

KANT AND NIETZSCHE'S ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE

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Although Nietzsche often expresses harsh and unfair criticisms of Kant's thought, he was, in fact, profoundly influenced by his critique of human knowledge. It is not the case that Nietzsche "misunderstood" Kant. Rather, he understood quite well that Kant's critical philosophy sounded the death-knell of metaphysics and promoted an agnosticism about man's knowledge of actuality. Nietzsche's early formulation of a pragmatic or humanistic theory of knowledge, his emphasis upon the creative activity of knowing, as well as his stress upon "conditional knowledge" or knowledge "for us," were shaped by Kant's philosophy. The notion that our basic categories of the understanding are "fictions" was also suggested, in an indirect way, by Kant's critical thought. The critical and skeptical analysis of knowledge that Nietzsche propounded was, as I shall try to show, conditioned by his interpretation of the implications of Kant's analysis of knowledge.

In his earliest notes Nietzsche struggled with the problem of knowledge and critically examined the implications of the extension of the "knowledge-drive." He was enchanted by the question of "things-in-themselves" and at first tried to present a contrast between the "world" that man constructs and the transcendental actuality of *Dinge-an-sich*. Later, he criticized the idea of "things-in-themselves" while, at the same time, postulating his own version of a linguistically and conceptually inaccessible reality. In both *The Birth of Tragedy* and "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche retained the notion of things-in-themselves and employed it in the formulation of his analysis of the restricted mode of "anthropomorphic knowledge."

Diálogos, 49 (1987) pp. 7-40.

The Birth of Tragedy reveals the influence of Kant and Schopenhauer. The “primal one” that lies beyond the realm of space, time and causality is, *mutatis mutandis*, Schopenhauer’s primordial will. Empirical existence is more or less described in terms derived from a summary of Kant’s epistemic conclusions. In his poetic, metaphysical representation of the essence of ancient Greek civilization Nietzsche refers to space, time and causality as conditions of phenomenal being and points to the thing-in-itself as the irrational, Dionysian ground of the world that cannot be conceptually grasped. Kant’s agnosticism about the realm of things-in-themselves, he then thought, could be circumvented by means of music, Dionysian passion, artistic insight, and creativity. The distinction between the phenomenal world and things-in-themselves was not only retained in his “romantic” work, but was incorporated into his attempt to deal with the relation amongst language, truth and reality in the skeptical essay he wrote the year after *The Birth of Tragedy* appeared.

Language and Reality

Even before he began working on “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche had been quite familiar with some of the implications of Kant’s “metaphysics of experience.” In F.A. Lange’s *History of Materialism* he came across criticisms of Kant, as well as a psychologistic interpretation of Kant’s theory of knowledge. He learned from Lange that we have no access to “the true essence of things.” Lange held that the ultimate “truth” of things is a postulate that results from an “antithesis” that is determined by our “psycho-physical organization” and that “beyond experience” this notion of a true essence of things has “no meaning at all.”¹ Nietzsche focused on the agnostic conclusions of the neo-Kantianism of Lange: the entire sensory world is the product of our psycho-physical organization; our bodily organs are, like all other aspects of the phenomenal world, images of an unknown object; the primitive basis of our “organization” is as completely unknown to us as are the entities that act upon us. What we know is phenomenal, the “product” of the unknown ground of our organization and the unknown origin of the effects that act

¹ F.A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, II, 499. (This is a reprint of the second edition of this work originally published in 1873.)

upon our "organization."² Nietzsche subsequently understood Kant via the psychologistic interpretation of Kant that Lange defended. In point of fact, his critical analysis of knowledge is a fragmentary presentation of the Kant-Langean epistemology.

In his brief essay on "truth and lying," Nietzsche repeats Schopenhauer's notion that the intellect is not only in the service of the will, but is a "tool" that serves life-preserving instincts. Truth has a social utility; it is valued because of its "life-preserving consequences." There is no more a "pure reason" than there is a "pure truth." Then, as now, man was unsatisfied with "truth" in the form of empty tautologies. The expression of truth in language involves a radical simplification of our immediate experiences. Words are metaphorical symbols that are used to represent sensory stimuli. And our concepts are significations that simplify what we experience. We say, for example, "The leaf is green," and thereby convey a piece of knowledge. But in the process we simplify the complexity of the phenomena experienced and ignore numerous individuating qualities. Ordinary language is suffused with "metaphors" that represent things or events in the most rudimentary and general way. Neither our words nor our concepts "picture" any experiential actuality. Against the early Wittgenstein, Nietzsche would have said that language does not and cannot "picture" the world at all. Language and thought radically simplify actuality and provide us with a pragmatically useful semeiotics.

What comes to be accepted as truthfulness is, in fact, the sedimentation of metaphorical designations. And truth itself is comprised of a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms." Linguistic usage and the drive for truth are designed to serve to humanize actuality, to create a human world of meaning. We believe that we possess "knowledge" because we forget that "the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors," not "things-in-themselves." Our senses, by means of a selection process, yield a restricted range of "appearances." Our metaphorical words and concepts further simplify the complex nature of our experience and the diachronic process of linguistic sedimentation produces linguistic-conceptual elements that are then used to express that social value we call "truth." Insofar as our senses give us an awareness of a restricted domain of phenomena, and insofar as our linguistic-conceptual framework is a metaphorical

² *Ibid.*, 864.

representation of a rich, complex panorama of qualitative particulars, the belief that our judgments express "truth" is unjustified. If man has no access to the essence of things, then what comes to be accepted as human truths are, in actuality, conventional agreements that serve the interests of life and facilitate social communication. Neither conceptually nor linguistically are we able to represent any independent "reality."³

This condensed analysis of language and conceptualization is informed by an exponential increase of Kant's critical orientation. Retaining Kant's distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves, Nietzsche argues that neither language nor conceptualization give us a knowledge of the true essence of things. By emphasizing the subjectivistic implications of Kant's critique of knowledge, Nietzsche undermines claims to truth. He has kept in mind Lange's assertion that Kant showed that the objects of experience are "our" objects, that there is no "absolute objectivity", that the absolute nature of things is hidden behind the impenetrable veil of the phenomenal world that exists for us.⁴

Lange argued that Kant's conception of the phenomenal world is confirmed by the current theories of the physiology of the senses. He maintained, in addition, that just as our senses determine the nature of appearances for us, so, too, does our cognitive organization condition the system of phenomena that we come to know. Nietzsche took this to mean that our sensory-cognitive "organization" conditions the phenomena we experience in such a way that we have no way of knowing whether the objects of our knowledge correspond to any objective entities. Ordinary language, as well as philosophical language, is not an authentic representation of actuality, but a means by which we impose order upon the chaotic "manifold" of sensory impressions that are themselves already a result of selection and primitive synthesis. Our linguistic-conceptual framework enables us to create a "world" that is intelligible, a humanized world in which we can function effectively and preserve ourselves in existence. Kant's notion that experience is equivalent to the synthetic unification of sensibility and understanding that yields a constituted world of phenomena, but gives us no access to the true essence of things, meant to Nietzsche that there is an asymp-

³ *Sämtliche Werke*, Berlin and New York, Band 1. "Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne," 879.

⁴ Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 455.

totic relation between language (and thought) and actuality. Even as he later tries to jettison the notion of things-in-themselves, this standpoint deeply influences the form of Nietzsche's radical critique of knowledge and truth. For, Nietzsche asserts that if our linguistic-conceptual framework does not provide us with an accurate representation of the "truth" of things, then it yields a false world-picture or a systematic "falsification" of actuality that then becomes a basis for the "anthropomorphic idiosyncrasy" that assumes that a humanized world *is* reality. If "knowledge" pertains to a linguistic-conceptual construction of a human world, and if it is unable to grasp the "truth" of actuality, then it is comprised only of "conditional truths" or "truth for us." That is, it provided "anthropomorphic truth" or what amounts, for Nietzsche, to practical or pragmatic "truth." Before C.S. Peirce, Nietzsche intuitively drew out of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* the pragmatic theory of knowledge that was obscurely present in it. There is no doubt that Nietzsche's critique of language, knowledge and truth both in his earliest and his latest reflections was inspired by his understanding of the implications of Kant's epistemology.

