UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Critique Without Foundation: Nietzsche and the Social Study of Science

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by

Christine Anna Payne

Committee in charge:

Professor Harvey Goldman, Chair
Professor Richard Biernacki
Professor Cathy Gere
Professor Martha Lampland
Professor Tracy Strong

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The Dissertation of Christine Anna Payne is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California San Diego

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DEDICATION

For Mike

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VITA

2006 B.S., Southern Oregon University

2010 M.A., San Diego State University

2018 Doctor of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Critique Without Foundation: Nietzsche and the Social Study of Science

by

Christine Anna Payne

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology (Science Studies)

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Professor Harvey Goldman, Chair

This work draws upon the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche in order to move beyond persistent philosophical and political tensions present in normative and naturalistic approaches in the social studies of science scholarship. I provide a series of interpretive interventions into Marxist, relativist, and feminist standpoint theories of knowledge. My research makes two central theoretical contributions. First, I demonstrate the fruitfulness of deploying Nietzsche's perspectivalist approach to questions of truth as a means for moving beyond the impasse of epistemological universalism and relativism. Nietzsche's analyses of truth simultaneously connect politically and ethically-motivated critiques of ideology with the recognition of the particular and partial character of all claims to knowledge. Insofar as one seeks or requires a foundation upon which intellectual or existential understandings may be built and secured, Nietzsche's contention that truths can be justified in light of forms of life directs attention to material embodiments and their expressions; focus ultimately belongs on the material and cultural conditions and social relations in which particular forms of life are embodied and

expressed.

The second theoretical contribution this work makes is attending to the question of the will-to-truth as such. In following Nietzsche's analyses through their resignification and expansion in the work of Freud and the early Frankfurt School, I demonstrate the significance of interrogating the taken-for-granted value of seeking out and securing more and better accounts of the truth of the natural and social world. The desire for more and better truths as the means towards, and foundational justification of, better intellectual, technological, political, and ethical forms of life can, counterintuitively, both emerge from and seek to attain and maintain social structures, relations, and sensibilities characterized by various degrees of fatal falsehoods. Otherwise disparate approaches to social epistemology fail to ask after the value of our desire for truth. It is in attending to the forms of life out of which such desires emerge that the current research makes a crucial intervention into the social studies of science and knowledge.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Question of Nietzsche in Light of the Social Study of Science: Why Nietzsche Now?

> Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.
>
> –Nietzsche, "On the Three Metamorphoses," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Traditional scientific and philosophical understandings of truth and the relationship of truth to reality are grounded in some variant of positivism or realism. Positivist accounts aim to dispel any metaphysical, i.e., understandings of reality that are not empirically demonstrable. Positivist accounts seek to ascertain the empirical facts of nature – often reduced to mathematics and logic – in order to identify the more and less adequate correspondence adhering between empirical facts and our knowledge of them.[1] Realist accounts posit the existence of underlying unobservable mechanisms at work in nature that justify the induction of explanatory causes from particular empirical events.[2] Both positivist and realist accounts of knowledge bracket out particular social and historical actors and contexts in order to observe and reason free of external contextual influences. Such accounts contend that there are more and less accurate understandings of the world, and each approach sets itself the task of progressing towards ever more accurate explanations of phenomena. To the extent that social, political, and historical influences factor into traditional scientific and philosophical explanations of knowledge, they remain at best inconsequential and at worst unfortunate distortions to be minimized or

[1] See for example Mach (1897/2000), Whitehead & Russell (1910, 1912, 1913/2011), Ayer (1952), Hempel (1966).
[2] See for example Archer (1995), Bhaskar (1975/2008), Chakravartty (2010), Putnam (1985).

eliminated.[3] The social study of knowledge, if it means anything at all in this context, remains the study of variables 'external' to knowledge proper.[4]

Beginning with such external factors of knowledge, scholarship in the social studies of knowledge challenges traditional natural scientific and philosophical accounts of epistemology. Social studies of knowledge demonstrate the significance of identifying the social conditions and positions *in* which, and the processes *by* which knowledge emerges, stabilizes, reproduces, and transforms. Social studies of knowledge situate truth within ongoing social and historical contexts in order to demonstrate how particular kinds of phenomena come to be facts of the matter. The proliferation and legitimation of social studies of science, technology, and knowledge has been met with considerable skepticism as well as aggressive incredulity. An ongoing series of controversies pivot around what role, if any, social conditions and interests do or ought to play in the search for, production of, and understanding of true knowledge.[5] What is at stake in these 'science wars' is the character of knowledge as such. Social studies of knowledge partially displace traditional accounts of the nature of knowledge and in doing so, they call into question the adequacy of both positivist and realist paradigms. The consequences of social studies of knowledge range from critiques of ideology, to epistemological skepticism, to ontological relativism. As social studies of knowledge travel from examining 'external' contexts of investigation to 'internal' conditions of justification, they increasingly destabilize the traditional character of truth. These processes of destabilization partially undercut the labor of

[3]This is not quite the case with practitioners of critical realism. Ostensibly, this variation of realism is concerned with historical social actors and the consequences agents have on natural and social structures. Closer interrogation of critical realism demonstrates that social agency is overdetermined by natural and social structures and so even this context-conscious approach reduces to teleology and determinism. See Archer (1995, 2001, 2003), Bhaskar (1979/1998, 1975/2008, 1986/2009).

[4] See Merton (1970, 1945/1973a, 1938/1973b, 1942/1973c).

[5]See Aronowitz (1988), Babich (2001), Gross & Levitt (1997), Ross (1996), Sokal (1996), Sokal & Bricmont (1999), Zammito (2004).

traditional natural scientists and philosophers of knowledge. Even as they bond against shared adversaries, scholars working *within* the subfield of the social studies of knowledge experience significant divisions. Divisions exist regarding the particular fashion in which social studies of knowledge can and ought to be carried out. It is within these internal divisions of the social studies of knowledge that I situate my argument. This project presumes the central significance of social conditions and positions for understanding knowledge about reality.

The research considered below is located at the intersection of what I refer to broadly as 'normative' and 'naturalistic' approaches to the social study of knowledge. Normative approaches to the social study of knowledge maintain that there are better and worse conditions from which the study of the world takes place.[6] Particular social conditions and political interests can help or hinder scholars' potential for arriving at better and worse understandings of, and interventions on, reality. Social conditions are not equally conducive to the practice of research and the search for truth. The task of normative scholars of knowledge is to identify those conditions most favorable to either adequate investigations or emancipatory interventions. Naturalistic approaches to the social study of knowledge maintain that knowledge remains relative to the particular social conditions from which it emerges. There are particular social conditions at play in the emergence of particular knowledge claims; however, the task of scholars is not to identify better or worse conditions for arriving at true knowledge of reality or for making emancipatory interventions in the world. The task of naturalistic scholars of knowledge is to demonstrate how particular knowledge emerges while remaining agnostic with

[6] See for example Adorno (1969/1976, 1956/1985a, 1966/2007), Ellul (1964), Habermas (1971b), Heidegger (1954/1977), Horkheimer (1933/1975a, 1932/1975b, 1937/1975c, 1935/1985), Lukács (1923/1972), Mannheim (1936/1985), Marcuse (1964), Marx (1867/1990, 1932/1992b, 1844/1992c), Marx & Engels (1932/2004), Merton (1970, 1973).

regard to the particular conditions or interests at play in the processes so identified.[7] Here, the job of a scholar is demonstrating the processes constitutive of what is while refraining from involvement in speculations of what ought to be the case.

Philosophers and scholars of Nietzsche are producing a compelling body of work that brings Nietzsche to bear on the question of knowledge.[8] Mainstream sociology fares worse; the discipline suffers from an almost complete lack of scholarship analyzing Nietzsche's analysis of truth.[9] One aim of the present research is to begin to fill in this gap by bringing the growing body of philosophically-motivated Nietzsche studies to bear on sociological theory. More encouragingly, there is an expanding body of interdisciplinary feminist 'new materialism' scholarship in science and technology studies that signals a significant shift in the relationship between normative and naturalistic approaches to knowledge. Provocative theoretical and empirical projects in this vibrant subfield are drawing together the epistemological and ontological flexibility of earlier social studies of knowledge with particular Marxist, feminist, and Foucauldian philosophical and political critiques.[10] The present research adds a unique approach to this ongoing theoretical reorientation within the social studies of knowledge.[11] The

[7] See for example Barnes (1972, 1977), Barnes & Bloor (1982), Bloor (1976/1991), Callon (1986), Geertz (1977), Knorr-Cetina (1985), Latour (1987, 1993), Latour & Woolgar (1979), Shapin & Schaffer (1985), Winch (1958/2008).

[8] See for example Allison (1999), Babich (1990, 1994, 1995, 2010a, 2010b), Bacsó (1999), Bergoffen (1990, 1995), Crawford (1990), Deleuze (1962/1983), Heidegger (1954/1977), Kofman (1973/1998), Müeller-Lauter (1999), Owen (1999), Pensky (2004), Pippin (2011), Simon (1972/1999), Strong (1975), Van Tongere (1999).

[9] Weber's *Science as a Vocation* (1917/2004) provides an exception proving the rule. Even so, this text – one of a handful of indisputably canonical texts in the discipline – manages to be grossly misinterpreted as a methodological manifesto proclaiming the value-neutrality of science. For compelling discussions of the link between Nietzsche, Weber, and science, see Hennis (1988) and Strong (2002). See also Goldman (1992). Other exceptions include Habermas (1968/1971a, 1968/1999), McCarthy (1994), and Horkheimer & Adorno (1947/2002).

[10] Among the most theoretically advanced and compelling accounts see Barad (2007), Kirby (2011), Mol (2002), and Oudshoorn (1994). Haraway's (1988, 1991/1995) and Harding's (1986, 2004) work on situated and standpoint knowledges also parallel Nietzsche's perspectivalism in a number of significant respects.

