the value antirealist readings of Nietzsche, and similar ones can be found in almost all of his works. In *The Gay Science*, for instance, he says that, "Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less—but has rather been given, granted value, and we were the givers and granters! Only we have created the world *that concerns human beings*!" (GS 301) He reiterates this point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, saying, "There are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena" (BGE 108). What I would like to say here is that the passages in which Nietzsche does embrace caution, *ephexis*, and suspicion and in which he steadfastly refuses to sully himself in the arena of metaphysical mud-slinging far and away outnumber those in which he sounds adamant and dogmatic. Even so, the passages I have mentioned here demand some reconciliation with the picture I have been developing. I have stated that the Skeptics' goal in adducing arguments from disagreement was to undermine the theories of their Dogmatic contemporaries (at a time when "Dogmatist" referred to anyone with "a discursive and systematic account" of things to offer), but they aimed to do so without installing new dogmas in place of old. What may be surprising is that, on the face of it, the clearest instances of these arguments *in the Skeptical literature itself* may appear to fail on the latter score. In fact, the texts with which Nietzsche would have been most intimately familiar seem quite friendly to the position I have called "moral antirealism." Contrary to appearances, however, Skeptical *epochē* remains intact, and so, I shall argue, can Nietzsche's.

The Appearance of Moral Antirealism in Nietzsche and the Skeptics

One version of the argument from disagreement figures prominently in Diogenes' reconstruction of the life of Pyrrho and his followers. Although Diogenes opens his account by stating, rightly, that the Skeptics "were constantly engaged in overthrowing the dogmas of all schools, but enunciated none themselves" (DL IX 74), when he turns to matters of "the good," his (admittedly convoluted) reconstruction of the argument sounds more germane to Academic than Pyrrhonian skepticism:

> *There is nothing good or bad by nature*, for if there is anything good or bad by nature, it must be good or bad for all persons alike, just as

> snow is cold to all. But there is no good or bad which is such to all persons in common; therefore there is no such thing as good or bad by nature. For either all that is thought good by anyone whatever must be called good, or not all. Certainly all cannot be so called; since one and the same thing is thought good by one person and bad by another; for instance, Epicurus thought pleasure good and Antisthenes thought it bad; thus on our supposition it will follow that the same thing is both good and bad. But if we say that not all that anyone thinks good is good, we shall have to judge the different opinions; and this is impossible because of the equal validity of opposing arguments. *Therefore the good by nature is unknowable.* (DL IX 101, emphasis added)

Diogenes' gloss, concluding as it does that "there is nothing good or bad by nature" and that "therefore the good by nature is unknowable," sits uneasily with the suspension of judgment (*epochē*) that is the hallmark of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Even more curiously, so does Sextus's own version of the argument.

In his treatise "Against the Ethicists" (M XI), an indispensable source for evidence about Democritus (on whom Nietzsche worked for so many years) and for the argument from disagreement, Sextus Empiricus appears to argue at great length for precisely this conclusion, that "nothing is good or bad by nature" (M XI 68–78).[25] Arguing, as Nietzsche does, not just from the *existence of disagreements* but from their *apparent intractability* among philosophers (as well as among rational individuals), Sextus claims that if some *x* were good *by nature*, it would have to be good *universally* (i.e., for all subjects at all times), and its goodness could not fail to be recognized by those who benefited from it. Therefore, if some *x* is good, but not universally acknowledged as such, it cannot be good by nature. He aims to show by example that the things the Dogmatists take to be goods are not universally, but only relationally, good. None of the "things which are said to be preferred," even health itself, he says, "turn out to be invariably preferred, nor are the things which are said to be dispreferred necessarily dispreferred. At any rate, if healthy people have to serve the tyrant and for this reason be destroyed, while the sick are exempted from this service and thereby also exempted from destruction, the sage will choose being sick on this occasion rather than being healthy" (M XI 65).

25. This is the first and most important of three arguments for this conclusion in M XI.

Before we examine the Pyrrhonian credentials of this argument, one point warrants emphasis. As this and other of Sextus's examples show, the Skeptic has no difficulty accepting statements about what is good as long as they are qualified as being "good for" or "in relation to" someone in some particular circumstance (M XI 71)—that is to say, as long as they are *relational*. The Pyrrhonist can and will readily accept relational first-order statements as reports about the way things appear, and he is satisfied with reports of appearances for all practical purposes—including, in Sextus's own case, medical practice and the preservation of health and well-being.[26] This qualification is crucial to Leiter's project, to which I now return to investigate its Skeptical antecedents. Part of this project is to define accurately the scope of Nietzsche's skepticism, about which Leiter says:

> Nietzsche's central objection to morality—or to what I call 'morality in the pejorative sense' (hereafter MPS), to pick out that cluster of values that is the actual target of his critique—is that its cultural prevalence is inhospitable to the flourishing of the highest types of human beings.... If this is Nietzsche's argument, then it also means that at the core of his critique of MPS is a judgment about *prudential* value (i.e., about what is *good* or *bad* for an agent), namely, the judgment that MPS is *bad for* certain persons because it is an obstacle to their flourishing. And if that judgment is not objectively true, then Nietzsche's critique of MPS simply has no force.
>
> Of course, Nietzsche also makes affirmative claims that suggest he thinks judgments of prudential value, judgments about what is good and bad for a person are objective.... Commitment to the objectivity of prudential value is not, however, an ambitious position. [Peter] Railton dubs it 'relationalism' (1986a) and suggests that we 'think of [non-moral or prudential] goodness as akin to nutritiveness'.... Indeed, as Railton notes, 'realism with respect to non-moral [or what I am calling prudential] goodness... [is] a notion that perfect moral skeptics can admit' (1986b: 185).[27]

26. "We say then, that the standard [i.e., the criterion of action] of the Skeptical persuasion is what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation.... Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding [Dogmatic] opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive" (PH I 21–23).