Scientific Knowledge

The indirect influence of Kant's critical philosophy on Nietzsche is dramatically revealed in his interpretation of scientific knowledge and the language of science. In all probability, Lange's critical analysis of the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* was instrumental in shaping the analysis of basic principles and concepts employed in the sciences as "conventional fictions" or heuristic devices. Lange had emphasized the agnostic character of Kant's thought especially in regard to scientific understanding. He called attention to a central point in the *Prolegomena*: that the "natural sciences will never discover the inner nature of things" or any ultimate ground of explanation that transcends sensory experience.⁵ Scientific explanation must be based upon the objects of sense that "belong to experience." And these are understood according to the "laws of experience." Whatever comes to be known in the natural sciences is shaped and formed by our sensibility and, consequently, any claims to "truth" that seek to go beyond these capacities are either "regulative principles" of reason or

⁵ *Kant's Prolegomena*, ed. P. Carus, La Salle, 1955, 126.

speculations that cannot be accepted as legitimate claims to knowledge. Lange refers to Kant's statement that every cognition of things that is based upon "pure understanding" is nothing but appearance and that "truth is in experience only."⁶ Apparently mulling this over for some time, Nietzsche began to see that if "truth" is discovered in experience (=the synthesis of sensibility and understanding), then Kant is proposing two modalities of "truth." Constituted, phenomenal, experiential "truth" and the transcendental "truth" of the essence of things or of "things-in themselves." If science is based upon the former modality of "truth," then, in a strict sense, it cannot and does not provide us with the "truth" of actuality. Clearly, the seed of a conventionalistic interpretation of scientific knowledge was planted by Kant himself.

Lange interpreted Kant's conception of the *a priori* as basically derived from our "physico-psychological organization." Our experience is physiologically determined and our thought is psychologically determined. Pointing to the common, but unknown, origin of sensibility and understanding, Lange held that even the most rudimentary sensory experience is pervaded by cognitive, logical connections that correspond to the activity of "conscious thought."⁷ It is this notion of the physiological determination of experience and the psychologistic form of conceptualization that conditioned Nietzsche's theory of knowledge.

Nietzsche saw clearly that Kant's account of knowledge led to the relativity of understanding and the anthropomorphic nature of all knowing. Quite early on, Nietzsche noted that the "process of categorizing" and the "subjective" aspect of understanding obscures our grasp of "the thing in itself." He emphasizes the active, creative, constructive process of knowledge. Alluding to Kant's thought, he remarked that "Time, space and causality are only *metaphors* of knowledge, with which we explain things to ourselves."⁸ In the wake of Kant's philosophy, "absolute knowledge" is undermined, and even the scientific interpretation of nature is "anthropomorphic." Believing

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151. By stressing that *nur in der Erfahrung ist Wahrheit*, Kant, as I try to show, introduces two modalities of truth: the truth discovered in experience and the truth of things in themselves.

⁷ Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 482.

⁸ *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 7, 484. "Zeit Raum und Kausalität sind nur Erkenntniss*metaphern*, mit denen wir die Dinge uns deuten."

that Kant had shown that "all constructions of the world are anthropomorphic," Nietzsche maintains that this "skepticism" must be overcome.⁹ Here we see the embryo of a dichotomy that runs through Nietzsche's writings: the negative power of skeptical analysis and its apparent inevitability and the desire to overcome and go beyond skepticism for the sake of a life-affirming cultural ideal.

When Nietzsche refers to the process of knowing as "simplification", "schematization", "organization" and "arrangement," he conceives of it as a constructive activity that creates a "world" that is intelligible to us. The notion that scientific principles and concepts are "phenomenalistic", that categories are "useful fictions," was suggested by Nietzsche's interpretation of Kant. That Kant himself planted the seeds that germinate in Nietzsche's epistemological reflections is clear when we realize that Kant's attempt to justify the scientific interpretation of nature led, ironically, to a skepticism about the truth of this interpretation. In the *Kritik*, it is held that "the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearance, had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there."¹⁰ If we join this understanding of the order and regularity of nature to the notion of things-in-themselves, the insinuation of skepticism is clear. Aware of the paradoxical nature of his analysis of our understanding of nature, Kant notes that it is "strange and absurd" to say "That nature should direct itself according to our subjective ground of apperceptions, and should indeed depend upon it in respect of its conformity to law." However, when we

consider that this nature is not a thing in itself but is merely an aggregate of appearances, so many representations of the mind, we shall not be surprised that we can discover it only in the radical faculty of all our knowledge, namely, in transcendental apperception, in that unity on account of which alone it can be entitled object of all possible experience, that is, nature. Nor shall we be surprised that just for this very reason this unity can be known *a priori*, and therefore as necessary.¹¹

Just as there are "objects in general," so, too, is there a "nature in general" that is constituted by our sensibility, our intuitions of space

⁹ *Ibid.*, 459.

¹⁰ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg, 1956, 184.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

and time and our *a priori* categories of the understanding. Precisely because the natural order is an elaborate construction, things in themselves (or, for that matter, nature in itself) transcend our knowledge. Lange's interpretation of Kant's account of sensibility leads to an agnosticism concerning the origin of sensory experience that is supported by Kant's views in the *Prolegomena*. For, Kant had said that the objects of sensations are possible only "by means of the quality of our senses." "Our senses," he continues, "are affected in a particular manner by objects that are unknown in themselves and are entirely distinct from these phenomena."¹² The question of the unknown origin of sensations generated in Nietzsche's thought a neo-Kantian analysis of sensation.

A theory of signs developed by Helmholtz also played a key role in Nietzsche's understanding of the nature of sensory experience. It was contended that sensations are signs, not copies, of objects. There is no relation of similarity between sensory signs and that to which they refer because we have no access to self-existent properties. The observed phenomena in physics are not signs of objective entities, but signs that satisfy conceptual conditions and requirements. Helmholtz argued that we can never know things as they are in themselves, but only their mutual relations, relations of permanence and change. Even though it is assumed that things exist independent of our sensory apprehension of them, they are known to us solely in their "interactions."¹³

Turning to "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," we find a briefly sketched version of Helmholtz's theory of signs. Nietzsche avers that in sensation there is a stimulation of the "nerves" that produces what now would be called a brain-state. We label this sensation (say, a sensation of "red") and identify it by the sign "red." This sound (the word "red") does not resemble the physiological state experienced. The word "red" is a symbol, metaphor or sign signifying the sensory experience. The language of sensation is a system of signs that refer to no known entities. In language-use we express a belief that we know about things in themselves even though we only express metaphors for things. Such metaphors do not correspond to "original entities."¹⁴ Although Nietzsche does not mention Helmholtz in his

¹² *Kant's Prolegomena*, 79.

¹³ H. Helmholtz, *Handbuch der physiologischen Optik*, 586ff. Cited in Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, New York, 1953, 304-305.

¹⁴ *SW*, Band 1, 879.

essay, it is clear that his account of sensation as a kind of semeiotics is derived from Helmholtz's theory. And that theory is itself an extension of principles embedded in Kant's analysis of sensibility.

Nietzsche understood that Kant's theory of knowledge led to the view that nature is a representation-world, that man does not discover laws in nature, but projects them into the natural world. He contended that "all we actually know about... laws of nature is what we ourselves bring to them—time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number... everything marvelous about the laws of nature... is... contained within the... inviolability of our representations of time and space." But these are, of course, *our* forms of intuition. "All that conformity to law, which impresses us so much... coincides... with these properties which we bring to things."¹⁵

The "subjective" determinations of phenomena emphasized in the first edition of the *Kritik* are closely associated with the haunting question of "things in themselves." If "experience" is a synthesis of the receptivity of sensibility and the spontaneity of understanding, and if phenomena are "representations of the mind," then we can have no knowledge of a purely independent actuality. Insofar as categories are applicable to phenomena alone, then noumena are unknowable. What is the case in regard to knowledge in general is *a fortiori* the case for scientific knowledge. The scientist, too, imposes "form" on the manifold of sensory impressions that is manifested in space and time. The transphenomenal actuality of the natural world cannot be known. The necessity in nature is traceable to the necessity of the categories of pure understanding. The outcome of Kant's theory of knowledge is that the world we know is primarily and essentially the world that we construct: that is, the world we have constructed, considered in its origins. With an irony that Nietzsche fully appreciated, the precise way in which Kant sought to lend support to natural science tended to generate skepticism about the objective validity of scientific knowledge. For Kant, nature is known solely as the "sum-total of phenomena, the sum-total of representations in our mind". Human understanding does not "derive its *a priori* laws from nature, but prescribes them to nature."¹⁶ In *Human, All-Too-Human*, Nietzsche will quote this remark with approval and add that our conception of nature yields a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 886.

¹⁶ *Kant's Prolegomena*, 82.

Welt als Vorstellung, a “world as representation.”¹⁷

Kant’s characterization of nature in a “material sense” is echoed in Nietzsche’s early sketch of the process of sensation. He asserts that “objects of sensation” that fill space and endure through time are possible by virtue of the quality of our senses. Our senses “are affected in a particular manner by objects that are unknown in themselves and are entirely distinct from these phenomena.”¹⁸ Aside from an illicit reference to an “object” of sensation (which, in terms of Kant’s thought, must be a phenomenon), this account of the unknown origin of our sensations is incorporated in Helmholtz’s theory of signs and in Nietzsche’s similar analysis. The point is that the idea of nature in a “material sense” is conditioned by our specific sensory modalities and the “ideality of space and time.” This suggests an agnosticism about the objective structure of the natural world. The implication of Kant’s account of the possibility of a natural scientific understanding of actuality is that the natural sciences do not give us access to what may be called “nature-in-itself.”