[11] Foucault's oeuvre offers perhaps the most sustained series of analyses explicitly couched in Nietzsche's style that commands a wide academic readership, including many scholars within sociology. Formally, by drawing on the genealogical framework, and substantively, through case studies demonstrating the dynamics of knowledge production and the motivations structuring such productions, Foucault (1977, 1977/1980a, 1983, 1984, 1984/1988,

following research provides a series of interpretive interventions into Marxist, relativist, and feminist standpoint accounts of knowledge in order to highlight the fruitfulness of deploying a Nietzschean perspectival framework. In addition, this research takes up Nietzsche's question of the will-to-truth as such. Even the most cutting-edge interdisciplinary studies of social epistemology stop short of considering the will-to-truth as such; this, along with the unique political and cultural sensibilities that his work brings to these otherwise critical social studies of knowledge justifies attending to Nietzsche's work on its own merits. In one sense, my research seeks to provide a significant reconceptualization of the social character of knowledge that connects the assumptions and concerns found in both normative and naturalistic accounts. In another sense, I demonstrate the necessity for scholars of social studies of knowledge to take seriously the question of the desires motivating the persistent investments in, and value of, our search for ever more and better accounts of truth.

What's at Stake in the Social Studies of Knowledge

This project appropriates the work of Nietzsche in an effort to partially traverse persistent philosophical and political tensions between normative and naturalistic approaches in the social studies of knowledge scholarship. I contend that Nietzsche is uniquely poised to address the theoretical conflicts present in social studies of knowledge. Nietzsche provides a distinctive framework for understanding knowledge that simultaneously acknowledges the necessarily particular perspectives from which knowledge emerges, while refusing to shy away from philosophical or political critique. Nietzsche demonstrates that epistemology in the traditional philosophical sense of the term is an instance of misguided redundancy. If, as I demonstrate,

1976/1990a, 1984/1990b, 1963/1994a, 1966/1994b, 1975/1995, 1961/2006) provides compelling empirical evidence demonstrating the power of taking Nietzsche's approach and questions seriously.

Nietzsche understands apparently epistemological criteria to actually be expressions of particular social relations and perspectives, then the 'ground' of truth and knowledge is just these particular relations and perspectives. It is 'us' – human beings acting from particular social positions and within particular historical conditions – that provide the foundation of our knowledge of the world.

This research makes two central theoretical contributions to the studies of social epistemology. First, I draw upon Nietzsche to provide a series of interpretive interventions into Marxist, relativist, and feminist standpoint theories of knowledge. I demonstrate the fruitfulness of deploying Nietzsche's perspectivalist approach to questions of truth as a means for moving beyond the impasse of epistemological universalism and relativism. Nietzsche's perspectival approach to the question of truth and knowledge demonstrates the partial character of any claim to truth not in order to render questions of epistemology relative but rather to render epistemology as such a redundant enterprise (Nietzsche, *GS*, *BGE*, *D*, *TI*, *GM*).[12]

In addition, this work attends to the question of the will-to-truth as such. In following Nietzsche's analyses through their resignification and expansion in the work of Freud and the early Frankfurt School, I demonstrate the significance of interrogating the taken-for-granted value of seeking out and securing more and better accounts of the truth of the natural and social world. The desire for more and better truths as the means towards, and foundational justification of, better intellectual, technological, political, and ethical forms of life can, counterintuitively, both emerge from and seek to attain and maintain social structures, relations, and sensibilities

[12] Citation of Nietzsche's works follow a standard pattern that includes, as necessary, abbreviations of his text, book or other large divisions (indicated by Roman numerals), and sections (indicated by Arabic numerals). When divisions or sections are overly broad or not available, page numbers are provided. The following will serve as textual abbreviations as necessary throughout the following work: *A* = The Anti-Christ, *BT* = The Birth of Tragedy, *BGE* = Beyond Good and Evil, *D* = Daybreak, *GM* = Genealogy of Morality, *GS* = The Gay Science, *HL* = On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, *TI* = Twilight of the Idols, *TL* = 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," and *Z* = Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

characterized by various degrees of fatal falsehoods. Nietzsche questions modern social actors' will to truth and knowledge, not in order to question the reality of the world, but rather to interrogate the kinds of human beings we modern social knowers are and the consequences of understanding ourselves and the world from modern scientific perspectives.[13] It is in attending to the forms of life out of which such desires emerge that the current research makes a crucial intervention into the social studies of science and knowledge.

Normative and naturalistic approaches defend their otherwise disparate studies against natural scientific and traditional philosophical attacks by appealing to either the real and rational or the natural and causal character of their analyses; the master questions of the desire for, and the value of, the will-to-truth as such are not raised. Nietzsche's analyses of truth simultaneously connect politically and ethically-motivated critiques of ideology with the recognition of the particular and partial character of all claims to knowledge. Insofar as one seeks or requires a foundation upon which intellectual or existential understandings may be built and secured, Nietzsche's contention that truths can be justified in light of forms of life directs attention to material embodiments and their expressions; focus ultimately belongs on the material and cultural conditions and social relations in which particular forms of life are embodied and expressed. The desire to know, the desire to grasp the truth of some process or some object informs even the most relativist of social studies of knowledge scholarship. Why bother to study the processes by which knowledge is created and contested, if not to learn something about the processes or the meanings at work? Nietzsche insists that we reckon with just such fundamental underlying questions.[14]

[13] See also Agamben (2009), Biernacki (2012), Sassower (1995).
[14] See Babich (1994). Together with Strong's (1975, 2012) interpretation of Nietzsche's radical Kantian critique of knowledge, i.e., anti-foundational critique, Babich's insistence that Nietzsche's work revolves as much around questions of knowledge as around questions of morality served as the impetus for the current project.

Background

Normative Social Studies of Knowledge

Normative social studies of knowledge demonstrate the role and the significance particular social relations play in the pursuit of truth. Normative social studies of knowledge seek to identify those social and political conditions most conducive to fostering an undistorted search for natural or social truth. These approaches presume that there are more and less accurate ways of knowing natural and social reality. The purpose of analysis is to demonstrate how conditions have facilitated or hindered the accuracy of natural and social accounts of the world. Normative social studies of knowledge share a commitment to truth over false or ideological explanations and in this sense, they necessarily provide asymmetrical accounts of explanations. While focused on the *social* conditions enabling or constraining the search for true knowledge, normative studies provide space for natural scientific and traditional philosophical approaches to knowledge. Normative studies do not call attention to social conditions in order to demonstrate the socially overdetermined *character* of truth but rather in order to demonstrate how social conditions affect the possibility of arriving at natural and social truths.

Marx performs a series of ideological critiques in an effort to overturn 'inverted' forms and kinds of knowledge. His critiques of ideological consciousness analyze the seemingly disparate spheres of religion, the liberal state, and the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1867/1990, 1844/1992a, 1932/1992b, 1844/1992c, Marx & Engels 1932/2004). Marx maintains that ideological consciousness can potentially be overcome, thereby providing social actors with an undistorted standpoint from which to accurately recognize social reality. Marxists after Marx have continued performing critiques of ideological consciousness, maintaining that particular

inverted, unfree social relations are reflected in the misrecognitions of inverted consciousness.[15] Drawing on sometimes too-crude Marxist frameworks, a number of scholars have attempted to partially account for the emergence of, and the particular character and transformations within, modern scientific methods, disciplines, and technologies. These accounts highlight the significance of particular social contexts for the emergence of modern scientific theories and technological practices in order to demonstrate both the productive and the destructive potential inhering in modern knowledge and technology (Bernal, 1971; Caudwell, 1965; Firestone, 1970; Freudenthal, 1988; Hadden, 1994; Sohn-Rethel, 1978; Zilsel, 1942). Science and technology are neither inherently good nor bad nor are they neutral - it is the job of the social analyst to determine under what particular social conditions and in service to which particular political interests these advancements may be useful or abusive.

Other scholars working within a partially Marxist framework have drawn attention to modern forms of rational scientific methods and the kinds of technological mastery achieved or desired as prime sources out of which ideological consciousness emerges (Aronowitz, 1988; Habermas, 1971; Horkheimer, 1975b; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002; Lewontin, 1991; Marcuse, 1964).[16] Where Marx seeks dissolution of ideology in the service of undistorted consciousness of social relations, many Marxists after Marx have located one of the wellsprings of ideology in seemingly neutral methods of knowing and mastering the natural and social worlds. In the former case, ideology is understood as a veil or barrier cloaking clear perception and understanding. In the latter, ideology stems in part from a misguided belief in rational and

[15] See for example Lukács (1923/1972), Habermas (1971a), Althusser (1968/2001). Mannheim (1936/1985), despite his appeals to perspectivism, ultimately argues that consciousness can be more or less 'adequate' to existing social relations. In this sense he, too, maintains a normative approach to knowledge, albeit one that is partially tempered by his rejection of Lukács' analysis of a universal standpoint. See also Baudrillard's analysis of 'hyperrealism' (1981).
[16] Critical Marxist studies share affinities with critical phenomenological and existentialist approaches to truth, knowledge, and technique. Each framework refuses to take for granted the self-evident reality or morality of truth. See for example Ellul (1964), Gadamer (1960/1975), Heidegger (1954/1977), Merleau-Ponty (1968).

technical mastery of the world. Despite these significant differences, each of the approaches draw distinctions between better and worse ways of knowing and understanding the natural and social world. Both approaches identify particular social and political interests conditioning particular ways of knowing as well as particular motivations for knowing what and how they do. Marxist approaches share a commitment to reducing the power and influence of ideology, while offering distinct accounts of the source of ideology.