27. Leiter 2009: 2–3.

Here, I agree wholeheartedly with Leiter's claim that at the core of Nietzsche's critique of morality is a judgment about prudential value, that that judgment is "relational" roughly in the sense meant by Railton, and that such judgments are among those which "perfect moral skeptics" can admit (although in a sense intended by neither Railton or Leiter), since—as Leiter correctly observes—commitment to them does not reflect "an ambitious position."

I shall return to this claim and also to Leiter's claim that if Nietzsche's judgment that MPS is bad for certain persons "is not objectively true, then Nietzsche's critique of MPS simply has no force." Before that, however, I return to Sextus's presentation of the argument from disagreement in "Against the Ethicists" (a version of which we have also seen in Diogenes), because its conclusion that "nothing is good or bad by nature" appears to be in tension—if not plainly inconsistent—with the greater degree of caution associated with Pyrrhonism and expressed by Sextus himself in the better-known *Outlines of Skepticism*. In Sextus's case (and in Nietzsche's, I believe), what we must do is treat instances of this argument as components of an overall program with wider and more far-reaching goals. The Pyrrhonists do not pit this or that argument or proposition against this or that Dogmatic argument or proposition, or their philosophical position against the Dogmatists' position so much as they juxtapose their *practice* to the practice of Dogmatism, inviting comparison and making a judgment not unlike Nietzsche's judgment that they are simply "better off" or "healthier"; they challenge Dogmatism as *a way of life*. Their target, according to Sextus, is in fact "the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (PH III 280). This squares nicely with Leiter's remark about the notebook passage previously under consideration, that in the scathing attitude it expresses toward Plato, "it has many relatives in [Nietzsche's] corpus and fits with a general picture Nietzsche has of the discursive pretensions of philosophers."[28] The feature, therefore, that Leiter singles out as peculiar to Nietzsche's version among modern versions of the argument from disagreement (i.e., that its force is directed not merely against the claims of moralities but against the philosophers who advance and attempt to justify them) belongs also to the ancient versions of the argument, and not accidentally, but essentially: this feature is also distinctive of the Skeptics' general approach.

28. Ibid., 13.

In the case of Sextus's "Against the Ethicists," then, it is crucial to remember its place in Sextus's corpus: it belongs to a series of treatises that attempt to undermine the views promoted in the various branches of philosophy (in this case, ethical philosophy). Those views, moreover, always turn out to be one or another sort of realism; metaphysical realism, we might say, is the "dominant paradigm." In the better-known *Outlines of Skepticism*, Sextus is more careful to present two arguments of roughly equal persuasive force, *equipollent* arguments, one on each side of every matter proposed by the Dogmatists, a tactic which he says brings about suspension of judgment. He prefaces his discussion of ethical philosophy in that work by putting distance between himself and the arguments and conclusions he is preparing to present, attributing them clearly to the Dogmatic schools while he remains for his own part uncommitted to the assertion that nothing is by nature good, bad, or indifferent: "It is plain," he says, "that they [the Dogmatists] have not put us on to the conception of any of these things—a not unlikely result, since they are stumbling about among objects which *perhaps* have no subsistence. For that nothing is by nature good or bad or indifferent *some deduce as follows*" (PH III 178, emphasis added). In "Against the Ethicists," however, he makes the case for moral antirealism *presupposing a backdrop of varieties of moral realism*. Thus, he does not present arguments in favor of the various realist positions; to do so among his contemporaries would be wholly redundant. His arguments are the equipollent counterweight to the received contemporary view. But if we are ignorant of the function of these arguments in Skeptical practice, their very vigorousness, to say nothing of Sextus's apparently incautious conclusions, appear as negative dogmatism.

In the later, more perspicuous and sophisticated *Outlines of Skepticism*,[29] Sextus takes care to remind his readers of this tactic frequently; although his statements and the vehemence of his arguments may appear to have him advancing a position, this is only an appearance. The Skeptics' arguments are always proffered "indifferently" and "without holding opinions" (e.g., PH I 24, 202–205, 207–208). In "Against the Ethicists," Sextus does not issue the same reminders, but we must remember that this work is not a practical

29. Richard Bett argues persuasively in the introduction to his translation of "Against the Ethicists" (1997) that *Outlines of Skepticism* is better seen as the culmination and summary of Sextus's Pyrrhonism, and placed therefore at the end of the canon, than as an earlier, sketchy version of the practice he refines later.

manual (as *Outlines of Skepticism* is) but an ad hominem attack (as Nietzsche's works are). Skeptics calibrate the strength of their arguments to the intended audience:

> Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency, and apply severe remedies to patients who are severely afflicted and milder remedies to those mildly afflicted, so Skeptics propound arguments which differ in strength—they employ weighty arguments, capable of vigorously rebutting the dogmatic affliction of conceit, against those who are distressed by a severe rashness. (PH III 280–81)

Nietzsche's diagnosis of his contemporary culture—that it is deeply, perhaps irretrievably decadent—requires the most strenuous argumentation he can muster against the prevailing view of "a type of morality that has attained dominance and validity in the form of morality as such" (EH 'Destiny' 4). Hence, in spite of his declaration to be "by far the most terrible human being who has ever existed," he also notes that "this does not mean that I will not also be the most charitable" (EH 'Destiny' 2).

To return to the consideration of Nietzsche's notebook passage from the spring of 1888: I have argued that of the figures we find named there, most are related to the Skeptical tradition. And the argument from disagreement that figures prominently in Nietzsche's critical remarks in that entry is in fact of Skeptical provenance. Furthermore, we need not be put off by the apparently antirealist thrust of the postulate "that 'a morality in itself', a 'good in itself' does not exist." One reason for this is historical: we find nothing to that effect in Nietzsche's corpus that we cannot also find in the Skeptical literature. Another reason is philosophical: these postulates in Nietzsche's writing are more challenges and provocations than *claims*, and he would at any rate exhort us to remain keenly aware that his notion of moral truths being "illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" is offered as a psychological hypothesis in the same spirit as the following claim in Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*:

> When I say these things are illusions, I must define the meaning of the word. An illusion is not the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error. . . . What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes. In this respect, they come near to psychiatric delusions. But they differ from them, too, apart from the more complicated structure of delusions. In the case of delusions,

> we emphasize as essential their being in contradiction with reality. Illusions need not necessarily be false—that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality.[30]

Nietzsche perennially denounces the doctrines of Christianity as illusions, fantasies, and even "lies," but in doing so he is less interested in issues of truth and falsehood than in hypothesizing about "the psychology of conviction, of 'faith': A long time ago I posed the problem of whether convictions are not more dangerous enemies of truth than lies. . . . I call lies *not* wanting to see what you see, not wanting to see it the *way* you do" (A 55).[31] Ultimately, he says, "it comes down to the *purpose* the lie is supposed to serve" (A 56).