Despite his repeated allusions to things-in-themselves, Kant is unable to offer a coherent account of such “transcendental objects.” The inapplicability of the categories of the understanding to noumena leads to a radical agnosticism about *Realität*. If the categories are subjective determinations, then the presumed independent reality is neither one nor many, for the categories of unity and plurality are inapplicable to it. There are neither “things” nor “things in themselves” nor a “thing in itself” insofar as the former imply plural entities and the latter implies a single entity. Cause and effect also cannot be applied to transphenomenal reality and Kant cannot consistently suggest (as he does) that our sensations are *caused* by unknowable ‘objects.’ The putative transcendent reality that Kant refers to cannot even be designated as real or unreal insofar as these (reality and negation) are inapplicable categories. If the transcendental “reality” cannot even be spoken of intelligibly, then it is clear that the nature that is understood in the sciences is a nature *for us*, a constituted and constructed nature. The empirical aspects of the natural world are conditioned by our particular mode of sensibility and the formal or lawful aspects of nature are conditioned by *a priori* principles that are legislated by

¹⁷ *SW*, 2, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, §19, 41. The “*Begriff der Natur*” in Kant’s thought entails that “*Natur=Welt als Vorstellung*.”

¹⁸ *Kant’s Prolegomena*, 79.

human understanding. The ultimate origin of the manifold of impressions is unknown and unknowable. All in all, then, as Nietzsche infers from his understanding of Kant's thought, the natural scientific world-interpretation is one that represents a "humanized" world.

Nietzsche was impressed with the burgeoning conventionalism that he found in the pages of Lange's *History of Materialism*. A scientifically justified agnosticism left its mark on Nietzsche and provided him with the tools with which he sought to show that the sciences do not lead us either to reality or truth. Many nineteenth century scientists joined Kant's agnosticism with the scientific notion of the limits of natural knowledge. The physiologist Du Bois-Reymond, for example, argued that the conceptions of matter and force were abstractions from phenomena, that the ultimate constituents of nature are forever beyond the reach of human knowledge. His slogan became: *ignorabimus*.¹⁹ Thus, the radical agnosticism about the veracity of scientific theories that Nietzsche propounded was initiated by Kant, reinforced by nineteenth century neo-Kantian scientists, and congealed in F.A. Lange's phenomenalist agnosticism. The seeds of a conventionalistic interpretation of science were planted by Kant.

The physicist Lichtenberg emphasized that, as Heisenberg would say later in another context, the observer is part of the observational situation. "We can," he said, "properly speaking, know nothing of anything in the world except ourselves and the changes that take place in us." When something acts upon us, the effect not only depends upon its original cause, but upon the observer as well.²⁰ Helmholtz insisted that we are acquainted only with the "effects" of things, that we have no real knowledge about "matter in itself." The concepts of matter and force are abstractions from the real: we have no grasp of matter except through its manifested "forces." He also averred that the notion of an enduring, permanent "substance" is an assumption, an "hypothesis" that satisfies the demands of thought, but corresponds to no absolute

¹⁹ Cf. Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 595f. Du Bois-Reymond presented his agnosticism in a lecture "Ueber die Grenzen des Naturerkennens" (1872). Lange examines the question of the "limits of natural knowledge" from a number of points of view and relates it to Kant's epistemic conclusions. Emil du Bois-Reymond published an influential book bearing the same title as his lecture in Leipzig in 1876.

²⁰ Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 852-853. In his notes Nietzsche makes a very similar observation. He remarks that "In the final analysis, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them, this finding, this importing, is called science." *SW*, Band 12, 154.

reality. The scientist continually encounters the limits of natural, scientific knowledge.²¹

Lange believed that the limits of scientific understanding tended to justify Kant's theory of knowledge. He pointed to the purely hypothetical nature of central scientific concepts. And he argued that the more deeply the scientists penetrated the structure of the natural world, the more it became apparent that science cannot grasp the essential nature of physical reality. Helmholtz, in particular, believed that the primary aim of Kant's critical philosophy "was to test the sources and authority of our knowledge." In Kant's view, Helmholtz explained, "a principle discovered *a priori* by pure thought was a rule applicable to the method of pure thought, and nothing further; it could contain no real, positive knowledge."²²

Lange's role in relation to the association between Kant's theory of knowledge and nineteenth century science was to synthesize these two currents of thought. He reduces Kant's theory to the view that "our sensory-cognitive organization" determines *all* objects of knowledge. The sciences of his day support Kant's notion that we cannot know things in themselves or the ultimate structure of reality. Knowledge is restricted to "effects", relations amongst phenomena, to a "relations-world." Lange pointed out that Kant could never justify the notion of things in themselves that are presumed to "exist" in a spaceless, timeless realm. The more we consider the idea of things in themselves as a concept of limit, the more we are persuaded that the phenomenal world embraces all that we can consider as "real."²³ Nietzsche incorporates Lange's phenomenalism into his own reflections and emphasizes the anthropomorphic and practical nature of phenomenal knowledge. By applying Kantian principles (with a psychological emphasis) to the question of scientific knowledge and by referring to basic notions in science (e.g., "matter," "force," "atoms") as hypothetical assumptions, Lange laid the groundwork for Nietzsche's understanding of the principles and concepts employed in the sciences as "regulative principles" or "useful fictions." The instrumentalistic interpretation of scientific principles and concepts that was defended by the pragmatists was anticipated first by Lange and later by Nietzsche.

²¹ Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 662-663.

²² H. Helmholtz, *Popular Lectures on Scientific Subjects*, trans. E. Atkinson, London, 1873, p.5.

²³ Lange, *op. cit.*, II, 498.

Nietzsche's conception of the principles and basic constructs of the sciences as regulative principles, heuristic notions, provisional assumptions and "conventional fictions" was directly derived from the insights of Lange and indirectly derived from Kant's critical philosophy. Kant's postulation of "ideals of reason" as if they were "true" provided a model for conventionalism. In the *Prolegomena* Kant postulated the existence of God in terms of a "symbolic anthropomorphism" that was solely concerned with language, with a *façon de parler*. What Nietzsche seems to have done was to superimpose this mode of thinking on all of Kant's claims to knowledge. This is not a "misunderstanding" of Kant, but an intuitive insight into the "regulative" framework of Kant's analysis of knowledge.

In his notes Nietzsche expresses amazement at Kant's attempt to present a "knowledge of knowledge." Kant, he claims, assumes the fact of knowledge, assumes an acquaintance with knowledge. If he did not already possess 'knowledge' in some sense, how could Kant offer a theory about how we are able to know anything? Despite the brevity of his remarks, Nietzsche is on to something. For, Kant does express an optimism about his total project. He avers that "I am concerned with nothing except reason itself and its pure thinking; and to gain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self."²⁴ Nietzsche sees that Kant simply assumes that his account of knowledge has *a priori* validity, especially since Kant explicitly denies that he is presenting an "hypothesis." That is,

Any knowledge that professes to hold *a priori* makes a claim to be regarded as absolutely necessary. This applies *a fortiori* to any *determination* of all pure *a priori* knowledge, since such determination has to serve as the measure and, therefore, as the example of all apodictic, philosophical certainty.²⁵

The above claim is considered by Nietzsche as a belief insofar as judgments are primitive expressions of belief. Kant's confidence in the *a priori* validity of his own analysis of how we know is unjustified. For, the "determination of knowledge" cannot be based upon "knowledge" without circularity. Since Kant is precluded from demonstrating the *a priori* validity of his explication of how man comes to know, the entire *Kritik* can only rest upon "regulative principles." When Nietzsche

²⁴ *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

refers to categories as “regulative” concepts or “regulative articles of belief,” he may be taken to have misunderstood Kant. On the other hand, it is more likely that he interpreted the categories as regulative because he saw clearly the paradox of claiming a “knowledge of knowledge.” The categories of the understanding may be “constitutive” of experience (insofar as they impose “form” on the “matter” of sensibility), but they are not themselves derived from constitutive principles. Kant’s categories resemble regulative ideals of reason rather than constitutive ‘objects’ of knowledge.