Where Marx distinguishes between more and less accurate perceptions and understandings of reality, Merton distinguishes between more and less adequate ways of performing the research process. Marx is centrally concerned with changing social relations in order to lift ideological veils. Merton is centrally concerned with outlining particular cultural norms and practices that help and hinder the search for accurate knowledge of reality. Merton's studies demonstrate that the search for *objective* knowledge of reality is best conditioned by *subjective* social and political norms. Merton's sociological studies of science outline the particular social and political norms that advance the search for scientific knowledge. Social values and practices partially condition the possibility for discovering, transmitting, and building upon, objective knowledge of reality. The rise of modern science was partly conditioned by particular social – often religious – beliefs and practices and the continuation of successful scientific research is conditioned by norms fostering inclusion, transparency, critical thinking, and neutrality (Merton, 1970, 1945/1973a, 1938/1973b, 1942/1973c).[17]

Marx's and Marxist studies of knowledge demonstrate the normative character of knowledge. Knowledge is bound to interests and often, interests that are explicitly or implicitly ideological in nature. Mertonian studies of knowledge identify the conditions within which

[17] Mulkay (1976) contends that however desirable Merton's norms may be, in actual practice they are frequently absent.

objective truth and knowledge can potentially emerge. Marxist studies of knowledge identify the conditions that render knowledge necessarily interested and frequently ideological in character. Where Merton provides accounts of 'external' social conditions, Marx demonstrates how 'external' conditions are expressed as 'internal' knowledge. What is significant for both approaches is their shared commitment to exploring the explicitly normative character of knowledge. While undertaken from distinct philosophical and political assumptions, Mertonian and Marxist studies of knowledge each draw attention to the centrality of interested political and social conditions and their relationship to the possibility of producing particular kinds of knowledge. Marx and Merton provide models for advancing empirical work that remains explicitly normative in character. These accounts are both empirical analyses *of norms* as well as *normative* analyses *of* particular social and political conditions.

Truth and knowledge are themselves normative in character. In this particular sense, normative social studies of knowledge share –perhaps grudgingly- some affinity with Popper's (1969/1976) falsifiability principle and Lakatos' (1977) rational reconstructions insofar as each of these otherwise distinct approaches presume some ultimate rational reality that research can potentially progress towards. Of course, it is the nature and purpose of rationality as such that inspires the *Positivismusstreit* between Popper and members of the Frankfurt School (Popper, 1969/1976). For Merton, Popper, and Lakatos, norms work in the service of emancipating scientific research. For Marx and for those working within the Critical Theory tradition, an interest in human emancipation of social actors provides the normative framework against which scientific knowledge is assessed.

In one sense, it is obvious to the point of redundancy that attention to political and social conditions is a necessary task for scholars engaging in social studies of knowledge. It is just such

explorations of the social character of knowledge that distinguishes social studies from natural scientific and analytic philosophical approaches to truth and knowledge. Nevertheless, despite the crucial heavy-lifting that normative social studies of knowledge perform by way of centering analyses on social conditions and political contexts, subsequent scholars working in the naturalistic social studies of science raise critiques at the normative component seemingly so pivotal for social analyses of knowledge.

Naturalistic Social Studies of Knowledge

Producers and practitioners of naturalistic social studies of knowledge maintain that researchers ought to approach the study of knowledge from an 'agnostic' perspective. Social studies of knowledge can legitimately demonstrate the particular social conditions and character of knowledge without aligning against or in favor of particular external social conditions or particular internal knowledge claims.[18] Naturalistic social studies of knowledge are explicitly modeled on natural scientific explanation; they identify relevant causal processes at work in the creation of knowledge in order to render non-normative descriptive and explanatory accounts of the creation, reproduction, and transformation of knowledge (Barnes, 1972, 1977; Barnes & Bloor, 1982; Bloor, 1976/1991; Latour, 1987, 1993; Shapin, 1995; Shapin & Schaffer, 1985). Researchers are required to remain impartial to the particular forms and kinds of knowledge that they describe and explain. Whatever an individual believes or values in relation to a particular form or claim of knowledge, that belief or value is irrelevant so long as the individual acts in the role of researcher. To proceed otherwise is to introduce subjective norms into objective accounts. Like normative social studies of knowledge, naturalistic studies demonstrate the norms and

[18] In the natural sciences see for example, Barnes (1972, 1977), Barnes & Bloor (1982), Bloor (1976/1991), Callon (1986), Daston & Galison (2007), Geertz (1977), Knorr-Cetina (1985), Latour (1987), Latour & Woolgar (1979), Shapin (1995), Shapin & Schaffer (1985). Within the social sciences see for example, Berger & Luckmann (1966), Goffman (1974), Winch (1958/2008).

interests at play externally and internally in the production of knowledge. Unlike normative studies, naturalistic studies refrain from advancing or critiquing the norms and interests that they demonstrate.

The naturalist turn in social studies of knowledge draws upon Durkheim's (1912/1995) study of the social character of knowledge forms, Kuhn's (1962/1996) understandings of paradigms,[19] and Wittgenstein's (1953/2009) analyses of rule-following in order to argue for the social, historical, and pragmatic character of knowledge and truth. Rejecting the need or desire to justify knowledge by recourse to rationalism or realism, natural social studies of knowledge instead argue that, at the level of epistemology, relativism is the approach appropriate for scholarship (Barnes & Bloor, 1982).[20] Whether or not truth *is* ultimately grounded in a real or rational fashion is not something social studies can ever demonstrate and so it can and ought to be left out of analyses.

The Strong Program sets the initial theoretical agenda of naturalistic social studies of knowledge by outlining four guiding principles for empirical research. Social studies of knowledge ought to seek causal explanations, remain impartial to true and false claims, treat true and false claims symmetrically, and remain self-reflexive towards its own claims of knowledge about knowledge (Bloor, 1976/1991). Where natural science aims to identify and explain the causal processes at work in natural phenomena, social science ought to identify and explain the causal processes at work in in the formation of claims to knowledge – regardless of the actual truth or falsity of the claims put forward. In this way, the Strong Program, whose objects of analysis are social in character, can nonetheless adopt a natural scientific methodology which

[19] Often overlooked in the light of Kuhn but equally important in this genealogy is the work of Fleck (1935/1981). Objections have been raised over the (mis)handling of Kuhn in some social studies of knowledge. See Friedman (1998) and Zammito (2004).
[20] See also Feyerabend (1975/2010).

then allows researchers to provide claims while remaining normatively neutral. The most significant theoretical consequence of adopting the Strong Program's approach to knowledge is the legitimation of epistemological relativism. By demonstrating the empirical fact of historical transformations regarding what is a justified fact of the matter as well as by demonstrating the empirical fact of the cultural multiplicity of claims to truth, these accounts compel us to recognize that there are no privileged standpoints from which a more objective or a more comprehensive knowledge of reality can be located.

A further development in the naturalistic study of knowledge occurs with the anthropological turn and the of rise actor-network theories of knowledge production. Anthropological accounts of knowledge share many characteristics with the Strong Program including a commitment to the centrality of empirical case studies, the identification of causal processes, the role of impartiality in scholarship, and an insistence that analysis remain symmetrical in character. Actor-network accounts also share the Strong Program's commitment to epistemological relativism. It is at the level of ontology that the approaches diverge. While scholars in the Strong Program tradition reject the possibility that social studies of knowledge can ever conclusively demonstrate the Truth of Reality, they often nevertheless remain personally committed to realism. Actor-network accounts extrapolate from the logic of symmetrical analysis in order to argue that it ought to be taken seriously at the level of ontology as well as epistemology.[21] In other words, the reality of reality is itself relative to historical and social instances of its production, reproduction, and transformation. Humans not only work in and with non-humans to construct claims to knowledge, they also coproduce the reality that these claims to knowledge seek to capture. The character and the limits of both epistemological and

[21] See for example Callon (1986), Latour (1987, 1993), Latour & Woolgar (1979).

ontological relativism have inspired a series of confrontations between various scholars working in different branches of the naturalistic study of knowledge.[22] Scholars who are very confident in the practice of studying claims to knowledge *about* reality in a relative fashion can nonetheless reject such an approach at the level of reality *as such* – a level allegedly beyond the scope of social studies of knowledge.

Despite the not insignificant differences between the two central approaches to the naturalistic social study of knowledge, their overlap remains substantial in comparison to normative social studies of knowledge. Both the Strong Program and the various anthropological actor-network accounts result in the deflation of the political and moral presumptions of normative social studies of knowledge. Even analysis that works at the level of relative ontology rejects as inappropriate normative claims made on behalf of this or that particular construction of reality or knowledge. As does the Strong Program with regard to knowledge, so do actor-network theories demonstrate the social character of reality without going on to argue for or against particular constructions. Relative to normative approaches, naturalistic accounts are simultaneously stronger - in the sense that they examine the social character of knowledge 'all the way down' – and weaker – in the sense that the social character of knowledge is depoliticized.

Nietzsche, Perspectivalism, & the Will-to-Truth

Normative and naturalistic approaches each demonstrate the social character of knowledge while drawing distinct consequences from their demonstrations. Normative accounts demonstrate the social character of knowledge in order to insist that there are more and less favorable conditions for the production of knowledge about the world. Naturalistic accounts demonstrate the social

[22] One round occurs between Bloor (1999a, 1999b) and Latour (1999). A second series includes Callon & Latour (1992), Collins & Yearley (1992), and Fuller (1992).

character of knowledge in order to compare the processes by which different social relations condition different knowledges. Nietzsche shares with both of these approaches the contention that there is no disinterested desire to knowledge – even claiming to be desirous of knowledge for its own sake belies an interest and a will that requires further investigation and understanding (Nietzsche, *BT*, *GS*, *BGE*, *GM*). In this sense, knowledge, even radically relativist approaches to knowledge, appear to be 'grounded' in the shifting grounds of human relations. In other words, historically particular human beings acting within particular conditions and in particular relations are the foundation out of which knowledge emerges and truth stabilizes or transforms. The ground itself is relational and in this crucial sense, what is traditionally understood as epistemology is social relations 'all the way down.' Nietzsche provides a helpful bridge between politically and ethically-motivated normative critiques of ideology and demonstrations of the necessarily partial and so relative character of knowledge and truth. In the sense that knowledge is perspectival, knowledge is relative. The question remains: relative to what? Nietzsche answers, 'relative to those who know.'