Finally, although Nietzsche in his notebook fragment seizes upon the Sophists' exploitation of the fact of moral disagreement, which he says "intimates that every morality [can be] justified dialectically," he surely realizes (as we must realize) that their reasons for doing so have nothing to do with vindicating an antirealist position—or any other metaphysical position, for that matter. They're Sophists; beyond winning the argument, they don't *have* a position or philosophical agenda to pursue. They're unscrupulous and ruthless mercenaries, shameless opportunists ready to don any cloak and assume any position for the sake of winning the argument—which they do for sport or for hire. This is clearly part of what Nietzsche *likes* about them, but it will not make them ready allies in the project of vindicating any truths or judgments, objective or otherwise; indeed, they could not be less interested in objective truths.

Strictly speaking, the Skeptics do not have an agenda either, at least not in the sense of a discursive and systematic account they wish to promote. What they do have on their side, however, as Nietzsche highlights in this unpublished fragment, is "intellectual integrity." This virtue (if we can call it that), which I take to be related closely to the "honesty" Nietzsche prizes and the

30. Freud (1961: 39) is, of course, discussing specifically religious belief in this passage; but the purpose of the discussion is, as it is in Nietzsche, to critique conventional morality and to question whether what it demands of human beings is psychologically possible or conducive to health. It is worth noting, too, that just as Freud is careful to distinguish illusion from error, we should be careful to distinguish errors (beliefs generated by epistemically unreliable processes, for instance) from straightforward and demonstrable falsehoods.

31. The point is underscored earlier: "Truth and the *faith* that something is true: these sets of interests belong to entirely different, almost opposite worlds" (A 23).

"intellectual conscience" (or "well-constitutedness") he denies to Christians in particular (A 52), is one Nietzsche associates constantly with skepticism, the entertaining of doubts, and the avoidance of conviction.[32] We have already seen Nietzsche say of the Skeptics that they are "the decent types in the history of philosophy; but the rest of them [philosophers] have no conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity" (A 12), and "The skeptics were the only *respectable* types among the philosophical tribes" (EH 'Clever' 3).[33] In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche identifies one type of "genius" whose way is "to avoid with hearty indignation everything that confuses and deceives us in our judgment of things; it is consequently an *opponent of convictions*" (1: 636). The *lack* of such "integrity" is, on the other hand, something with which he charges Plato, who is surely among those implicated in Nietzsche's claim that he mistrusts all systematizers and avoids them, when he states famously (or by now, perhaps, infamously) that "the will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI 'Arrows' 26). At any rate, in this brief passage from 1888, Nietzsche makes abundantly clear that Plato, "a *great Cagliostro*," stands utterly in opposition to the forces of intellectual integrity, under which heading he ranges the Skeptics and their close cousins.

"Our Objectivity" and the Opposition to Moral Realism

Nietzsche, therefore, is an opponent of moral realism as one of the readiest forms in which dogmatism persists, and his opposition grows out of the same "Greek instincts," found in Heraclitus, Democritus, Protagoras, Pyrrho, and Timon, that oppose Plato. But this opposition cannot consist simply in identifying Plato's position and arguing for its converse. Plato is the *quintessential* dogmatist, the one who "stands truth on its head" by "disowning even *perspectivism*, which is

32. Recall, e.g., GS 110, where "honesty and skepticism" appear as a pair; UM 3: 2, where Nietzsche praises the skeptic Michel de Montaigne for his "honesty," among other things; and further in A 52, in which he singles out the refusal to engage in doubt of any kind as the hallmark of Christianity's lack of "*intellectual* well-constitutedness" and praises the practice of *ephexis* (withholding judgment) in interpretation.

33. On this passage, see the introduction (esp. n. 16).

the fundamental condition of all life" (BGE P). Countering Platonic realism with antirealism can produce nothing more than a mirror image, and Nietzsche must be after more than this, because such a criticism would overlook what Nietzsche's real criticism of Plato *is* in the first place: that his will to truth, his commitment to a model of explanation and conception of knowledge that requires transcendental grounds, *is a model of knowledge moralized*—the ascetic ideal in its most virulent and pernicious form. Plato's commitment to *objectivity* itself is fundamentally ascetic. This is why "the worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of all errors to this day was a dogmatist's error, namely Plato's invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself" (BGE P).

Understanding what this charge means, however, will not be possible without the important distinction we saw Nietzsche make in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* between a concept of objectivity that bears all the marks of the ascetic ideal and a more modest concept of objectivity of which he takes ownership.[34] Recall that the upshot of this earlier discussion was as follows: We're embodied creatures. For us, to see an object is to see it from whatever point of view we happen to occupy. If we want to improve our visual representation of the thing, we can walk around it, turn it over, put it under the microscope, bombard it with X-rays, and (depending on the object) cut it open and peer inside. And "*the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter," that much more complete will our representation be (GM 3: 12). As Nietzsche makes plain, there is a natural limit to this completeness, in the sense that no accumulation of views of an object will ever add up to or amount to an objective view, if by that we mean a view that is not *from* any standpoint in particular. The notion of a view from nowhere is incoherent: "Here it is demanded that we think an eye that cannot possibly be thought, an eye that must not have any direction . . . ; thus, what is demanded here is always an absurdity and non-concept of an eye" (GM 3: 12). If we appreciate fully the absurdity Nietzsche exposes in this idea, we will see that it would be lunatic to adopt a view from nowhere as the human ideal in visual representation.