If we analyze Kant’s claim that the exposition of the determination of *a priori* knowledge entails a criterion for “philosophical certainty,” we realize that if the analysis of the conditions of knowledge are truly *a priori*, they clearly do not have reference to a sensory order or to “possible objects of knowledge.” Kant cannot consistently claim that his assertions *about knowledge* are “constitutive” claims because what would be constituted in this instance would be knowledge claims about the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. In Kant’s own terms, the assumption that his account of human knowledge is *a priori* (without any reference to sensuous experience) must mean that the explication of knowledge itself is a *transcendental* use of reason made possible by the surreptitious use of regulative principles or regulative ideals of reason. The *a priori* categories of the *understanding* are meaningful and not “empty” because they are applied to the appearances apprehended in sensibility. But the *a priori* structures of knowledge themselves cannot be objects of the understanding (*Verstand*). Therefore, they must be known by reason alone. If the categories are known by *Vernunft* or “reason,” then they are postulates that function as regulative concepts. The basic principles of knowledge cannot be demonstrated to be “absolutely necessary” insofar as they must be construed as derived from a transcendental use of reason. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant virtually acknowledges this. For, he maintains that:

the sources of the knowledge of reason are not in objects nor in the imagining of objects (by which it cannot be taught anything additional); these sources are in reason itself. Therefore, when reason has presented the basic laws of its capacity completely and determinately, free from interpretation, there remains no knowledge *a priori* for pure reason to seek or reasonably to inquire after.²⁶

²⁶ *Kant's Prolegomena*, 140-141.

Nietzsche criticizes Kant for assuming the necessary, *a priori* "truth" of his theory about knowledge. The idea of pure knowing or a pure, knowing subject is considered a fiction. Kant is right, though, in his view that reason is a form-giving activity, a constructive activity. If "regulative principles of belief" are substituted for a pretention to "pure forms of knowledge", Nietzsche is willing to grant Kant his due.²⁷ Although it has sometimes been said that Nietzsche's approach to the problem of knowledge is based upon his opposing Hume to Kant, it would seem to be the case that Nietzsche's interpretation of the implications of Kant's thought (with an assist from Lange) led him to question the objectivity of rationalistic conceptions of knowledge, as well as that of scientific world-interpretations.

Although cognizant of the immense value of the scientific interpretation of nature, Nietzsche insists that the instrumental, conventional nature of the scientific conceptual scheme yields only a symbolization of nature. The "objective validity" of scientific knowledge that Kant himself did not doubt was inadvertently undermined by Kant's epistemic analyses. Insofar as human understanding imposes its laws on objects of knowledge by virtue of categorical determination, nature is construed as *le monde comme représentation*.²⁸ Kant's appeal to regulative ideals of reason suggested the possible, regulative nature of scientific knowledge. After attacking the Kantian concept of knowledge, using weapons forged by Kant himself, Nietzsche applies the same kind of critical analysis to the functional categories of the understanding. This is consistent with Kant's depiction of categories as *logische Funktionen*.²⁹ Agreeing with Kant that the order, regularity and succession of natural phenomena are shaped and formed by our law-giving cognitive structure, Nietzsche asserts that "It is our laws and our conformity to laws that we read into the phenomenal world."³⁰

The scientific "world-interpretation" is founded upon "imaginary

²⁷ *SW, Band 12*, 264-266.

²⁸ Oliver Reboul, *Nietzsche critique de Kant*, Paris, 1974, 21.

²⁹ *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 295. Kant claims that the categories as pure concepts of the understanding are "so many modes of thinking an object for possible intuitions." The "pure categories" are indefinable, but useful and capable of giving "meaning" to an object or representing things in general. Although Kant does not refer to pure categories as "fictions," by designating them "logical functions" (insofar as they have not been applied to experience), he suggests the idea of conceptual fictions. In his discussion of the "Discipline of Reason in Hypothesis," Kant refers to concepts of reason considered as "mere ideas" that can be "thought only problematically" as "heuristic fictions" (*heuristische Fiktionen*). *Ibid.*, 703.

³⁰ *Werke*, Leipzig, 1901, XII, 42.

quantities," ideal conceptual inventions and hypothetical fictions. In mechanics, Nietzsche claims, "bodies, surfaces and lines" are assumed. These notions are "a consequence of our assumption that there are substances and things and permanency. Just as certainly as our concepts are inventions, so certainly are the constructs of mathematics inventions."³¹ The sciences rely on "regulative hypotheses," "regulative principles of method," the postulation of phenomenalist entities and provisional assumptions. The "ideal regulative method" of the empirical sciences is as much dependent upon "regulative fictions" as is the philosophical (i.e., Kantian) organization of the phenomenal world. There is a basic "anthropomorphic" mode of understanding in the scientific world-interpretations. This assumption about the anthropomorphic character of scientific knowledge may be traceable to an observation of Goethe's. That is, that "All philosophy of nature is... anthropomorphism, i.e., man, at unity with himself, imparts to everything that he is not, this unity.... We can observe, measure and weigh, etc., nature as much as we will; it is still only our measure and weight, as man is the measure of all things."³² Nietzsche also found this inevitable anthropomorphism in Kant's restriction of knowledge to the phenomenal world or, what is virtually the same thing, the *humanized* world.

The dominant principle of all scientific explanation in the nineteenth century and of most scientific explanation in the twentieth, the principle of causality, is considered a conventional fiction. In a strict sense, Nietzsche maintained, science offers not explanation, but description. The world uncovered in what would be called the "hard" sciences today is not the true world, but an elaborate, sophisticated interpretation. The aim of the "humanization of nature" is the mastery of nature. If we extracted all that is "phenomenal" from our world-picture, we would have no clear picture of nature at all. This notion of Nietzsche's is equally applicable to Kant's conception of the phenomenal world. For, if the world we know is shaped by our particular senses in coordination with a projected conceptual schema, if every phenomenon is relative to ourselves, then if the phenomenal elements of experience were removed, there would be no world to speak of at all.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³² Cited in Ernst Cassirer's *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, trans., W.C. Swabey and M.C. Swabey, New York, 1953, 445.

Although Kant wanted to preserve the veracity of the objectivity of the world, his analysis of the springs of knowledge made everything relative to our senses, our intuitions of space and time and our *a priori* categorical schema. The “world” that Kant reveals is clearly a “human world.”³³ If, as Kant held, a “phenomenon cannot be anything by itself, apart from our mode of representation,” if the categories are construed as “subjective” forms of thought, and if phenomena are but the “play of our representations,” then we have no way of knowing whether our philosophical or scientific “representation” of the world corresponds to any independent “reality.” And this is the case apart from the assumption of “things in themselves” insofar as the only world we can know must be an “apparent world”. Very early in his philosophical career, Nietzsche insightfully saw 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.”³⁴ That this *is possible* even though, in Kant’s framework, we can never verify it indicates the extreme skepticism to which Kant’s theory of knowledge leads. Kant, of course, repeatedly referred to the unknowable realm of “things in themselves” and stressed the radical distinction between phenomena and noumena, a distinction which, strictly speaking, Kant cannot claim to *know*. Despite his intention to overcome Kant’s skepticism in regard to things in themselves, Nietzsche is haunted by the distinction between the world for us and reality as it is in itself. He inherits this problem precisely because he is, *malgré lui*, a radical Kantian.

Things in Themselves

Kant repeatedly, even compulsively, returns to the question of things in themselves in the *Kritik*, the *Prolegomena* and in his posthumous writings, finally coming to see that he must posit a transphen-

³³ B.P. Bowne, *Kant and Spencer*, New York, 1912, 144-145. Bowne’s exposition and critical analysis of Kant’s *Kritik* emphasizes the subjectivity, relativity and constructive nature of Kant’s thought in such a way as to unconsciously duplicate some of Nietzsche’s critical remarks. At one point, he avers that there is an implicit “nihilism” in Kant’s critique of reason. *Ibid.*, 19. In another place, Bowne refers to the “self-destructive character of the doctrine that denies the applicability of the categories to reality” and claims that the notion of an unknowable reality “vanishes” when one analyzes the implications of Kant’s theory of knowledge. This could leave us, as in Nietzsche’s analysis of knowledge, with a phenomenal world that does not truly represent an objective order of entities, *Ibid.*, 136-137.