Is it possible to perform a critique without an epistemological 'banister'?[23] On what basis, if not some external criteria of truth, can we call into question a particular claim to knowledge or truth? Conversely, on what basis, if not some external criteria of truth, can scholars justifiably affirm a particular claim to knowledge or truth? Nietzsche gestures towards the possibility of grounding knowledge in human life. Modern individuals are thrown into a world that they must navigate without the comfort of foundational religious, ethical, or political supports as grounds and guides for living. With the rise of apparently secularized scientific ways of knowing the world, humans, far from having arrived at a set of stable truths, have steadily lost their

[23] Strong's (2012) crafting of, and approach to this question, directly informs and motivates this current project.

intellectual and moral anchors. Nietzsche chastises those modern 'last men' who, having finally acknowledged their predicament, succumb to the necessity of uncertainty and the exhausted comfort of nihilism (Nietzsche, *BT*, *GS*, *A*, *BGE*, *GM, Z*). He resists the urge to resolve modern disenchantment into a weary relativism, even while maintaining the necessarily partial nature of any truth. Nietzsche seeks to hold on to the perspectival character of truth and knowledge while simultaneously rejecting the devolution of perspectival truth into a leveled-down liberal relativism. If taken seriously, grounding knowledge in life transforms questions of method and measurement into questions of politics and ethics. Approaches to knowledge and to truth rest on historically particular values, desires, and drives – ways of being in the world.

The research presented here demonstrates that deploying Nietzsche's perspectivalist approach to truth provides the basis for a series of productive interpretive interventions into already existing bodies of critical social studies of knowledge. Additionally, the research below demonstrates the fruitfulness of enlarging the scope and object of social epistemology to include the question of the will-to-truth as such. In addition to the already crucial work being done that variously describes, explains, and sometimes also evaluates competing claims to truth, Nietzsche asks scholars of social epistemology to enlarge and deepen their work by turning to considerations of how, why, and to what ends the compulsive desire for more and better accounts of truth functions. In a sense, Nietzsche is recommending that 'we knowers' undergo a process of self-reflection before proceeding with our otherwise critical work as usual; we must effectively begin to know about knowing itself. The goal is of course not to render solid knowledge impossible, but rather to force into sharp relief not only the particular contexts that inform claims to truth, but also the forms of life that seek in the realm of epistemology a basis or foundational ground upon which the rest of life can be secured. As I contend below, even within

the tradition of epistemic relativism, truth serves as a type of foundation. Can we imagine alternative forms of life that deploy claims to truth in anti-foundational fashions? Can we imagine a constellation of social relations that are, in a sense, free from the weight of truth?

Such questions suggest that the current work, while immediately concerned with the realm of epistemology, is ultimately a meditation on the role and future direction of political and ethical visions and projects. The work provides a series of analyses that bring Nietzsche into productive conversation with other theories of social epistemology, but the work does not conclude with one or a series of firm answers. Indeed, in recognizing that the question of epistemology is 'resolved' by a turn to political and ethical projects, the 'ground' upon which solid or secure answers might be built is recognized to be equally uncertain. If knowledge is grounded in forms of life and forms of life – particular sets of material social relations expressive of particular perspectives and conscious and unconscious interest and desires – then it is both too simplistic and too sure to arrive at neat or obvious answers. Nevertheless, I contend that the combination of fresh theoretical frameworks and the radical critique inherent in the question of the will-to-truth as such are significant enough in their own right to abide research that ultimately concludes with more questions than answers.

Having identified the central contentions and contributions of the current project, it is necessary to explicitly demarcate what the current project is not setting out to accomplish. The present research emerged out of a desire to place Nietzsche into conversation with leading critical schools of social studies of knowledge in order to fill theoretical gaps in existing scholarship on social epistemology. Such interpretive interventions should not be mistaken as a series of hermeneutic arguments regarding what Nietzsche 'really' means in his texts. While such scholarship and dialogue are of course valuable in their own right, the current work is not

situated within Nietzsche studies as such. The particular readings of Nietzsche contained in what follows are ultimately mine; this leaves them open to further fruitful discussion, debate, and additional and different interpretive interventions. I turn now to a brief synopsis of the following chapters.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two

I first take up the question of Nietzschean perspectivalism in relation to the work of Marx. I demonstrate a significant overlap between Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and illusion and Marx's investigations of ideology and their relation to class struggle. At stake in chapter two is the possibility of performing political critique and engaging in political action absent foundationally secure general or universal truths. I first examine the potential limitations, including the unintentional reemergence of ideological illusions, facing political projects grounded in assumptions of general or universal truths. Next, I turn to a consideration of the potentially liberatory power of particular and partial truths. I conclude by considering whether the pursuit of *universal* freedom may be better served by taking seriously a perspectival approach to truth that hinges on *particular* perspectives rather than on the presumption of a set of stable general truths. Walking the tightrope between Marx's analyses of ideology and class struggle and Nietzsche's critiques of attempts to ground and authoritatively justify universal claims to truth, I consider the character of political critiques and practices aimed at the realization of desires for material well-being and the cultivation of human freedom. I contend that understanding Marx's and Nietzsche's epistemological projects in relation to one another provides fresh conceptualizations of the character and scope of emancipatory political projects.

Chapter Three

In calling into question the possibility of developing a universally-shared epistemological viewpoint, the preceding argument goes on to call into question the possibility of developing a universally-shared political imagination and set of emancipatory projects. The central contention of chapter two is that, far from proving a distraction or detraction from serious and sustained projects of political emancipation, approaching truth in a perspectival fashion can potentially encourage a wider and more inclusive set of ideas and practices – because and not in spite of – perspectivalism's critique of universal vantage points and claims to knowledge. Nevertheless, the possibility of epistemological plurality devolving into political and ethical relativism remains, and this possibility requires serious and sustained reflection. Chapter three considers Nietzsche's warnings of a looming epistemological catastrophe as aids for reflecting on the temptation of relativism presented by Nietzsche's own perspectival approach to knowledge. By reading his announcement of the 'death of God' through his reflections on the relationship between modern Western science and religion, an understanding of the relationship between Nietzsche's perspectivalism and relativism is clarified. In order to bring into relief both the moments of significant overlap and the even more significant moments of departure that Nietzsche's perspectivalism shares with epistemological relativism, the chapter begins with a consideration of relativism as it manifests in the schools of the Strong Program's Social Studies of Knowledge and in Actor-Network Theory. Between these two approaches to the question of truth, the issues of epistemological and ontological relativism, symmetrical analyses of truth and error, and normatively agnostic evaluations occupy center stage.

While I do contend that particular elements of Nietzsche's perspectivalism can plausibly be understood to rest comfortably within these relativistic approaches to knowledge, Nietzsche's

answer to the question of what grounds knowledge nevertheless moves the issue of relativism away from the realm of the epistemological and toward the realms of the political and the ethical. Approaches to knowledge and to truth rest on historically particular values, desires, and drives - ways of being in the world. Having tracked the potentials and potential pitfalls of perspectivalism against the temptations of relativism, we are lead back to one of the central animating concerns of this work as a whole; namely, the consequences for political imaginations and practices in the face of the deconstruction of traditional understandings of epistemology.

Chapter Four

The key methodological point to take from toggling between universalism and relativism is the recognition that these approaches need not exhaust our epistemological imagination; additional approaches exist and may prove more adequate and satisfying in our desire to arrive at knowledge. Still, the conceptualization of universalism and relativism as being two ends along an epistemological pole remains. Nietzsche's meditations on epistemology are always also a series of socio-cultural and political analyses. Chapter four considers the relationship between feminist standpoint epistemologies and Nietzsche's understandings of truth and knowledge. I contend that there is indeed a series of significant overlaps between these approaches and that fruitful work can been done to partially articulate them towards emancipatory epistemological and socio-political ends. In particular, feminist standpoint theories share with perspectivalism an insistence that better and worse perspectives exist from which to approach our natural and social worlds. On the one hand, while feminist standpoint and Nietzschean epistemologies share with Marx an explicitly normative concern with radical critique and transformation, feminist standpoint theories share a wariness of the oversimplified universalism baked into some class-based critiques of ideology. On the other hand, while feminist standpoint and Nietzschean

epistemologies share with the various relativist approaches to knowledge an appreciation for partiality and particularity, they simultaneously reject the detached, allegedly non-normative agnostic symmetry deployed in relativist explanations of what counts as knowledge. These theoretical overlaps between feminist standpoint and Nietzschean epistemologies are themselves grounded in a larger overarching set of assumptions, the key feature of which we have seen at work continuously: the overdetermination of an otherwise underdetermined epistemology by socio-cultural, political, and ethical concerns. Feminist standpoint and Nietzschean appreciations for the partial and particular character of perspectives ultimately provide a foundation for truth that is political and ethical in character. In short, there is much to suggest that feminist standpoint and Nietzschean approaches to truth are motivated by a series of similar methodological assumptions.

While Nietzsche grants that greater objectivity can be obtained from the accumulation of particular perspectives, chapter four demonstrates that such epistemological accomplishments are ultimately ancillary to Nietzsche's primary socio-cultural concerns. These concerns are in many respects diametrically opposed to the political and ethical concerns expressed in feminist and Marxist standpoint theories. Standpoint theories presume that objective accounts of the world will be enlarged and enhanced by the perspectives of variously less powerful and less privileged social actors. This methodological presumption is grounded in the politico-ethical presumption that less powerful social actors, because of the perspectives and experiences afforded them due to their relatively peripheral or marginalized locations within a set of social relations, will better grasp the objective realities of their natural and social worlds. To presume that social actors located in relatively less privileged or powerful positions are better suited in either an epistemic or political and ethical sense to perceive and understand the way in which the world is or ought

to be constitutes, for Nietzsche, a disastrous error. The practices and projects that social actors aspire to and enact should instead emerge as instances and relations between those who are able to know and act out of an abundance of health, self-determined creativity, and delight. It is worth seriously engaging with Nietzsche's political and cultural considerations. Doing so provides an opportunity to better understand Nietzsche's epistemic analyses as well as helping to puzzle out if, and to what extent, his apparently conservative and elitist rejections of slave morality might be reconceptualized and appropriated to inform just those emancipatory projects that feminist and Marxist standpoint theories seek to articulate and create.