The situation is the same with respect to cognition. We can, by investigating and acquiring more perspectives, make some

34. See chapter 4.

epistemic gains. Indeed, "*the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter," and the more we hone "the capacity to have [our] pro and contra *in* [*our*] *power*, and to shift them in and out: so that [we know] how to make precisely the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge," the better off we will be, both practically and epistemically. But here, too, there are limits. As in the case of vision, if we have set our sites on objectivity, understood as "disinterested contemplation (which is a non-concept and an absurdity)" and the property of some "pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge," then we have, quite perversely, adopted as a goal for ourselves an ideal incompatible with the kinds of creatures we are. Crucially, however, this is not tantamount to claiming, with the Academic skeptics of antiquity, that knowledge is impossible for us. That claim requires accepting a model of knowledge (an understanding of the concept of knowledge) that contains an absurdity; it retains as a goal, as a legitimate aim, "objectivity" in the sense Nietzsche intends to criticize, and then reports on our inability to achieve that goal. The Pyrrhonists, however, do no such thing; that would give too much of the game away to the Platonists.

What Nietzsche's perspectivism therefore demands is an overhaul of our concepts of knowledge and explanation, taken as the goals of scientific (or philosophic) inquiry. Specifically, what is needed is to sever them from objectivity in the ascetic sense, and to give "conviction" and "faith" precisely what they have coming to them, as does the species of "genius" Nietzsche hails in *Human, All Too Human* as "justice." Playing on the homily offered by Plato's Euthyphro on the nature of justice as "to give each his own," Nietzsche says this kind of genius "is an *opponent of convictions*" because

> it wants to give to each his own, whether the thing be dead or living, real or imaginary—and to that end it must have a clear knowledge of it; it therefore sets every thing in the best light and observes it carefully from all sides. In the end it will give to its opponent, blind or shortsighted 'conviction' (as men call it:—women call it 'faith'), what is due to conviction—for the sake of truth. (HH 1: 636)

What Nietzsche envisions here may be nicely illustrated by some recent work in the philosophy of science. In an essay titled "Thinking about Mechanisms,"[35] the authors offer an account

35. Machamer et al. 2000.

of what mechanistic "explanation" would look like if stripped of its metaphysical pretensions.[36] As they define them, "mechanisms are entities and activities organized such that they are productive of regular changes from start or set-up to finish or termination conditions."[37] Now, we might be tempted to say that the regularity itself is the real *explanandum* and that without a notion of what underwrites the regularity, the mechanistic description on offer cannot count as a genuine explanation. It is the purported necessity or the lawlike connection between the start and the termination that we are interested in; it is in those things that *causation* consists. But the authors resist this temptation:

> A mechanism is the series of activities of entities that bring about the finish or termination conditions in a regular way. These regularities are non-accidental and support counterfactuals to the extent that they describe activities. For example, if this single base in DNA were changed and the protein synthesis mechanism operated as usual, then the protein produced would have an active site that binds more tightly. This counterfactual justifies talking about mechanisms and their activities with some sort of necessity. No philosophical work is done by positing some further thing, a law, that underwrites the productivity of activities.[38]

On this analysis, the task of scientific explanation is accomplished when we have accurately identified the entities involved in a process under investigation and discovered and described the regularities in the activities (understood functionally) involved in that process. If this analysis seems to condemn us to a sort of Humean skepticism that makes *adequate explanation* a chimera, it is only because we (again perversely) continue to accept a model of explanation that is as conceptually confused as the notion of "an eye that must not have any direction." It is in the acceptance of a model of explanation that requires an extraphysical, "magic" ingredient, one accessible to and verifiable by only a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowing," that science today is "not the opposite of that ascetic ideal but rather *its most recent and noblest form*" (GM 3: 23). This point about "objectivity" is, for Nietzsche, not an aside, but

36. I am grateful to Daniel Burnston for pointing me toward some of the relevant literature on this issue. See also William Bechtel and Robert N. McCauley's recent defenses of a "heuristic identity theory."

37. Machamer et al. 2000: 3.

38. Ibid., 7–8.

essential to his critical project, oriented as it is toward exposing the sickness in the ascetic ideal.

The upshot of all this is that, on Leiter's reading it must be an objective (metaphysical) fact that there are no objective (moral) facts. That is the thesis he takes to be required for Nietzsche's critique of morality to have any force, and the thesis he takes to be supported by the argument from disagreement, since that thesis is supposed to be the best explanation of the phenomena. The conclusion is that Nietzsche is a "skeptic" (that is, an antirealist) about the objectivity of morality. But it seems clear on the basis of passages like *Genealogy* 3: 12 and Nietzsche's complaints about philosophy and philosophers "these days" and about science having become the last refuge of the ascetic ideal that what he is a skeptic about, in the genuine sense of the word 'skeptic', is *objectivity itself*.[39] It is *objectivity* as we typically think of it that puts the "will to truth" in the service of an unrealizable (or at least, heretofore unrealized) ideal and that makes even scientific reasoning ascetic in the modern era. It is *objectivity* that is so connected with the human pride and pretense that Nietzsche identifies and puts down as early as "On Truth and Lie." And disinterested *objectivity* in the service of the truth and the Good is the ideal chiefly promoted by Plato. Surely, then, Nietzsche cannot affirm as an objective truth the metaphysical thesis that there are no moral properties or facts. His only option in opposing Plato without becoming merely Plato's mirror image (the anti-Plato, the one who says, "Whatever Plato thinks, I think the opposite!") is not to adopt *any* of the metaphysical positions in this debate, but to eschew the debate altogether. That is what he does in the interest of the intellectual "cleanliness" and health Nietzsche so often invokes: "I do not refute ideals, I just put on gloves when I have to deal with them" (EH P 3).