³⁴ *SW*, Band 7, 459.

omenal realm if only as an *ens rationis*. Despite the fact that the idea of things in themselves is called a "limit concept," a negative concept, a posit that restricts the claims of sensibility, its metaphysical significance lingers in Kant's thought. Despite occasional slips of the pen, Kant did not consider things in themselves as the *cause* of phenomena. The reason for this is not only the technical point that he is precluded from applying the category of causality to what transcends experience. Rather, he saw that if the noumenal self is construed as the cause of appearances, then he would end in an idealism he wanted to avoid. If, on the other hand, he held that transcendental objects in themselves were the cause of phenomenal appearances, he would then lend support to a materialism that he deplored. His way out was to hold that things in themselves are "thinkable," but are unknowable. The idea of the thing in itself as a *Grenzbegriff* was intended as a way to avoid the paradox of referring to an unknowable X as an ontological something. But Kant never seemed to have been satisfied by his sophisticated resolution of a problem. His empirical orientation led him to insist that categories are meaningless if they are illicitly applied to transphenomenal entities. However, he wanted to extend the categories beyond "objects in general" for the sake of "practical reason." Nietzsche is, in large part, right to say that "In holding that things in themselves are thinkable, e.g., God, the free moral self, the world as totality, Kant had the moral point of his philosophy in mind."³⁵ Kant did not affirm the "reality" of noumena solely on the basis of the intelligibility of things in themselves as a "limit concept." For, the postulation of a free, undetermined, noumenal self (which Nietzsche sarcastically calls a "self in itself") was essential to his ethics.

It is the use of his critical epistemology as a means of defending a morality based upon practical reason that infuriates Nietzsche. He charges Kant with "hypocrisy", with having "ulterior motives" even as he constructed his critique of knowledge. By creating a "practical reason" that transcends the limits of critical reason for the sake of morality, Kant opened the door, Nietzsche believes, to "nihilism". For the sake of "moral truth" and "moral freedom," Kant reversed the effects of his critical thought and, by doing so, inadvertently undermined the foundation of morality. Precisely by granting himself

³⁵ *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York, 1968, 310-311, 223, 251-252.

licence to create a transphenomenal, "transcendental world" or "intelligible world," and by restricting knowledge to phenomena alone, Kant presented a moral philosophy that had no foundation in his critical, theoretical philosophy. By transferring value, ethical significance and freedom to an "intelligible world," Kant undermined, in Nietzsche's view, the value of life and existence in the actual, phenomenal world. What lies at the basis of Kant's standpoint is the unfortunate separation of theory and practice.³⁶

In his early writings Nietzsche more or less accepted the assumption of things in themselves. By the time he wrote *Human, All Too Human*, he wondered whether this notion was not, after all, empty of meaning. Above all, he was concerned not to make a distinction between this world and some other transcendental realm. If there were, as Kant suggests, a reality in itself, then the "reality" of the actual world of "becoming" would be undermined. Ironically, it was Kant's analysis of knowledge that provided Nietzsche with the means of trying to negate the postulation of "things in themselves."

Nietzsche accepts Kant's conception of knowing as a spontaneous activity, a constructive process. Even in his critical account of the categories of (the) understanding as "fictions," he embraces their practical value. Nowhere does Nietzsche deny the pragmatic, instrumental value of the Kantian categorical scheme. In point of fact, he seems to have adopted the view that categories have a functional, heuristic value as conventional fictions from Kant himself. By emphasizing the "subjective" nature of the *a priori* Kant implied that the categories that enable us to have knowledge do not represent actuality. Nietzsche argues, for example, that there are no ontological unities, that our concept of "unity" is a fiction that facilitates our understanding of the world, but is not an actual characteristic of any real entities. There is little doubt that Kant himself suggests such a notion insofar as he holds that the unities and identities that appear in our thought and language are our own creations, creations that result from the application of categories to a fluid, unsubstantial manifold of appearances. The unities we project into experience are primarily formal or, at best, have relative validity. While Kant avers that we conceive of objects as unities by virtue of the structure of our mind (the transcendental unity of apperception), Nietzsche offers a psychological analysis of the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

origin of the concept of unity. In this regard, he frequently argues that we think of experienced entities as unities because we transfer our belief in ourselves as “unities” (unified egos or subjects) to other entities.³⁷ Although such an interpretation cannot be attributed to Kant, there are views of the derivation of the categories that open the door to the kind of exploration of the primitive origin of the categories that Nietzsche relishes. Thus, for example, it has been said that Kant desired to avoid Leibniz’s rationalism and, hence, suggested that “The... categories are *derived* from experience and without experience can have no meaning so far as knowledge is concerned.”³⁸

Kant simply assumes that the human mind is structured in a certain way such that it must think of objects in terms of universal, necessary categories that are *a priori*. Nietzsche raises a question later raised by the structuralists: if there is an *a priori* pattern in human thinking, from what source is it derived? His answer to this question is similar to that offered by the French structuralists: there must be a kind of unconscious origin of the *a priori*, a pattern of thought incorporated into our language and derived from man’s earlier social and psychological experiences. The philosophical concepts that seem to emerge suddenly in the history of thought seem, in fact, to be part of an “innate systematic structure and relationship”, seem to be more a matter of recollection than recognition. Philosophizing is atavistic, a way of thinking that extends back to the primordial conditions in which basic concepts arose. There is a “family resemblance” among the philosophies of India, Greece and Germany that suggests an “unconscious domination by similar grammatical functions.”³⁹ Nietzsche does not end his analysis with this clever insight. Rather, he claims that the analogous grammatical functions point to psycho-social conditions of life that are rather old. Wittgenstein later says that language expresses a form of life. But Nietzsche suggests that philosophical language, as well as ordinary language, expresses a form of life that has disappeared, but lingers in the symbolic forms of thought and language. The implication is that the *a priori* of human thought that Kant delineates is a reflection of transmitted categorical schema.

³⁷ *SW, Band 13*, 258. “Wir haben den Begriff der Einheit entlehnt von unserem ‘Ich’-begriff...”

³⁸ G. Schrader, “The Thing in Itself in Kantian Philosophy,” in *Kant*, ed., R.P. Wolff, New York, 1967, 179-180.

³⁹ *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, § 20, *SW, Band 5*, 34.

Nietzsche held that our "picture of the phenomenal world" is one that has evolved over a long period of time and has survived because of its practical utility. Language is a symbolic simplification of immediate experience, a semeiotics that represents a conceptual-linguistic world, not actuality in process. Thus, even though there is nothing like "substance" in actuality, the concept proved invaluable because it enabled man to project stability and permanence into the actual world.⁴⁰ Since the conceptual-linguistic "world" is an elaborate invention of man, a construction that has evolved diachronically, it is riddled with metaphysical suppositions and metaphors. The world that is represented in consciousness and expressed in language is, for Kant, an "apparent world." It was inevitable, then, that Kant should have emphasized our agnosticism concerning "things in themselves."

Nietzsche attacks the idea of things in themselves in his later reflections because it creates an artificial antithesis between an "apparent world" and a "true world," a conditioned world of phenomena and a transcendental world, a world permeated by contradictions and a world free from contradictions.⁴¹ Although he agrees with Kant that the world as representation is a world for us, he repudiates the positing of a "world in itself" that transcends our senses and our categories. In his notes, Nietzsche makes his position quite clear.

I do not posit "appearance" in opposition to "reality," but on the contrary take appearance to be the reality that resists transformation into an imaginative "world of truth."⁴²

Reality has an "ungraspable, fluid, Protean nature" and it appears different from different perspectives. The notion of a "reality in itself" that is stable and permanent is fallacious.

Kant's postulation of an unknowable thing in itself is unjustified. We cannot refer to it without illicitly employing categories. Even the idea of a "thing" suggests a "substance" that is objective and permanent. There is no thing in itself because there are no "things" (unified, permanent, substantial entities) and, even in his terms, there can be no "things" that exist outside the intuitions of space and time. The humanized world, the world for us, is the only world we can be said to

⁴⁰ *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 111, *SW*, Band 3, 471-472.

⁴¹ *The Will to Power*, 310-311.

⁴² *SW*, Band 11, 654.

⁴³ *SW*, Band 13, 271.

know. The world of appearance is “an arranged and simplified world, at which our practical instincts have been at work; it is perfectly true for *us*; that is to say, we live in it; proof of its truth for.”⁴³ Up to a point, Nietzsche agrees with Kant that our knowledge is restricted to what has been constituted by our senses and our concepts. He disagrees with Kant about the primitive origin of our categories and emphasizes that knowledge is “interpretation” from a particular perspective. Phenomenal knowledge yields “conditional truths” that are primarily instrumental and practical. If Nietzsche had remained at this point in his thinking, he would have been a phenomenalist without things in themselves. Or, in other words, a radical Kantian.

In his notes of the 1880's, Nietzsche argues that Kant cannot allude to things in themselves (as he sometimes does) as “causes” of sensory appearances because causality has a “purely intraphenomenal validity.” There is no more a mysterious thing in itself than there is a “meaning in itself.” The idea of things in themselves is “nonsensical.” If we remove all that is phenomenal from our knowledge of extraconceptual entities, nothing remains. There is no “problem” of the thing in itself because the notion is a fiction. Other interpreters of Kant have offered similar objections. It has been said that “If this thing cannot be brought into causal connection with experience and its orders of change, it is of no use, and instead of being an absolute existence it is an absolute nothingness.”⁴⁴ The notion of a “thing” that possess a constitution in itself apart from “interpretation and subjectivity” is a useless hypothesis. Deleting subjectivity and interpretation, we would have a “thing freed from all relationships,” or no “thing” at all.⁴⁵ We cannot even speak of what ostensibly transcends our conceptual-linguistic framework.