Chapter Five

In each of the prior three approaches to social epistemology considered in relation to Nietzsche's perspectivalism, the arrow of causation runs from truth towards better forms of life. For Marxists and feminist standpoint theorists, particularities and dualistic abstractions posing ideologically as false generalizations require recognition and dismantling in the service of actually objective truths. Such truths then work as a central means for securing the good life. In other words, so long as distortions and misunderstandings about the way in which social relations 'really' work are assumed and reproduced, the possibility for overcoming present relations in favor of something better must necessarily remain partial or stalled. The will-to-truth here results from a series of political-ethical assumptions about what the good – or at least a better – life consists of, with truth functioning as an epistemic warrant upon and through which such a life can be both secured and justified. The means-ends arrow moves from truth towards life: freedom rests upon the recognition of, and reaction to, the true character of natural and social reality.

Chapter five provides a final angle for considering the relationship between the spheres of epistemology and ontology. Here, I pause to reflect upon the significance of recognizing material life being a series of relations that express a fundamentally 'illusory' character motivated by both rational and irrational desires. I contend that Nietzsche's focus on material life is not only a critique of iterations of idealism, but also a critique of a positivist materialism that would reduce down to brute facts of the matter questions of what is real, true, and desirable. Nietzsche's materialism rests rather on his contention that life as a series of variously rational and irrational embodiments and expressions of desires renders the character of life in some important sense 'illusory,' 'apparent,' or even 'erroneous' when measured against the standards of even radical social epistemologies. If the yardstick for truth is indeed in some crucial sense forms of material and cultural life, then we must contend with the character of life as such as a series of more and less risky desires – including the desire for truth.

To better develop the master question of the will-to-truth as such, I turn to Freudian psychoanalytic understandings of desire. In possession of this expanded meditation on how and why desire flows in the fashions that it does, we are in a solid position from which to examine the potential and real downsides of attaching foundational significance to the search for, and accumulation of, truth. A final iteration of the will-to-truth that Nietzsche's previous critiques bring into sharp relief is best articulated by the early Frankfurt School – the counterintuitive process of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002). The concern here is that the will-to-truth as unquenchable desire for more and better truths about the natural and social worlds can work in the service of something like an anti-Enlightenment. In other words, the fetishizing of more and better facts about the world, of ever-increasing accuracy, technical efficiency, and an unthinking exaltation and investment in truth, comes to work – even

if unintentionally or unconsciously – in the service of life-denying projects. The consequences that can emerge from an overemphasis on the attainment of truth range from the decadent nihilism that emerges from substantively vacant positivism to the material and existential terror that stems from the reification and totalitarian application of 'really true' concepts, facts, and classification schemes. The desire for more and better truths about the natural and social worlds as the means towards, and foundational justification of, better intellectual, technological, political, and ethical forms of life can, counterintuitively, emerge from, and seek to attain and maintain social structures, relations, and sensibilities characterized by various degrees of fatal falsehoods. Whether as statically-ridged, mindless, and taken-for-granted facts and data that serve as their own reason for existence, or as concepts and pieces of evidence that serve to 'explain' and so validate a host of insidious ideological imperatives, simplistically singular fixations on acquiring truth can prove to be as or more harmful than helpful or liberating. It is in the light of such considerations on the character and consequences of the will-to-truth that I conclude with a final series of reflections on the significance of Nietzsche's perspectivalism.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Question of Ideology in Light of Perspectival Knowledge: The Truths of Marx and Nietzsche

> I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician*… to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all "truth" but something else – let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.
>
> –Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface for the Second Edition

The reflections that follow are an attempt to consider the potential character of political practices in light of Marx's and Nietzsche's approaches to truth and illusion. Marx and Nietzsche are read in relation to one another in order to suggest a partial overlap between Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and illusion and Marx's analysis of ideology and class struggle. What is at stake in this essay is the possibility of performing political critique and engaging in political action absent foundationally secure general or universal truths.[24] I first examine the potential limitations, including the unintentional reemergence of ideological illusions, facing political projects grounded in assumptions of general or universal truths. I then turn to a consideration of the potentially liberatory power of particular and partial truths. I conclude by considering whether the pursuit of *universal* freedom may be better served by taking seriously a perspectival approach to truth that hinges on *particular* perspectives rather than on the presumption of a set of stable general truths.

[24] The immediate impetus for this project is the work of Strong (2012) in which the possibility – and limitations – of a 'politics without vision' is explored, as well as Babich's (1994) treatment of Nietzsche's relationship to the question of science. More broadly, the essay is informed by the perennial concern in much feminist, critical race, queer, and postcolonial theory that an emphasis upon totality – whether in regard to ideas, identities, or political projects – often operates by, and to the effect of, the exclusion of Others. The literature here is immense. For canonical exemplars see De Beauvoir (1949/2011), Fanon (1952/2008), Butler (1990/2006), and Said (1978/1979), respectively.

In his critiques of ideology, Marx (1867/1990, 1844/1992a, 1844/1992c; Marx & Engels, 1932/2004) demonstrates how particular historical social relations condition consciousness. Ideas, beliefs, and values are often ideological inversions that can – and should – be righted in the interest of human flourishing. The challenge of ideological critique resides in bringing to light the real and true character of social relations in order to transcend distorted forms of consciousness for the sake of making possible transformations in practical social relations. In his critiques of the desire to ground truth in a secure or universal sense, Nietzsche (*GS*, *TL*, *BGE*, *TI*, *GM*) demonstrates that particular historical social relations and locations necessarily result in non-universal ideas, beliefs, and values. Consciousness and the social relations that condition consciousness do not - and cannot - attain a universally secure status. Our perception and understanding is necessarily perspectival in character. This essay argues that Marx's critiques of ideology can be understood in such a fashion that we need not rely upon a search for universal truths and interests in order to undertake political critique and action. In particular, becoming aware of and contributing to the overcoming of capitalist social relations need not necessarily require the development of a generally or universally-held form of consciousness rooted in an objectively general social interest. Likewise, Nietzsche's critique of our repeated attempts to ground truth in a stable, secure, and universal fashion can be read in such a way that we need not reject compelling justifications for political and ethical critiques or struggles motivated by diverse imaginations of what Marx (1894/1991, p. 959) designates 'the realm of freedom.' It may be possible, in other words, to marshal Nietzsche's critiques of universal truth in the service of a Marxist–inspired drive for universal freedom.[25]

[25] This is not to suggest that Marx and Nietzsche can be made compatible in any simple sense. Their sense of what is wrong with the modern human condition and what may be made right is not the same. It is also clear in what follows that they do not share any straightforwardly compatible understandings of truth and illusion. What is under examination here is the possibility of reading the authors analyses of truth and illusion such that they can be made to

Consideration of the relative strengths gained from using a Marxist or a Nietzschean lens to view epistemological and political questions has a long and well-rehearsed history in social and political theory.[26] Across such understandings is a shared acknowledgment that Marx's and Nietzsche's analyses remain in some greater or lesser degree of contradiction, with their respective political assumptions and motivations serving as a central source of tension. These political tensions are real and to bypass or dismiss them occurs at the peril of serious scholarship. In an effort to avoid simplifying either Marx's or Nietzsche's insights, I resist the temptation of construing any easy reconciliation or seamless compatibility between the authors. It is unlikely that Marx's analysis of ideology and class struggle welcomes any simple connection to a perspectival approach to knowledge. It is even more certain that Nietzsche's epistemological critiques were not written with the intent of advancing the struggles of the working classes. Nietzsche's critiques of socialism, equality, and democracy (*BGE*, 43-44, 202-203, *D, A, GM)* and his suggestions that a laboring class is a necessary condition of possibility for aristocratic freedom (*GS*, 377, *BGE*, 239, 257ff, *D* II) inform the work of many theorists.[27] Nevertheless, even as their assumptions and motivations diverge, there are moments of thought between Marx and Nietzsche that might yet be read in relation to one another in the interest of reconsidering

speak together in a fashion – a fashion both authors would no doubt find highly objectionable – that is potentially conducive to liberatory political practices.

[26] Compelling treatments include Adorno (1966/2007), Caygill (2004), Deleuze & Guattari (1972/2009), Foucault (1977, 1977/1980a), Habermas (1971b, 1985/1998, 1968/1999), Horkheimer & Adorno (1947/2002), Kofman (1973/1998), Love (1996), Lukács (1923/1972, 1962/1980), McCarthy (1994), Miller (1978), and Weber (1905/2002).

[27] I maintain that, when read closely and in context, Nietzsche's political understandings are rarely simply 'pro' or 'con' or 'left' or 'right' in our sense of these terms. Nietzsche's perennial demand to think 'beyond' tidy dualities can provide political fodder to strongly authoritarian as well as strongly liberatory projects. This is his potential and his danger. For recent scholarship that explores Nietzsche's 'aristocratic' political inclinations, see Appel (1999), Bull (2011), Robin (2011), Waite (1996), and Wolin (2006). See Scott & Franklin's (2006) and Schotten's (2009) recent compelling reflections on the fruitfulness of thinking critical race and queer theories through the lens of Nietzsche's thought. With respect to truth and illusion, see Conway's (1993) examination of 'slavish' trends in epistemology – an issue taken up at length in chapter four.

radical political imaginations and practices.[28] The following analysis makes an interpretive intervention by walking the tightrope between Marx's critiques of ideology and capitalist social relations and Nietzsche's critiques of the compulsive series of attempts to ground and authoritatively justify universal claims to truth in order to consider the possibility of political critique and action absent the guarantee of stable, secure, or universal epistemic foundations.

Inverting Ideological Illusion

Marx (1867/1990, 1844/1992a, 1844/1992c; Marx & Engels, 1932/2004) demonstrates the conditions under which ideology emerges as the dominant form of historical consciousness, under what conditions ideological consciousness is reproduced, and under what conditions ideological consciousness may be made transparent and potentially transcended. As Marx understands it, ideology is the inversion of consciousness conditioned by contradictory social relations; given this understanding, ideology can in principle be dissolved.[29] The material relations – including scarcity and the alienated social relations resulting from a fragmented division of labor wedded to the production of commodities for profit - which give rise historically to ideological consciousness are not necessary or inescapable facts of the human condition (Marx, 1939/1973, pp. 690-712, 1894/1991, pp. 957-959). Nevertheless, the forms of consciousness that these relations have conditioned now in their turn condition the presumptions

[28] While motivated by divergent visions, Marx and Nietzsche each provide critiques of classical liberalism and of democratic equality absent individual distinction and freedom (Marx, 1844/1992a, pp. 360-361, 1844/1992c, pp. 218-221; Nietzsche, *BGE*, *TI*, Raids of an Untimely Man: 38, *GM*). Both also gesture towards the potential for overcoming existing social relations and political-cultural institutions (Marx, 1939/1973, pp. 690-712, 1894/1991, pp. 957-959; Nietzsche, *BT*, 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism,' *GS*, 382, *GM*, III: 23-28).