Dogmatism as Moralism

The Skeptics' opposition to Platonic realism, indeed to any Dogmatic realism, about values resurrects the concern expressed by commentators like Aristocles of Messene that the Pyrrhonist, maintaining as he does a certain indifference to moral argument, could only be

39. Nietzsche is especially clear about this in BGE 207.

a rogue and an unscrupulous character whose way of life constitutes a threat to the moral order. And the Skeptic's emphasis on the *ataraxia* he enjoys by "not hypothesizing and being convinced" about whether things are good or bad by nature does nothing to help matters (PH III 238). Many commentators have supposed that Skeptical *ataraxia* supervenes on a rationally unreflective life that could be little better than the life of an animal. Though it might be trouble free, such a life would lack the higher pleasures a fully human existence affords. On this score, recent critics of Skepticism have again echoed the ancients in claiming that the Skeptic's life, even if psychologically possible, is unattractive and, worse, unfit for a human being. What is most interesting for our purposes is the way in which this charge that the Skeptical life must be (intellectually and emotionally) unfit for human beings returns to the charge with which I began this chapter, the charge of moral "monsterism."

Earlier I looked at Aristocles' worry that the Skeptic, lacking the belief that one action is more morally justifiable than another, is capable of any atrocity. The Pyrrhonist has a reply to this frequently leveled charge, one that is developed in some detail by Sextus Empiricus (M XI: 162–7; PH I 21–30) but which appears more concisely in Diogenes Laertius. To the charge that without beliefs, action would be impossible, Sextus's well-known reply is that "the standard of the Skeptical persuasion" (that is, the Skeptics' criterion of action) is "what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation" (PH I 22). Thus, Sextus says:

> Attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad.[40] By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive

40. On the issue of whether this would commit a Skeptic in the modern era to accepting conventional religion or morality, see chapter 1 on the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*. There I argued, of such conventional behaviors as Sunday churchgoing, that once one realizes (as Nietzsche clearly does) the dependence of this convention (and

> in those which we accept. And we say all this without holding any opinions. (PH I 23–24)

So the Skeptic's resolve to live by the appearances is compatible with his agnosticism about dogmatic matters, and also accommodates a willingness to yield to the exigencies of human nature and physiology and *generally* (though not always) to follow the laws and customs of his society.

This resolve is invoked both by Sextus and by Diogenes on the Skeptic's behalf, to exonerate him from the Dogmatist's charge that his suspension of judgment would extend, reprehensibly, even to those moral predicaments ordinary persons have no trouble sorting out, and in such a way that the Pyrrhonist cannot help but either act atrociously or act acceptably but "for the wrong reasons." As Timon and Aenesidemus declare, says Diogenes:

> In matters which are for us to decide we shall neither choose this nor shrink from that; and things which are not for us to decide but happen of necessity, such as hunger, thirst and pain, we cannot escape, for they are not to be removed by force of reason. And when the dogmatists argue that he may thus live in such a frame of mind that he would not shrink from killing and eating his own father if ordered to do so, the Skeptic replies that he will be able so to live as to suspend his judgment in cases where it is a question of arriving at the truth, but not in matters of life and the taking of precautions. Accordingly we may choose a thing or shrink from a thing by habit and may observe rules and customs. (DL IX 108)

If patricide "just isn't done," in other words, the Skeptic will refrain—but only by appeal to the (apparently pretty thin) resolve to live "by the appearances," one of which is conformity to the customs and habits of one's community. The tyrant's demands will exert some pressure on the Skeptic, as they would on anyone, and he may do the "wrong" thing. But there is no decisive reason to suppose he will. What Aristocles and others want us to recognize is the unpredictability of the Skeptic's behavior; even if he does the right thing, he will have no account to offer after the fact that could

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of worship in general) upon a system of dogmatic metaphysical extravagances, one's adherence to it falls away. Sextus's "handing down of customs and laws" is, in this day and age, more appropriate to, say, the rules of the road or to using the correct fork for one's salad.

explain or defend his actions. He can only have done what appeared best to him at the time.

Aristocles, however, "has no patience" with this reply, and neither do modern commentators; Gisela Striker, for one, calls it "disappointing."[41] Julia Annas seems to share in her discomfort: "For such a response to the tyrant's command, even if it results in the right action (and it might not; even Sextus adds 'perhaps') is an essentially *uncritical* response. The skeptic just *does* what his intuitions tell him. He has no basis for considering alternatives, or for wondering whether this occasion might prove an exception."[42] The reliance on intuition and the lack of rational reflection and of any basis for considering alternatives are what make the Skeptic such an unreliable and, ultimately, shady character. Even if he acts more or less in the way we would act, the Skeptic nevertheless sets a bad example: he opens up the terrible possibility that if he does what he does (and does more or less what we would do) without benefit of a lot of heavy-duty moral theorizing, then the rest of us may be doing no better. Our efforts at moral reasoning may be superfluous, epiphenomenal. Annas, once again, writing about the Pyrrhonists and without having Nietzsche in mind, has said: "The skeptic just does what his intuitions tell him. . . . [But] the intuitions themselves are only motives to action which happen to be there, like hunger or thirst—not to be ignored, but not the kind of thing that can sensibly be questioned, either. We do not think of moral choice in this way, because we do not think of our moral intuitions and principles this way, as just happening to be there and working themselves out one way or another while we, so to speak, look on."[43] Interestingly, however, this is *exactly* what Nietzsche often hypothesizes about our motives and principles. We cherish our view of ourselves as rational and reflective agents, as creatures who—unlike the brutes—can be moved by reason and are not passion's slaves. But just as he challenges those physicists who transgress the boundaries of sober scientific methods to declare the lawlike regularity of the universe with his counterproposal of a relentless and indifferent power-will operating in the universe (BGE 22),[44] Nietzsche hypothesizes here

41. Striker 2004: 20.

42. Annas 1986: 20.

43. Ibid.

44. "Granted," he says, "this is only an interpretation too—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well then, so much the better!" (BGE 22)

that what rises to consciousness may be nothing more than an after-effect.[45] After all, he observes, "a thought comes when 'it' wants, and not when 'I' want" (BGE 17). Contrary to our most cherished self-image, that is, Nietzsche suggests that our rational faculty may be "nothing but a *certain behavior of the instincts toward one another*" (GS 333).