Despite his attacks on Kant, Nietzsche sometimes grapples with Kant's suggestion of an uncategorized manifold of impressions as a means of referring to the flowing realm of “becoming.” He maintains that

The contrast to the phenomenal world is not the “true world,” but the formless, undefinable world of sensuous chaos... thus another kind of phenomenal world, one which is not knowable to us.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bowne, *op. cit.*, 137.

⁴⁵ *SW*, Band 12, 353.

⁴⁶ *Werke*, XVI, 68.

The slip of the pen that leads to a reference to another phenomenal world only indicates how much in the grip of Kant's thought Nietzsche was. For, in a strict sense, the sensuous manifold of impressions is not a "phenomenal world" insofar as there are no discriminable phenomena in it. Perhaps we might speak here of a proto-phenomenal world insofar as Kant's references to a "manifold of sense impressions" suggests an awareness of an objective (given) stream of actuality. At one point in his *Nachlass*, Nietzsche cryptically refers to an original "chaos of representations" in the language of Kant. It was probably Kant (*via* Lange) who suggested to him that there must be a primitive mode of synthesis in sensibility that already simplifies our experiences. It was not only Heraclitus, Lange and Buddhism that shaped Nietzsche's conception of actuality as characterized by "becoming." For, Kant suggests that in sensibility we encounter a chaotic process of "becoming." If our organization and schematization of our experiences is primarily due to categorical imposition on our sensory experience, then Kant is mistaken when he refers to *things* in themselves. If our senses give us as immediate a relationship to actuality as we can attain, then that actuality is more likely a dynamic process, an impermanent process of becoming. In what Kant calls the "receptivity of sensibility" we immediately encounter a system of fluctuating appearances. These appearances to us are appearances of something we know not what. Kant refers to it as the realm of things in themselves while Nietzsche refers to it as a Protean becoming which, "seen from within," is designated "will to power."

Despite his efforts to overcome the Kantian idea of things in themselves, Nietzsche ends by referring to what may be called a "becoming in itself" that transcends language and thought and names the motor force underlying becoming "the will to power." Although the rationale for postulating a universally immanent will to power in all entities falls outside this discussion, it may be said that Nietzsche does not claim positive knowledge of this inferred process or this "hypothetical" *nisus* underlying all change. Despite his recurring skepticism, Nietzsche was tempted to offer his guess at the riddle of existence, his version of the secret identity of "things in themselves." In this sense, he never succeeded in eluding the shadow of Kant.

Knowledge and Becoming

Although it has been said that Nietzsche misunderstood Kant in the sense that he did not realize that our categories are not derived from experience or influenced by it even though they enable us to construct an intelligible order out of a sensory manifold,⁴⁷ this is not, strictly speaking, a misunderstanding of Kant. Rather, Nietzsche challenges Kant precisely in regard to his assumption that there is a "pure reason" or genuine *a priori* categories that are completely independent of the development of language or absolutely divorced from sensory experience. There is no pure knowing subject and no pure knowledge that is separated from our drives, feelings, interests or senses. Heidegger's claim that, for Kant, the determinations of "being" are categories and, hence, imply that "the structure of the thing is connected with the structure of the assertion"⁴⁸ was seen clearly by Nietzsche. The chink in Kant's armor is the acceptance of basic, formal categories as "apodictic" without any consideration of the historical, cultural and linguistic origin of such concepts. In the broadest sense of the term, Nietzsche claims that the categories of the understanding are rooted in human experience. In addition, he holds that the selective nature of our sensory experience excludes many stimuli that, from a scientific point of view, are considered real. In our sensory experience there must occur a primitive process of "assimilation," some basic "intellectual activity." This assumption is given a biological twist by Nietzsche insofar as he attributes a selective, assimilative process to all organic beings. However, the general idea was probably suggested to him by

⁴⁷ Rose Pfeffer, *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus*, Lewisburg, Pa., 1972, 109.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* Trans. W. Burton and V. Deutsch, South Bend, Ind., 1967, 63-64. Heidegger is suggesting, as Nietzsche had earlier in a fragmentary way, that there is a thing-ontology in Kant's thought that is conditioned by *Aussage* or "assertion." What Nietzsche saw, long before the linguistic philosophers, is that language contains metaphysical and/or ontological suppositions that condition our understanding of the "world." However, he differs from most of the philosophers of language because he believes that the inherited linguistic *a priori* is a humanistic falsification of actuality. Wittgenstein claims that "What we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, New York, 1953, 48e. Nietzsche, of course, saw that everyday or ordinary language already contains metaphysical-ontological beliefs and assumptions that have been distilled from the diachronic development of language. By suggesting that the most lasting linguistic distinctions had been made in the remote past, Nietzsche is hinting that philosophical language elaborated on an "ordinary language" and its "grammatical functions". The grammatical forms or structures in Indo-European languages, Nietzsche claims, reflect what Wittgenstein calls a "form of life," a psycho-social world, as well as "physiological value-judgments" that have evolved over a long period of time. Cf. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse, SW, Band 5, § 20, 34-35.*

Kant's argument that there is a "synthesis of apprehension" even in sensibility.⁴⁹ Although Nietzsche wants to say that sensation brings us into contact with an independent actuality, he also admits a primitive process of abstraction in sensory experience itself. The point is that actuality is richer and more complex than what we are able to conceive of or experience in sensation.

In a sense, Nietzsche agrees with Kant that there is a kind of necessity in the way in which we categorize what we experience. But this necessity is in part an inheritance from the past, in part psychological and in part rooted in our practical needs. Invariably, he offers a psychologistic analysis of the origin of basic categories. The highly useful concept of "cause," for example, is a "psychistic fiction" that is derived from our belief that we are imbued with a will that can cause effects. We project this interior phenomenalist understanding of our acts of will producing effects into the world of events. Causality, then, is a psychically derived anthropomorphic notion derived from our belief in the causal efficacy of our will. In general, Nietzsche argued, against Kant, that our categories have a psychogenic origin. Once they have become canonical, they are preserved in language and in our conceptual scheme. Such concepts, in turn, become what Quine has called "cultural posits" or epistemological "myths."⁵⁰ For Nietzsche, at any rate, there are no pure *a priori* concepts. There are only unconscious *a priori* notions the origins of which have been forgotten.

Despite his interpretation of the origin of the categories, Nietzsche more or less adopts Kant's phenomenalism, especially when he admits relative, "conditional knowledge" of a "phenomenal world." Both philosophy and science deal with a phenomenal understanding of the

⁴⁹ *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 143-144. That a *Synthesis der Apprehension* is operative in immediate sensibility is clear insofar as Kant claims that "objects" (*Gegenstände*) are given to us in "sensibility." *Ibid.*, 63. That "objects" are *given* in the receptivity of sensibility is strange when we consider that the notion of an object, throughout most of the *Kritik*, presupposes the application of categories to possible or actual experience. In a strict sense, the meaningful application of the categories to sensory experience requires the "schemata" of the pure concepts of the understanding. "The categories... without schemata, are merely functions of the understanding for concepts, and represent no object." *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁰ W. V. O. Quine. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *Classics of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. R. Ammerman, New York, 1965, 212. Quine's approach to the language of science is very similar to Nietzsche's view. Quine holds that "the conceptual scheme of science" is a "tool," that "Physical objects are conceptually imported... as convenient intermediaries..." Physical objects "enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience." *Ibid.*

world that gives us a meaningful and useful world-interpretation. But they do not enable us to apprehend "truth." For, there is no truth in the sense of an unconditioned reality or a "truth in itself." Man is immersed in a "river of becoming" and his knowledge is a highly selective, psychologically determined, interpretation of aspects of this process. Although "there is no Truth," there are many "truths" or what James later called "truths in the plural." For example, there are the provisional, hypothetical "truths" of the sciences, as well as the "terrible" truths about man that Nietzsche claims to have uncovered. In a practical sense, the world is "knowable." However, it is subject to a multiplicity of interpretations and has countless "meanings."⁵¹ What Nietzsche insists upon is the humanistic nature of most truths and the practical value of the idea of truth itself. Insofar as he radically redefines truth, he is not an epistemological nihilist.