[29] The validity of this categorical assertion draws strength from Marx's insistence that even meaningful symbols are materially conditioned. 'From the start, the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness that exists also for other men…language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men…Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product' (Marx & Engels, 1932/2004, pp. 50-51).

of social actors (Althusser, 1968/2001). Material conditions continue to *appear* necessary, and this apparent necessity reinforces ideological consciousness. Still, for Marx, the potential exists for a non-ideological consciousness to develop. The knot lies in achieving widespread recognition of the contingency of our present social formations and of transforming this recognition into widespread concrete demands and action for social change. Three central paths by which ideology emerges and is reproduced include the rise of a complex division of labor conducive to abstraction and alienated social relations, the transformation of production from use towards commodity production, and the conflation of particular class interests with a general or universal social interest. Marx understands these components as interrelated moments in a larger series of historical processes of changing modes of production. They are briefly disentangled below in order to suggest that parts of the whole may be reconceptualized in light of Nietzsche's epistemological concerns while retaining Marx's critical scope and stakes.

A first way in which Marx (1932/2004) understands the emergence and reproduction of ideology is through an analysis of the historical intensification of abstract and alienated social relations that result from past and present organizations of the division of labor. Physical necessity, material dependency, and class struggles have historically woven together, fostering the conditions for increasingly complex divisions of labor to attend to the needs, desires, and interests of various social groups. One consequence of the increase in the complexity of the division of labor is the potential for partially disconnecting the performance of sensuous activity from conscious contemplation – a split between manual and mental labor (Marx & Engels, 1932/2004, pp. 51-52). A division of labor that generates the potential for such an 'emancipation' of consciousness from the immediate world 'implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity…devolve on different individuals' and so explains the

different avenues through which forms of consciousness are abstracted from a sense of the social world in general (Marx & Engels, 1932/2004, p. 52). As the division of labor grows increasingly complex, individuals are consigned to relatively narrow tasks disconnected from larger productive, social, and political understandings, effectively atomizing individuals both in terms of production and in terms of their social and political imaginations (Marx, 1844/1992a, pp. 324-334). Other social actors become relatively disconnected from the process of material production (Marx & Engels, 1932/2004, pp. 51-52). In both instances, consciousness is mediated by more or less abstract mythological and religious beliefs, political philosophies, and legal statutes.[30]

A second way in which Marx (1867/1990) understands the emergence and reproduction of ideology is through an analysis of the emergence of a series of capitalist social formations where social activity pivots around the production of commodities. The logic of the capitalist mode of production is such that social life revolves around the relentless production of commodities with goods and services produced for their ability to be exchanged at a profit for the owner of capital regardless of their actual or potential social use or desirability. In the process of subsuming productive relations into relations of commodity production and exchange, social relations transform into relations between things while the material products of labor-power transform into social relations (Marx, 1867/1990, pp. 165-166). Simply put, social relations of production are inverted. To the extent that social production is equivalent to the production of commodities, production as an activity remains mediated via wages and 'the market.' The consciousness that emerges in relation to this alienated, mediated activity becomes and remains an alienated, ideologically inverted consciousness.

[30] Ironically, these mediators of human experience are symptoms of the same experiences that they are meant to comprehend and organize.

Both the rise of a complex division of labor and the transformation of production from direct use towards commodity production condition the abstraction of particular day-to-day life activities from broader social and political visions and practices. If a social actor's consciousness is conscious existence of that social actor's life activities, and these life activities are characterized by alienated relations of social production, then the social actor's consciousness which is conscious existence of these alienated life activities will necessarily be alienated in form and alienating in content. What is crucial is that ideology is not incidental in the sense that it emerges as the *necessary* effect of particular social conditions. At the same moment, ideology is entirely incidental to the degree that it is only immanent in *particular* arrangements of social relations.

A third way in which Marx understands the emergence and reproduction of ideological consciousness is through an analysis of the relationship between particular and general interests. The primary examples to consider are the recurring conflations of the particular interests of one or a handful of socially or politically dominant classes with an apparently general social interest (Marx & Engels 1845/1975, p. 130-31; Marx & Engels, 1932/2004, p. 54). A surface-level analysis might find it remarkable that a budget plan espousing the merits of lower taxes for all can find enthusiastic support among particular individuals who would most stand to benefit from increased social spending. To understand the recurrence of such ideological forms of consciousness requires that we recall the abstract and alienated character of existence. In other words, one has to dig beyond the surface appearance to reach the material root of such ideological consciousness. Atomized individuals whose everyday lives remain relatively restricted in terms of social power come to identify the concept of 'the general interest' with those particular interests and groups who appear to wield actual large-scale power in society.

Mainstream politicians and political parties, church authorities, reigning legal statutes and sentiments, in addition to wealthy businesspeople – because of both their apparent and their real social power – come to be equated with the general interest of all social actors.[31]

If ideological consciousness emerges in part due to increasingly complex divisions of labor and the production of commodities for the profit of the capitalist class, then the overcoming of ideology requires the overcoming of these alienated social formations. Ideological 'reflections of the real world can…vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man [sic] and man and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and rational form,' when social relations of production are transformed and brought 'under their [social actors'] conscious and planned control' (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 173). In other words, the means and the ends of social production require a radical transformation.[32] As regards the third moment identified above, if ideological consciousness can be characterized as the conflation of the particular with the general, then the contradiction between the supposed general interest - experienced ideologically as a real general interest – and particular interests must, by Marx's reckoning, dissolve. To appropriate the logic deployed in *On the Jewish Question*: 'As soon as society succeeds in abolishing the *empirical* essence' of ideological consciousness, then this ideological consciousness 'will have become *impossible*…consciousness will no longer have an object, the subjective basis of [ideology] – practical need – will have become humanized and the

[31] The question of the *desire for* such seemingly irrational identifications leads to psychoanalytic approaches to ideology. See Althusser (1968/2001), Deleuze & Guattari (1972/2009), Freud (1921/2004a), Lyotard (1974/1993), Marcuse (1955/1974), Reich (1972), and Žižek (1989/2008). The question of desire is arguably of singular importance when seeking to fully account for the process of ideology, most especially when attempting to understand instances of seemingly obvious 'false' consciousness. See chapter five for a reflection on the role of desire in relation to matters of truth and illusion.

[32] For Marx (1939/1973, pp. 690-712, 1894/1991, pp. 957-959), this demand translates into a move away from the 'realm of necessity' towards the 'realm of freedom' He sees in the increasing productivity of technology the means for automating much necessary labor, thereby opening up the time and the means for truly human social relations and creative expressions.

conflict between man's [particular] individual sensuous existence and his [general] species-existence will have been superseded' (Marx, 1844/1992c, p. 241).

It is at this third moment that I propose an interpretive intervention. Recognizing the historical contingency of apparently necessary conditions and marshalling this recognition to abolish practical need and exploitation – to 'humanize' social formations of production – is one (no small!) matter. Still, the leap from humanizing production to superseding the difference between particular interests and a general social interest begs pause. The overcoming of material need does not, in itself, suggest that the gap between an individual's particular existence and interests and the general social existence and interests has been sutured. This approach to overcoming ideological consciousness is based upon the presumption that there *are* straightforwardly more real and true general or universal interests awaiting realization (Althusser, 1968/2001; Habermas, 1971b, 1985/1998, 1968/1999; Harding, 1986; Lukács, 1923/1972; Mannheim, 1936/1985).[33]

Without questioning the real and true merits of a humanized approach to social relations and production, I maintain that the punch line of Marx's analysis can be interpreted in a manner different from an attempt to square the circle of particular interests with straightforward general objectives. Perhaps what is ideological, regardless of a particular mode of production or social formation, is the conception of a straightforward set of general objective truths and universal

[33] Harding (1986), like Lukács (1923/1972), critiques straightforward positivist claims to objectively valid truths in favor of an approach grounded in particularly-situated standpoints. While starting from different assumptions about which specific social groups provide more accurate perspectives of the social totality, both maintain that there are more and less privileged perspectives from which to adequately grasp general social truths. The relationship between standpoint theories and perspectivalism motivates chapter four. Mannheim (1936/1985), despite his appeals to perspectivism, ultimately argues that consciousness can be more or less 'adequate' to existing social relations. Althusser's (1968/2001) understanding of ideology, while seemingly foreclosing any trajectory out of ideological consciousness, still presumes a reality that ideological consciousness forever works to obscure. Habermas (1971b, 1985/1998, 1968/1999) demonstrates that knowledge is necessarily interested. At the same time, he maintains that a rational, quasi-universal consensus aiming towards projects of human emancipation may be developed through processes of participatory discourse in democratically-organized public spheres. See Pensky's (2004) discussion of Habermas' analyses of Nietzsche and truth.

social interests. Perhaps we can reinterpret Marx to say that with the humanizing transformation of the social relations of production from abstract to direct expressions of particular interests, comes the actual expression of a general social interest – *through and as particular interests*. A general transformation of the political economy of capitalism constitutes a series of transformations in particular social relations. Social relations that express particular needs and desires *are* general social relations. To restate this thesis in a more provocative fashion: *general social interests and relations are only ever constellations of particular social interests and relations*.[34] After outlining Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and illusion below, I return to this reinterpretation of Marx and ideology as a way of considering the possibility of radical political critique and action absent the assumption of general objective truths and universal social interests.