The objection to Pyrrhonism that insofar as it is not guided by reason the Skeptic's inner mental life would be like that of an animal and that the well-being allegedly achieved by means of Skeptical practice consequently "might not look very attractive" betrays an unstated but deep commitment to a doctrine of human exceptionalism—an idea that Nietzsche clearly recognizes and that he works hard throughout his career to expose as essentially moral. "To translate humanity back into nature; . . . [to make him] deaf to the lures of the old metaphysical bird catchers who have been whistling to him for far too long: 'You are more! You are higher! You have a different origin!'" (BGE 230) Focusing on the *uncritical* nature of the Skeptic's behavior, for instance, Striker describes the attitude she thinks the Skeptic exemplifies as a merely passive acquiescence, and she invokes Sextus's own description of the Methodic physicians as an illustration:

> By the necessitation of feelings Skeptics are conducted by thirst to drink, by hunger to food, and so on. In the same way Methodic doctors are conducted by feelings to what corresponds to them: by contraction to dilation (as when someone seeks refuge in heat from the compression due to intense cold), and by flux to checking (as when those in the baths who are dripping with sweat come to check it and so to seek refuge in the cold air). And it is clear that things foreign to nature force us to proceed to remove them: even a dog will remove a thorn which has got stuck in his paw. (PH I 238)

"It is significant," Striker concludes, "that Sextus assimilates the performance of the doctor to the instinctive actions triggered by hunger or thirst, and that he compares these to the behavior of

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See chapter 4 for a lengthy exegesis of this passage, in which the infamous "will to power" plays the role of an equipollent argument.

45. See D 129, GS 11, GS 333 and TI 'Errors' 3, and also Leiter (2002: 91ff.), who argues persuasively for the view that "Nietzsche claims consciousness is epiphenomenal, and given our identification of the 'will' with our conscious life, Nietzsche would have us dispense with the idea of the will as causal altogether."

an animal: no reasoning is involved in either case."[46] Apart from the question of whether the Skeptic could have a very interesting or admirable mental life, we should note that this accusation receives its thrust primarily from the revulsion its proponents count on us having at the very notion of being assimilated to animals. The Skeptic's unreflective, uncritical existence is not a life fit for a human being but only for a brute, so this objection goes, and thus we should reject Skepticism, because that life is obviously unacceptable. "We know all too well," Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "how offensive it sounds when someone classifies human beings as animals, without disguises or allegory" (BGE 202; cf. 229). But this objection cannot be successful without betraying a prior, visceral, and unargued-for commitment to the doctrine that human beings are exceptional among animals; indeed, so exceptional as to occupy a place not continuous with but above and beyond the rest of nature. Such a doctrine could not be made coherent without precisely the kind of non-natural or supernatural account of phenomena that Pyrrhonian practice reliably undermines. Thus we come full circle in this chapter and can more easily see, in light of this revelation, how the Dogmatist's objection to Skepticism as an allegedly brutish way of life is in many respects a thinly veiled moralism and how doubt itself could come to be, as Nietzsche says, "already a sin" (A 52).

Skepticism as Immoralism

When Nietzsche says in *Daybreak* that he has "commenced to undermine faith in morality," it is significant that he neither singles out any one moral system nor declares that his aim is to demonstrate the falsity either of moral evaluations or their presuppositions. ("What have I to do with refutations!" he says [GM P: 4].) Instead, he promotes suspicion, on a grand scale, about the kinds of prior commitments and presuppositions without which there could be no morality. One of these is a commitment to the objectivity of at least some moral judgments; another, a commitment to regard human beings as occupying a place over and above the rest of nature.

46. Striker 2004: 19.

The first commitment we have seen betrayed by the charge leveled both by Aristocles and by modern opponents of Sextan Skepticism. That one ought not kill and eat one's own father, even if commanded to do so by a tyrant, is introduced in this context—plausibly enough—as uncontroversial. But the Pyrrhonist will surely recognize, quickly and rightly, that this principle announces itself not innocently but as an instance of a categorical, objective, and universal imperative. And the existence of such imperatives is precisely what the Skeptic challenges. That the Skeptic would make so bold as to withhold his assent from such a proposition is regarded as monstrous, but defending the monstrosity of his ephectic stance cannot be done without begging the question in favor of the conventional moral principles at issue and without treating as objective what is not obviously so.

Likewise, the objection that the Skeptical life is brutish betrays a second commitment (to a doctrine of human exceptionalism); this objection is motivated by a presupposition that human beings are *special* in virtue of, say, being "ensouled" or having a rational faculty that sets us apart from—and above—nonhuman animals (cf. HH 1: 101, GS 77, 115), a bias Nietzsche consistently aims to discredit. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche summarizes briefly what he finds offensive about moral "reasoning," and he explains how as central a moral concept as "dignity" (the basis of Kant's system of morality) is the product of the dogmatic attitude I have been attempting to expose here. The passage is short and is worth quoting in full:

> *The four errors*.—Man has been educated by his errors: first, he saw himself only incompletely; second, he endowed himself with fictitious attributes; thirdly, he placed himself in a false rank order in relation to animals and nature; fourthly, he invented ever new tables of goods and for a time took them to be eternal and unconditioned—so that now this, now that human drive and condition occupied first place and was ennobled as a result of this valuation. If one discounts the effect of these four errors, one has also discounted humanity, humaneness, and 'human dignity'. (GS 115)[47]

47. It is important to bear in mind the kind of qualification Freud makes, in the passage cited earlier: "When I say these things are illusions, I must define the meaning of the word. An illusion is not the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error.... What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes.... Illusions need not necessarily be false—that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality" (Freud 1961: 39). What Nietzsche refers to in this passage

If, that is to say, one adopts the more cautious attitude Nietzsche frequently recommends, the result is a suspension of judgment even on such basic ideas as that human beings are endowed with a peculiar dignity that commands respect and requires special consideration. It is not difficult to see how a steadfast suspension of judgment on such a proposition could be responsible for some of the most troubling passages in Nietzsche's work, specifically those that appear to license cruelty or oppression.