As we have seen, Nietzsche argues that there is no distinction between the "apparent world" and the "true world." The system of appearances constituted by our senses, our thought and our psychology *is* reality. The mind is form-giving, meaning-giving and constructive in its activities. We designate this spontaneous, selective, constructive activity of the mind "knowledge." And what we confer distinction on as "truth" is "the will to be master over the multiplicity of sensations," the will to impose order on the "chaos" of experience. Knowledge is an outcome of a "power in us to order, simplify... artificially distinguish." The ability to acquire knowledge was not originally designed for the attainment of knowledge as an end in itself.⁵² What this means is that the "knowledge-drive" is primarily in the service of life, our needs and drives, and survival. In the same spirit, C.S. Peirce later remarked that "Logicality in regard to practical matters... is the most useful quality an animal can possess," that knowledge was originally linked with "action."⁵³ If knowledge has a

⁵¹ *SW, Band 12*, 315. All knowledge of the world is interpretive and all interpretation originates from a specific perspective. Hence, all knowing is perspectival. For a general discussion of perspectivalism, see Arthur Danto's "Perspectivism" in *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, New York, 1965, 68-99. For a somewhat different approach to this issue, see G.J. Stack, "Nietzsche and Perspectival Interpretation," *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 25, (Fall, 1981), 221-241.

⁵² *The Will to Power*, 272, 278, 280.

⁵³ *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, Cambridge, Mass., 1931-1935, 5.366. In a letter to Mario Calderoni (ca. 1905) he reiterated this notion. "All the more active functions of animals are adaptive characters calculated to insure the continuance of the stock. Can there be the slightest hesitation in saying, then, that the human

life-preserving function, then it involves the creation of a "world" in which man can function effectively and survive and flourish. This humanized understanding is a "falsification" of actuality because (1) it is based upon highly selective sensory responses, (2) it is derived from fundamental concepts (e.g., "unity," "identity," "substance," etc.) that do not pertain to actual entities, (3) because it is conditioned by our psychological "prejudices" or interests, and (4) precisely because it is motivated by practical needs. Given this viewpoint, given the belief that whatever can be conceptualized must be "false," Nietzsche should have adopted an agnosticism about actuality. Because he does not, he continually makes claims about the nature of actuality that he cannot "know" to be accurate.

Although it is true that life is no argument in favor of the "truth" of our cognitive-linguistic "schematization," insofar as various forms of life survive without it and human communities that did not have a Kantian or scientific interpretation of the world have survived, there are good reasons for assuming an approximation between our scientific interpretation of nature and the actual natural world. Where there is an effective mastery of physical processes or energy, sophisticated accomplishment (e.g., the moon-landing), Nietzsche's notion of science as involving a "falsification" of nature is disputable. Often he seems to avoid seeing the difference between "falsification" and "approximation." Productive, effective action and the completion of complex tasks brought about in terms of a theory of the structure of the natural world suggest a very close approximation to the actual structure of the natural world. Nietzsche's central point, however, still holds: even the most practical and productive knowledge attainable does not give us "truth" in regard to actuality.

By repeatedly referring to our "falsification" of reality, Nietzsche assumes an illicit knowledge of that reality. How can he *know* that actuality is characterized by "becoming"? He has precluded a metaphysical knowledge of reality by virtue of his critique of metaphysical

intellect is implanted in man, either by a creator or by a quasi-intentional effect of the struggle of existence, virtually in order, and solely in order, to insure the continuance of mankind?". However, Peirce does not agree with the "ultra pragmatic notion that action is the *sole* end and purpose of thought." In the same letter, Peirce makes an observation that seems designed to undercut Nietzsche's skepticism about scientific knowledge and nature. He remarks that the fact that man "has been able in some degree to predict how Nature will act, to formulate general 'laws' to which future events conform, seems to furnish inductive proof that man really penetrates in some measure" the "ideas" that govern nature. *Ibid.*, 8.211-212.

thinking; he has undermined a sensory apprehension of reality because he assumes simplification, abstraction and assimilation in sensory experience. Reason or understanding are presumed to be furthest removed from actuality because they involve organization, schematization, simplification and deindividuation. It is one thing to proclaim that the "world" that matters to us is a "fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations,"⁵⁴ but it is quite another to claim to have a knowledge of a process of becoming that is said to be inaccessible to language or conceptualization. It is one thing to hold that the "character of becoming is incapable of formulation," but it is another thing to have positive knowledge that actuality is a dynamic process of unending change, especially for one who thinks of knowledge as the imposition of "being" on becoming. Nietzsche's negative epistemology cuts him off from any legitimate assertions about what lies beyond our sensory range, our categories or our psychic idiosyncrasies. His epistemic position should have led him to a complete agnosticism about the actual nature of reality.

Not only "things," but processes can have no "constitution in themselves" apart from subjectivity and interpretation. By adopting the Kantian view that we can know nothing apart from "our sense receptivity and the activity of our understanding,"⁵⁵ Nietzsche has cut himself off from a conception of the nature of reality as effectively as Kant had. Knowledge and becoming are asymmetrically related. In effect, he has postulated a "becoming in itself" or what amounts to an "unconditioned reality," precisely the kind of reality he often enough denies we can know. Nietzsche's intuition of the process of becoming is rooted in his acceptance of the views of Heraclitus and Lange and seems analogous to the Mādhyamika Buddhist conception of the temporal world as characterized by *anicca* or "impermanence." For

this world of our experience is a Becoming, and never attains to Being.... Impermanence is the inexorable, fundamental and pitiless law of all existence.... everything is a Becoming, a flux without beginning... or end; there

⁵⁴ *SW, Band 12*, 114.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 396. Without "*unserer Sinnen-Receptivität und Verstandes-Aktivität*", Nietzsche says, "how could we know that things exist?". In this passage, Nietzsche adopts a decidedly Kantian mode of subjectivity and turns it against the idea of *things* in themselves. The subjectivity he defends here is treated under the heading of *unsre psychologische Optik* or "our psychological perspective" and is, therefore, meant as an illustration of the psychistic factors that enter into what is usually considered "objective knowledge." It indicates Nietzsche's psychologistic interpretation of Kant's theory of knowledge.

exists no static moment when this becoming attains to beinghood—no sooner can we conceive of it by the attributes of name and form, than it has... changed to something else.... We are deceived if we... believe that there is ever a pause in the flow of becoming.... It is only by shutting our eyes to the succession of events that we come to speak of things rather than of processes.⁵⁶

While Buddhist literature is replete with numerous, often sophisticated, arguments showing the insubstantiality of the phenomenal world, the universality of change and the dissolution of all “elements” (*skandhas*), Nietzsche generally simply assumes the universality of becoming. Whereas the Buddhists argue from the mutability and insubstantiality of the phenomenal world to the position that the world of phenomena cannot be ultimately real, Nietzsche maintains that the eternal process of becoming (what the Buddhists call *samsara*) is reality. Having denied that language and thought are able to articulate becoming, and having said that sensation entails a mode of abstraction, he has blocked his own way to a knowledge of the process of becoming. Having argued that the knowledge we have is a “conditional knowledge,” he has precluded a knowledge of *any* transphenomenal actuality, including that of “becoming.” He cannot claim, in any strict sense, that he has overcome the antithesis between an “apparent world” and a “true world” insofar as he has reinstated an antithesis between the “world” constituted by our senses, our categories and our psychology and the ‘true’ process of becoming. If, as Nietzsche argues frequently enough, knowledge relies upon the concept of “being” (in the sense of the thought of something stable, unchanging, unitary and substantial), then knowledge of a real process or knowledge that actuality is in process is not possible. In lieu of Kant’s “things in themselves” Nietzsche is led to assume a “becoming-in-itself.”

Knowledge as Creative Power

If Nietzsche had been a consistent phenomenalist, he would have held that our linguistic-conceptual scheme, our philosophical understanding (primarily Kant’s) and our scientific world-interpretations are one and all phenomenalist, conventional, simplifying forms of conditional knowledge. We would have no access to ‘Truth’ and we

⁵⁶ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, Bombay, 1956, 84-86.

would be confined to a multiplicity of "truths" that are relative truths based upon a variety of sensory-cognitive perspectives. Apart from "empty tautologies," our knowledge would be comprised of probable, practical, instrumental or pragmatic "truths" that serve the survival of the species and the increasing mastery of the natural world. Unlike C.S. Peirce, Nietzsche did not believe that by means of the method of induction truth or an "indefinite approximation to the truth" would occur in the long run, that there would be a convergence on truth.⁵⁷ Nietzsche held that the very methods of the sciences, as well as what he considered their conventional nature, will never yield 'Truth,' but will discover, propose or postulate an indefinite number of "truths" in a "plurality of interpretations." Nietzsche never denies the validity, usefulness or meaning of relative, empirical "truths." But he did envy that they will ever lead us to "the truth." The only access to "truth" we have is by way of creative, poetic or aesthetic ideals. Such a poetically formed truth would serve as a provisional guide by which man might live and think. The value of such postulated truths would be the presumed effects they would have on human culture and civilization.