The Provocative Potential of Nietzsche's Perspectivalism

Marx demonstrates how the experience of living in and through alienated social relations leads to the creation and reproduction of ideological forms of consciousness, including the historical processes of abstraction that transform particular interests of particular groups into general interests across social actors. Nietzsche shares Marx's critique of the continual transformation of life-denying interests and experiences into general concepts, truths, and interests. Still, Nietzsche (*GS*, *TL*, *BGE*, *TI*, *GM*) challenges projects aimed at capturing

[34] The concept of 'constellation' is borrowed from Adorno (1966/2007), who in turn borrows it from Benjamin (1963/2009). As the metaphor suggests, a constellation refers to a series of points which are necessarily related to one another but whose significance, taken as a whole, remains an open question with regard to the particular perspectives assumed and the particular points of emphasis desired. The notion is better grasped when considered in relation to the concept of totality understood in its Lukácsian (1923/1972) version. Totality here refers to a progressively more complete understanding of a social or historical whole such that the real and universal truth of a matter can (and should) be justified. See Jay (1984) for an account of the changing role of totality – including the role of the concept's detractors – within the Western Marxist tradition.

constellations of particular social relations and interests in order to designate as singularly real and true a secure and certain general social perspective. He does this, not in order to preclude transformations in social consciousness or action but in order to stem any conceit that transformations in social consciousness or action do or can reflect a stable series of general objective truths emerging from a universally-interested perspective. Tracing the logic of Nietzsche's perspectivalism leads to consequences about the character of truth and illusion at partial variance with traditional Marxist interpretations of ideology. Marx's understanding that consciousness emerges out of material conditions is maintained in Nietzsche's perspectivalism. In both, critiques of ideology work to unravel the genealogical emergence of specific forms and contents of consciousness as expressions of particular perspectives that are themselves rooted in particular social locations in particular historical moments.[35] The central difference between conventional Marxist ideological critique and Nietzschean perspectivalism is the deflation, in a perspectival approach, of claims to generally true knowledge and interests derived from a general or universal social standpoint. After Nietzsche, a critique of ideological consciousness is no longer commensurate with the aims of recognizing disjunctions between the particular and the general and of transforming particular perspectives, ideas, and interests into accurate reflections from a general perspective of a general social interest. As go claims to general or universally true knowledge and interests, so go straightforward identifications of particular or partial knowledge and interests being ideological in nature.

Analysis of consciousness and its more and less abstract conceptual components remains critical in the sense that it *identifies* the historical and social roots from which particular perspectives, ideas, and interests emerge. However, the work of critique in the sense of *affirming*

[35] I acknowledge taking liberties in using the concept 'ideology' in relation to Nietzsche. The relatively analogous term in Nietzsche's work is 'illusion.'

or rejecting perspectives, ideas, and interests in relation to socio-political or ethical visions or practices occurs beyond the realm of epistemological – which is to say generally 'accurate' or 'inaccurate' and objectively 'true' or 'false' – investigation.[36] Nevertheless, Nietzsche does not revert to liberal relativism or nihilism.[37] While there *are* better and worse ways of being in the world, Nietzsche's perspectivalism does not afford any certainty or security wrought from the realm of epistemology to translate into and guide the values of life. In other words, it is possible and necessary for social actors to determine what constitute the values and aims of life apart from 'true' and 'false' and apart from the concept of a perspective held 'in general' (Nietzsche, *BT*, V: p. 52, *GS*, 57-58, 76, 355, *BGE*, 3-4, *TI*, The Problem of Socrates: 2, The Four Great Errors: 8). After briefly outlining Nietzsche's perspectival approach I return to Marx's analysis of ideology – and the reinterpretation of Marx's analysis suggested in the previous section – in order to begin addressing the possibility of calling into question particular political and ethical interests without the traditional epistemic support of general perspectives and truths.

Nietzsche (*TL*, I, p. 81) suggests that consciousness is and can only ever be a particularly situated, particularly interested phenomenon.[38] Consciousness emerges from and is conditioned

[36] See also Adorno (1956/1985a, 1966/2007) for (sometimes ambiguously) critical assessments of traditional Western understandings of truth and knowledge.

[37] See Nietzsche (*GS*, 124-125, 143, 343, 345, *TI*, How the "True World" Finally Became a Fiction, *GM*, I: 5). Certainly, there is the possibility, given a perspectival approach to truth and value, of falling prey to one or both alternatives. Nietzsche succumbs to neither, but he does sound multiple warnings of their possibility in the light of the 'death of God' – the dissolution of all-encompassing metaphysical systems grounding thought and action. His task is, first, to demonstrate the character of our modern reality wherein transcendental truths and values are no longer available to intellectually honest investigators. His second task is to reflect upon the actual and potential consequences emerging from the first fact. Knowledge, critique, and values are still possible, but they must come to be understood as partial and ever-dynamic creations. Whether particular social actors affirm or deny, create with or challenge life, remain open historical questions. The issue of Nietzsche's relationship to relativism animates chapter three below.

[38] I employ Nietzsche's early essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (1873/1979), as the foundation for understanding his perspectivalism. This text provides one of the most straightforward and structured accounts of the foundational philosophical assumptions motivating Nietzsche's approach to the question of truth. He will go on across his other texts to develop these assumptions and approaches, but I do not see his later works making radical detours or retractions from these earlier foundational epistemic assumptions and approaches. Indeed, the entirety of "'Reason' in Philosophy" in his later *Twilight of the Idols* (1889/1997b) reads as an updated – and appropriately more acerbic – version of the more systematic earlier essay. We see something similar in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good*

by historical relations, and these relations cannot be grasped as a whole nor can they be transformed in such a way so as to render consciousness less partial or less motivated by particular expressions of particular interests. In other words, human knowledge is fundamentally perspectival and so necessarily partial (Nietzsche, *TL*, I, p. 86).[39] Any serious reference to a fixed general social totality constitutes a category mistake. Such a social totality would be an expression of social relations, and such relations would be expressions of particular social actors' shifting needs and desires, ideas and actions. There is no static foundation outside of the relations of social actors to provide epistemic warrant or meaningful certainty for claims made on behalf of social consciousness or social interests 'in general.'[40]

While no fixed foundation outside of historical social relations exists to provide epistemic security or certainty in general, Nietzsche (*TL*, II, p. 89) nevertheless understands the creation of abstract and relatively static concepts about an 'out there' to be a necessary activity of human experience. Individuals deploy concepts in order to fix and manipulate the material world they navigate. The process of conceptualization draws together the infinitely particular instances of experience and converts these into illusorily similar kinds of entities - in the process making possible the identification and transformation of unlike into like (Nietzsche, *TL*, I, p. 83). Concepts give rise to the possibility of 'arbitrarily discarding… individual differences and…

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and Evil (1886/1989, 268) where a "pragmatic" approach to concepts is briefly stated, along with a reflection on the troubling consequences arising from the "natural, all too natural *progressus in simile*" of experiences, understandings, and language. This concern is taken up again in "Raids of an Untimely Man" in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Our real experiences aren't chattery at all. They couldn't communicate if they wanted to. That means that there are no words for them. When we have words for something, we've already gone beyond it. In all speaking there is a grain of contempt. Language, so it seems, was invented only for what is mediocre, common, communicable" (1889/1997b, 26).

[39] See Weber's (1968/1978, pp. 6, 8-10, 20) partial echo of Nietzsche's analysis. In a different theoretical vein, see also Goffman (1974, pp. 8, 563) and Simmel (1918/1971, pp. 354-359).

[40] See also Haraway's (1988, p. 583) critique of an epistemic position above and beyond all partial perspectives, the ever-tempting 'god trick.' Nietzsche (*GS*, 344, *BGE*, On the Prejudices of Philosophers, *TI*, Epigrams and Arrows: 26, "Reason" in Philosophy: 6, The Four Great Errors: 5, *GM*, III: 13, 24) finds the desire for such an all-encompassing perspective to be itself a central example of illusory consciousness in need of explanation and critique.

forgetting the distinguishing aspects' of what are actually distinct moments of lived experience in the practical interests of social communication and action:

> Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases – which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things (Nietzsche, *TL*, I: p. 83)

Simply put, conceptualization is the congelation in consciousness of *particular* experiences in the service of representing them as *general* for the *practical* sake of shared meaning and activity. What is significant is that Nietzsche's account of abstraction at this stage is normatively neutral. There is nothing inherently problematic with the process of abstraction, because abstraction is just how social actors navigate and engage with the world. The practical function of concepts is obvious enough. The description of an impression as 'seashell' or 'pillow,' as 'cerulean' or 'curved,' works to designate as general particular experiences in the world that can be meaningfully understood among groups of people. In order to make sense of shared existence and to communicate meaningfully with each other in the world, humans must make use of abstract and general concepts as practical illusions. There will never *not* be conceptualization and hence, there will never *not* be abstractions from the particular to the general. However, abstractions can be said to really and truly reflect a general perspective, fact, or interest only in the sense that particular experience has *already been* schematized into concepts – concepts which reflect attempts to invest particular moments with universal significance for practical purposes. What is significant here is that the processes for identifying general true knowledge – and distinguishing it from ideological illusion – remain, in the last instance, unstable and uncertain.

There is a double maneuver at play in Nietzsche's analysis. Abstraction functions to provide a sense of stability and security as actors come to feel relatively efficacious and satisfied with their self-forming and shared practices. In another sense, practical abstraction cannot actually provide sufficient epistemological grounds for – and so cannot adequately justify – such stability and security. Read together, these two claims lead to the provocative conclusion that what is epistemologically unjustifiable – generalized abstraction – is socially meaningful and practically necessary. Within a given context abstract general concepts are perfectly useful for describing and so helping to adjudicate truth in an epistemically weak sense. An individual may, for example, be able to determine usefully and meaningfully whether there is food in the cat's bowl or if current weather conditions invite the wearing of a warm sweater. A less pedestrian example: social actors may determine usefully and meaningfully whether or not there is evidence that climate change is a real phenomenon worthy of sustained attention and action. Nevertheless, outside of a particular context or perspective, general conceptual abstraction is incapable of providing adjudication in the sense of absolute certainty. It should be born in mind that 'particular context' is itself a concept and so may also shift in meaning. Climate change provides a powerful illustration. The *particular* context in which the reality of climate change exists and matters is, literally, a *global* – which is not to say universal – context, and so the way in which humans approach the set of facts and meanings around this particular context will – at least potentially – be more or less global in character.[41]

[41] The example is deliberate. Few if any social issues are as general and as pressing as the climate crisis underway. The delineation of 'global' in distinction to 'universal' is not meant to take away from the real and true severity of the crisis. Rather, this distinction serves to illustrate by way of an extreme example the merits and limitations of taking a perspectival approach seriously. It is, unfortunately, possible to argue that taken from a cosmic point of time and view, earthly climate change merits little concern. At the same time, it is possible, using direct evidence from an Earthling's point of view, to challenge such fatalistic conclusions and to engage in literal life-affirming practices aimed at averting this accelerating catastrophe.