All the more important, then, to remind ourselves that as a skeptic and "immoralist," Nietzsche is in no way required to deny or intentionally to flout any particular moral convention, any more than his challenge implies an exhortation to any reader to do so. "For, as an immoralist," he cautions jokingly in *The Gay Science*, "one needs to avoid corrupting innocents" (GS 381). As he observes in *Daybreak*: "It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged" (D 103). Nevertheless, it is "the skepticism of audacious manliness" closely related to "the genius for war and conquest," the skepticism that "does not believe but does not lose itself in the process," the skepticism that "gives the spirit dangerous freedom, but is severe on the heart" that reveals itself ultimately in "the tough will to undertake dangerous journeys of exploration and spiritualized North Pole expeditions under desolate and dangerous skies" (BGE 209). Such a genuine suspension of judgment, an ephectic attitude, toward the most fundamental requirements of moral thinking, is not only *necessary* for Nietzsche's revaluation, a project for which he says repeatedly that he must remain at a distance from morality itself; it is also *sufficient* to afford him the title of an "immoralist." The only claim we have to be suspicious of is his claim to have gotten there first.

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as "errors" would be more properly described as "illusions" in Freud's sense of the term.

Conclusion

"At hearing the news that 'the old god is dead,' we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation—finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea'" (GS 343). This image, of the philosopher as a sailor and adventurer, is clearly one that is close to Nietzsche's heart.[1] Perhaps its Homeric resonances, which recall the wine-dark seas sailed by that *polutropos* Odysseus and by so many Greek heroes, explain its recurrence in his works. But as a metaphor for the seeker and lover of knowledge, it is particularly appropriate for the Pyrrhonist, who, having encountered the equipollence of argument, really does come unmoored and whose judgment is suspended like a vessel on the ocean, facing an infinite horizon, and who moreover finds his *happiness* there, on calm and open seas—precisely where most would experience a terrifying emptiness.

1. Nietzsche uses it in BGE 23, D 432 and frequently throughout GS: see, e.g., 46, 283, 289, and 377, as well as the verse "Toward New Seas" in the appendix. In this verse, as in GS 289, Nietzsche invokes the figure of Christopher Columbus, discoverer of a New World who was reportedly buried in Genoa (cf. GS 291), reminding his readers that, "The moral earth, too, is round!"

Surely, it is not for everyone to find their health and cheerfulness in such a situation; most encounter only nausea and seasickness. Yet Nietzsche declares:

> We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have burned our bridges behind us—more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there—and there is no more 'land'! (GS 124)

Contrary to the supposition that the Skeptic's life without belief is the "easy way out," Nietzsche demonstrates better than any ancient skeptic that this mode of existence is not for the faint of heart. Indeed, he says that, "The freedom from every sort of conviction, being *able* to see freely, is *part* of strength" (A 54). This strength is exceptional. The "metaphysical need" and the consolation of belief are the rule among human beings; if they were not, then the deliverances of the "madman" who announces the death of God in that famous passage of *The Gay Science* would not be greeted (as Nietzsche's published works were mostly greeted in his lifetime) with awestruck and disconcerted silence (GS 125).

In raising the problem of the *value* of values (GM P: 6), in commencing to undermine our *faith* in morality (D P: 2), in taking *as his task* a critique of the will to truth (GM 3: 24),[2] Nietzsche has every

2. Of course, Nietzsche elsewhere, and with greater frequency, describes the philosopher's task as *creating values*. One might be tempted, then, to say that this makes his skepticism methodological: "Perhaps the philosopher has had to be a critic and a skeptic and a dogmatist and historian and, moreover, a poet and collector and traveler and guesser of riddles and moralist and seer and 'free spirit' and practically everything, in order to run through the range of human values and value feelings and *be able* to gaze with many eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance. . . . But all these are only preconditions for his task: the task itself has another will, —it calls for him to *create values*" (BGE 211). But this task he reserves explicitly for coming philosophers, *philosophers of the future*, for whom Nietzsche works to clear a path, precisely by being the "*destroyer par excellence*" (EH 'Destiny' 2). These coming philosophers are in a very distant future; it is not even clear that they will be human—perhaps they are to be "transhuman." Nietzsche, after all, gives birth to Zarathustra, who is himself but a bridge to the *Übermensch*. So Nietzsche's skepticism is not methodological; Nietzsche's way is the Skeptic Way. At most, we

intention of "burning his bridges" and challenging the ground upon which all philosophical, moral, religious, and metaphysical beliefs stand. In doing so, he seems to challenge his readers to leave behind certainty, conviction, and "land": "For—believe me—the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—*to live dangerously*! . . . Send your ships into uncharted seas!" (GS 283) Yet he realizes that for most human beings (perhaps for all human beings other than himself), this will not be possible—the "metaphysical need" is simply too strong. This diagnosis is confirmed not only by our observation that belief in the ascetic ideal is ubiquitous and by the sheer fanaticism typical of religious belief; it is confirmed even by the dominant interpretative approaches to Nietzsche's own work. Most readers can countenance setting sail with Nietzsche and leaving behind the Continent of Metaphysical and Moral Realism, but no sooner have they departed than they begin charting a course straight for the Isle of Metaphysical Antirealism, or else the Polders of Postmodernism—anything to attribute to Nietzsche *a view*, a theory, an "–ism". Such readers may permit morality to *be* a problem, but not to *stay* a problem, as Nietzsche's adventurers and seafarers do: "If you are ever cast loose here with your ship, well now! come on! clench your teeth! open your eyes! and grab hold of the helm!—we are sailing straight over and *away from* morality!" (BGE 23).