Although Nietzsche attacked Kant's assumption of the apodictic nature of his delineation of the range of human knowledge, he certainly saw the value of regulative ideals that are postulated for a practical purpose. Where Kant speaks of "regulative ideals of reason," Nietzsche implicitly appeals to what may be called regulative ideals for the enhancement of *Existenz*. The practical and instrumental knowledge that man has attained and will continue to attain is exceedingly valuable, but it cannot provide cultural ideals for the future. Nietzsche's general view is that the pragmatic, empirical world-orientation that has been adopted by the Western world is utilitarian and technologically powerful although dangerous from the point of view of cultural unity, creativity in the arts and the further enhancement of existence. Scientific advancement is a means, not an end in itself. As science acquires "power... over nature, then one can use this power in order freely to develop oneself... [through] self-enhancement

⁵⁷ *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 2.777, 2.780, 2.781. Peirce maintains that the method of induction "will in the long run yield the truth, or an indefinite approximation to the truth, in regard to every question." *Ibid.*, 2.269. Although Peirce sometimes seems to be talking about the accumulation of empirical truths, he also indicates that he is thinking of the truth of things. For, the real construed in terms of "regularity" is the product of the convergence on truth. "Reality is only the object of the final opinion to which sufficient investigation would lead." *Ibid.*, 2.693.

and strengthening.”⁵⁸ Thus, Nietzsche envisions scientific technology as a means to a higher cultural ideal. The postulation of creative ‘truth’ already assumes the utilitarian value of a plurality of empirical, conditional truths. Creative or poetic truth is intended for the enhancement of life and the attainment of power. In this sense, truth is not come upon as a datum, but it must be actively created, as the artist creates a beautiful work of art.

‘Truth’ is not something that is there to be found and discovered—but something that must be created and can be called a process, or better, a will to conquer which has no end... a process *ad infinitum*.⁵⁹

Truth in this sense signifies a process or a “will to overcome.” Knowledge as *poiesis* is an active process, a striving for understanding that must remain open, provisional, hypothetical, experimental. Nietzsche was opposed to static conceptions of knowledge and truth, to the “Egypticism” that closes off debate, inhibits *skepsis* or inquiry, that venerates “mummified” concepts. What is being proposed, in short, is an experimental conception of truth.

Despite the fact that Nietzsche’s notes for a work to be called *The Will to Power* warn that it is to be a book “for thinkers and thinkers only,” there is a disturbing open-endedness in the experimental idea of truth, an arbitrariness, a vagueness that almost invites abuse. Searching for a criterion for such a truth, we find only: “the enhancement of the feeling of power.”⁶⁰ As sympathetic as one may be with the vitality

⁵⁸ *Werke*, XV, 434. This notion of science as a substructure that may serve the enhancement of life reflects a very early sentiment. Nietzsche had quite early said that “It is necessary, not to destroy science, but to subordinate it.” It is to be subordinated to a higher culture, a pyramid capped by the “overmen” of the future. *Werke*, X, 114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 56.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45. “*Das Kriterium der Wahrheit liegt in der Steigerung des Machtgefühls.*” Despite the vagueness of this “criterion,” we know from other passages that the “feeling of power” pertains to a subjective transformation of *Existenz* and not to a feeling of power over others. For Nietzsche, the maximal feeling to power would be attained by the “thought” of eternal recurrence, the imposition of Being on becoming. The thought of the eternal recurrence of the same is described as a “high point of meditation.” *The Will to Power*, 330. In order to appropriate the thought of eternal recurrence, it would require a maximal life-affirmation or a maximal subjective “feeling of power.” The value of truth seems to lie, for Nietzsche, in its “effects.” A “world-affirming human being” would be one who “wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity.” *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, § 56. *SW*, Band 5, 75. Whoever could affirm life and existence so completely would experience the highest feeling of power—hence would experience “truth” in existence. In a circuitous, even esoteric way, I believe that Nietzsche is defending a version of subjective, “lived,” or existential truth.

and daring of Nietzsche's thought, this isolated statement in the *Nachlass* gives one pause. While it may be the case that a passionately held truth may give one a maximum feeling of power, we wonder what dreadful 'truths' might give someone an enhanced feeling of power. Recent history does not require us to wonder. Whatever Nietzsche may have meant by this cryptic assertion, it is a vague, open conception of truth that makes it radically subjective. Without a more precise idea of what a viable experimental truth would be, we are left in a no man's land. Nietzsche seems aware of the dangers inherent in his aesthetic notion of truth: "We make experiment with truth... perhaps humanity will perish as a result of this."⁶¹ The ambiguity that is absent from his insightful criticisms of humanistic truth is present in his notion of experimental truth. Knowledge and truth conceived of as a poetic, aesthetic creation is stimulating and provocative until we ask precisely what it means concretely. There is little doubt that Nietzsche himself intended the idea of the *Übermensch*, the notion of the eternal recurrence and the concept of the will to power as his experimental truths.

Since he has excluded a knowledge of an "unconditioned reality," the conception of the will to power is not a positive claim to knowledge, but is an experimental hypothesis, a poetic myth concerning the ultimate nature of actuality. The eternal recurrence of the same, too, is not, despite the attempts to present a "scientific" defence of it, a claim to knowledge. It is primarily an "as if" conception that serves, as has recently been said, as an "existential imperative."⁶² Nietzsche is far more interested in the subjective "effects" of the idea of eternal recurrence on the individual who accepts it as if it were true than he is with its objective validity. The "thought" of the eternal recurrence of the same is clearly described as the imposition of being on becoming, a thought that produces a maximal feeling of power. The "overman" is described as the "myth of the future," the ideal that serves as man's new

⁶¹ *Werke*, XII, 410. Although this remark reveals Nietzsche's tendency towards swashbuckling prose, we should remind him that, from his standpoint, every "table of values" accepted as "truth" is experimental and dangerous.

⁶² Cf. Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, Bloomington and London, 1978. "Recurrence (and its real or possible truth) is a visual and conceptual representation of a particular attitude toward life. The attitude toward life Nietzsche wishes to portray is... the attitude of affirmation, of overfullness; the attitude which expresses ascending life... The attitude toward life captured in the doctrine of eternal recurrence is the expression of nihilism already overcome." *Ibid.*, 142.

goal. Given the thousand year period that Nietzsche says it would take for the cultivation of the “overman,” this is a myth that is at least possibly realizable. This troika of “truths” is presented by Nietzsche as his world-interpretation, his experimental hypotheses. The idea of will to power serves to designate the *pathos* that underlies and sustains the process of becoming and the idea of eternal recurrence is the circle of becoming understood from the standpoint of Being. But we know that the thought of eternal recurrence of the same is a paradoxical thought of Nietzsche: for he tells us often enough that the imposition of being on becoming entails falsification. The thought of the immanence of eternity in the temporal process of becoming is analogous to Kierkegaard’s thought of God, in the person of Christ, becoming man, of “the eternal being” manifested in temporality. This thought of what, for Nietzsche, is an absolute paradox would produce a maximal enhancement of the feeling of power. The courage to accept a reality comprised of the synthesis of a *nisus* towards power and the eternal recurrence of the same would have to be bolstered by the strongest life-affirmation. These two experimental ideas or “truths,” then, are the portals through which the “overman” must first pass.

The notions that comprise Nietzsche’s positive thought are clearly experimental in nature, creative “truths” that are offered for acceptance as if they were true. As I’ve said, the postulation of such experimental notions was probably suggested to Nietzsche by Kant. For, Kant had opened the door to the “hypothetical employment of reason,” the projection of ideas as ideals on the basis of “problematic concepts.” While Kant appeals to postulates of reason (e.g., God, freedom of the will and immortality) in terms of the satisfaction of human needs and human happiness,⁶³ Nietzsche postulates experimental truths for the sake of the enhancement of *Existenz* or the enhancement of the “feeling of power,” as well as for the sake of the value of what he believes would be a superior “cultural pyramid.” Just as Nietzsche offers a hyperbolic extension of Kant’s critique of knowledge, so, too, does he seem to propose a hyperbolic conception of regulative ideals.

The clash between Nietzsche’s radical phenomenism and his postulation of mythopoetic ideals in the form of experimental truths

⁶³ *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 724ff. Kant notes that “All practical concepts pertain to objects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction... to objects of our feelings.” *Ibid.*, 725.

seems to replicate the tension, in Kant's thought, between the critical restriction of knowledge in his epistemology and the defense of moral values by virtue of the use of practical reason. Despite his heroic efforts to transcend the standpoint of Kant, Nietzsche never succeeded in escaping the long shadow of Kant.

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