It is in that way that Nietzsche says we, too, "*are still pious*," as he notes in the passage immediately following his paean to "open seas"; for we fail to recognize that in thinking about morality and even in scientific thinking,

> convictions have no right to citizenship, as one says with good reason: only when they decide to step down to the modesty of a hypothesis, a tentative experimental standpoint, a regulative fiction, may they be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge—though always with the restriction that they remain under police supervision, under the police of mistrust. But doesn't this mean, on closer consideration, that a conviction is granted admission to science only when it *ceases* to be a conviction? Wouldn't

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would have to say that *Nietzsche* is "methodological," a "preparatory human being" in the sense described in GS 283. Compare the "virile, warlike age" Nietzsche describes as approaching in that passage with the "new, warlike age" that heralds the "new and stronger type of skepticism" described in BGE 209.

> the cultivation of the scientific spirit begin when one permitted oneself no more convictions? (GS 344)

By the time he writes *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche can no longer afford subtlety on this point. "People with convictions," he states clearly, "have pathologically conditioned optics, which makes them into fanatics . . . the antithesis of strong spirits who have become *free*" (A 54).[3] "Convictions are prisons," he says again, in no uncertain terms, and not only in science but in the arena of value, where the philosopher finds his proper task. "Where basic issues about value or lack of value are concerned, people with conviction do not come into consideration. . . . If you are going to talk about value and lack of value, you need to see five hundred convictions *beneath* you,—*behind* you" (A 54).

We have discovered a number of fronts on which resistance to the Pyrrhonian reading of Nietzsche might be offered. First among them were worries about the internal coherence and acceptability of this variety of skepticism itself; but we have seen that the Pyrrhonist does not fall victim to self-refutation by declaring, confidently but paradoxically, that he knows that he knows nothing at all or that knowledge is impossible for human beings.[4] Furthermore, an appropriate understanding of the scope of Skeptical *epochē* allows us to see how such a practice can be compatible with everyday activity, so that Skepticism is not "unlivable," as it is sometimes alleged to be. Hume's charge that the Skeptic would perish from hunger out of sheer bloody-minded resistance to ordinary, everyday beliefs (in the innocent sense of 'belief' clarified in *Outlines of Skepticism* 1: 13 [cf. DL IX 102]) is not one that need trouble Sextus Empiricus. We have confronted the objection that the *ataraxia* the Skeptic enjoys upon suspending judgment seems incompatible with Nietzsche's praise of courage, strength, and warrior virtues and with his determination to cast suspicion primarily upon those who take suffering to be an unqualified evil. The more "cheerful" ancestor of tranquility,

3. Compare, obviously, the discussion of "perspectivism" at GM 3: 12.

4. That Nietzsche fully realizes the ridiculousness and incoherence of this view is evident in the mocking tone of his "nutshell" caricature of Kant's plan to limit knowledge to make room for faith: "Even Kant was on the same path with his categorical imperative: his reason became *practical* here. —There are some questions that people are *not* entitled to decide the truth of; all the ultimate questions, all the ultimate problems of value are beyond human reason. . . . To grasp the boundaries of human reason—now, *that* is real philosophy" (A 55).

euthumia, yields a sense of "peace of soul" that Nietzsche can effortlessly embrace. And we have seen that a number of resistances to Skepticism originate in the very attachment to ascetic ideals that Nietzsche strove his whole career to expose and undermine: Just as G. E. Moore famously raised his hands and pronounced, "Here is one hand; here is another," concluding that it must be unreasonable to doubt such *obvious* truths and taking his demonstration to be sufficient proof of the objective fact that the external world exists, so the opponent of Pyrrhonism would have us consider the tyrant's demand to kill and eat one's own father, concluding that so reprehensible an act could not be countenanced by a reasonable human being and taking this point to demonstrate sufficiently that there must, after all, be at least *some* objective moral facts. But the Skeptic is not persuaded. Unimpressed by the Dogmatists' insistence on these "facts," he is equally unperturbed by the accusation of brutishness, for he withholds his assent also from the doctrine that would make human beings exceptional among animals.

Yet perhaps the biggest obstacle to accepting this interpretation of his thought will be what Nietzsche himself describes as our "*horror vacui*," that humanity needs a goal and that "it would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will" (GM 3: 1). This point appears to him as a basic fact about the human will. (Though here we must remind ourselves that this is a "fact" not in the sense of a deep or hidden truth about any metaphysically essential human nature, but a perfectly reasonable, defeasible claim borne out by his own observations; Sextan skeptics are quite happy with facts taken provisionally and as reports of appearances.) That Nietzsche *has nothing for us* is an idea that most readers will find impossible to accept. Better he should steadfastly deny the existence of truth, the possibility of knowledge, the canons of rationality—better, that is, for him to espouse an aggressively negative dogmatism[5]—than *withhold belief*. He does not have a theory of morality (i.e., "a discursive and systematic account of correct moral judgment and action"), a semantics of truth, an ontology or metaphysics or epistemology. He has neither an atheism ("I have

5. There have been, in my view, some particularly ham-fisted readings of Nietzsche along just such lines; and such readings have been, sometimes with equal clumsiness, indicted as representative of "postmodern" readings. Surely this is too hasty a generalization. There are interpretations according to which Nietzsche is a "postmodern skeptic," but where they do not dissolve into negative dogmatism and ultimately incoherence, these readings have a discernibly Pyrrhonian aspect.

no sense of atheism . . . I have too much curiosity, too many doubts and high spirits to be happy with a ridiculously crude answer" [EH 'Clever' 1]) nor a new religion. He cannot and will not tell us how to live, and he disdains our efforts to look to him for inspiration, advice, or any kind of program. On the contrary, his project is purely descriptive; it is not prescriptive or normative. If the philosopher as enemy of morality and of dogmatism suspends judgment, if he makes morality a problem and lets it remain a problem, then where, exactly, does that leave us? Nietzsche's answer, cheerfully offered, is that it leaves us in the only place he intends for it to leave us—at sea. "*Embark, philosophers!*" (GS 289)

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