In one important sense, Nietzsche demonstrates that the transformation of unlike (particular) into like (general) is not simply a process of ideology but is constitutive of the process of conceptualization as such. However, while not constitutive of the process of abstract conceptualization as such, the transformation of the particular into the general does provide the conditions of possibility for the emergence of ideology. What was a normatively neutral process now acquires a normative character:

> For something is possible in the realm of these schemata which could never be achieved with the vivid first impressions: the construction of a *pyramidal order* according to castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, and clearly marked boundaries – *a new world, one which now confronts that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world, and thus as the regulative and imperative world…* in this conceptual crap game 'truth' means using every die in the designated manner, counting its spots accurately, fashioning the right categories, and never violating the order of caste and class rank. (Nietzsche, *TL*, I: pp. 84-85, emphasis mine)

Dynamic partial perspectives and experiences come to appear less real and true than abstract generalizations. In addition, what is designated real and true acquires a sense of being higher in value ('more human') and of carrying legitimate authority ('regulative and imperative'). Following a trajectory similar to that traced in Marx's analysis (1867/1990, pp. 125-177) of use value, exchange value, and commodity fetishism, particular perspectives (unlike) are transformed into general (like) perspectives (concepts) which are transformed into reality, truth, goodness, and authority.

Whether in the more mundane pragmatic interest of shared communication, or the more explicitly political interests of groups exercising power and authority, the conflation of the particular into the general renders some aspects and understandings of the world real, true, and good at the expense of contingency, dynamism, and particularity. In other words, social actors work to fix relations, perspectives, and concepts in ways advantageous to their particular

positions and interests. It is here that Marx and Nietzsche cross paths. In the concluding section that follows, I attempt to tease out the potential of their partial overlap in the service of a radical politics absent assumptions concerning a general social perspective, truth, or set of interests.

The Question of Ideology in Light of Perspectival Knowledge

In their respective approaches, Marx and Nietzsche are each committed to understanding the sources out of which historical forms of consciousness emerge and acquire social compulsion. Both critique the creation and reproduction of static universal concepts that work to superficially freeze as real and true a set of general perspectives, ideas, and interests that are fundamentally particular, situated, and historically in flux.

Marx works to uncover the multiple roots of ideological forms of consciousness in order to make possible the achievement of an undistorted recognition of the true nature of alienated social relations. This work leads Marx to demonstrate the historical trajectories of social production and their increasingly complex divisions of labor which, in turn, lead to an examination of the processes of commodity production and the alienated social relations that emerge from inverted social formations. Finally, Marx identifies the conflation of the particular interests of dominant classes into apparently general social interests as a final moment of ideological consciousness. The dissolution of ideological consciousness requires a radical transformation in social relations of production. Due to its own immanent logic of accumulation, the capitalist mode of production is poised to bring about its own ruin and replacement (Marx, 1867/1990). The decline of capitalism and the emergence of less alienated ways of being in the world would, given Marx's logic, provide the conditions of possibility for the resolution of our inverted forms of consciousness. The possibility of no longer being tied to narrow material or

mental tasks, of no longer remaining at the mercy of wages and the invisible but all-powerful market, and of no longer producing commodities for the profit of the few, all gesture towards a decrease in our experience of estrangement from ourselves, from each other, and from the natural world. The question that remains is: what, given this general schema, does Marx's suggestion that '… practical need – will have become humanized and *the conflict between man's [particular] individual sensuous existence and his [general] species-existence will have been superseded*' (1844/1992c, p. 241, emphasis mine) signify? Perhaps what is meant is that with basic human needs met, differences in interests between particular individuals and the larger society will dissipate – or at least be rendered relatively inconsequential. Or perhaps this is meant to gesture towards the possibility that, absent structural exploitation and alienation, the satisfaction of the broad human interest in freedom can be realized by each and all.

Such interpretations of the relationship between the particular and the general seem plausible and, for those working in the Marxist tradition at least, inspiring. Nevertheless, it may do well to reconsider the ramifications brought to bear from taking Nietzsche's perspectivalism seriously. Like Marx, Nietzsche understands the consciousness of social actors in relation to their social relations - as expressions of particular interests. Also like Marx, Nietzsche demonstrates how particular perspectives, ideas, and interests are transformed into relatively ossified, apparently general facts of the matter. Finally, like Marx, Nietzsche illustrates that the force for disrupting old ways of knowing and being and of creating new ways of knowing and being is to be located in power and desire – politics and ethics. Change occurs through active transformations in social relations. However, unlike Marx, Nietzsche's analysis of consciousness and its transformations throws into question the possibility of a general social interest by which political or ethical practices could be judged, in any ultimate epistemological sense, as more or

less real, true, good, or authoritative. Whatever interests take pride of place as general social interests would not for that matter be any less perspectival, historical, and particularly-situated in definition, meaning, and substance, nor any less open to contestation and transformation. For Nietzsche, a transformation in consciousness constitutes a series of sidereal expressions rather than an uncovering or an arrival. The recognition that relations of power lie behind processes of conceptualization does not lend itself self-evidently to a political project that seeks to overturn exploitative power relations *if* such an overturning is intended as a strategy for securing transparency between thought and experience. This recognition can serve to motivate action towards *particular* political projects of overcoming. However, liberation cannot stem from, nor arrive at, a general social transparency and interest if a general social transparency and interest is illusory. From this perspective, liberatory practices, like conscious thought, can only ever be the transformation of particular social relations towards particular interests informed by particular perspectives – which, as perspectives of social relations, must remain in historical flux.

The question then becomes: what is to be gained by the deflation of general social interests into particular interests? What is at stake? The move away from designating a set of interests as universally real and true creates spaces for particular truths to exist without the risk of their being shelved under the label of ideology in favor of those claiming possession of a more real or correct consciousness or political practice. Drawing sharp distinctions between real and true general social interests and merely partial interests risks designating a particular – however radical – set of interests, values, and desires as *the* real and true general social interests, values, and desires. Simply put, it risks resurrecting the ideology meant to be extinguished.

Political imaginations, desires, and projects emerge historically, from multiple particularly-situated positions and perspectives. They are not and do not remain static or

univocal. In the short-term, the assumption of a more correct political imagination and practice has the potential to overshadow or exclude critical ideas and actions that may overlap with, challenge, or compete with interests and projects assuming pride of place. One need only consider the debates revolving around the tactics, strategies, and goals of the contemporary American Left. The questions of whether one comprehensive social movement can or should be marshaled for the sake of its strength in numbers, whether distinct groups should focus their demands on particular issues while working in solidarity with different but related groups, or whether different groups require some degree of distance for the sake of concerted focus and against threats of cooptation all demand sustained reflection.

In the long term, political ideas and actions shift in character, scope, and aim. The search for a general social consciousness and political practice denies the necessarily multiple lived positions and perspectives from which ideas, interests, and goals emerge. Paradoxically, it may be in the overall interest of a society to remain open to particularly-positioned, historically-shifting ways of moving forward, however fraught with contention such untidy politics must be. If we follow Marx, for example, in arguing that human flourishing in the realm of freedom is an interest that weaves together and thereby transcends the distinction between the particular individual and the general social totality, we can still pause to ask what exactly is meant by the concept of 'human flourishing.' Of what, exactly, does this consist and does it consist of the same attributes across individuals, groups, or societies? Is the meaning of human flourishing open to challenge and change? Problems that may register as flippant theoretically might nevertheless take on a serious tone in the sphere of lived political practice.

The puzzle that remains is whether Nietzsche's playfully serious perspectival approach can, in the last instance, be brought into productive collaboration with Marx's critique of

ideological consciousness and with Marx's larger political visions of human plenty and freedom. Disunity and general ineffectiveness are the concerns to be immediately leveled at a less than general approach to truth and action, especially in relation to struggles such as that of the working classes that are straightforwardly global in consequence. Can political critique and struggle be effective in the absence of a real and true general social interest, without a solid or secure epistemic warrant? Is the political risk of allowing multiple perspectives and interests, along with shifting imaginations and strategies, worth the inclusive but possibly disjointed dynamism? My reading here gestures cautiously in the affirmative. Struggles can be understood and championed from numerous perspectives emerging from any number of partial motivations and towards a multitude of short and long-term goals and desires. Social actors and groups can continue the work of recognizing the alienating character of historical and contemporary social formations and, from these partially overlapping recognitions, seek various but connected ways of struggling for better visions of the good life. The ground and the justification of critique, struggle, and imagination are not 'out there' waiting to be revealed, but rather always-already exist as a series of social relations. The ground and the justification exist as they shift.

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CHAPTER THREE:

The Question of Perspectivalism in Light of Relativism: From Agnostic Symmetry to Agonistic Distinctions

> Perhaps nobody yet has been truthful enough about what 'truthfulness' is.
>
> –Nietzsche, "Epigrams and Interludes," *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism 177

The central argument motivating the preceding chapter was that a Nietzschean perspectivalist approach to questions of truth can be fruitfully deployed in relationship with Marx's critiques of ideology – though only after Marx's presumption of the possibility of epistemological transparency and universalism is challenged. By focusing attention on the necessarily situated and partial character of knowledge, perspectivalism calls into question the possibility of attaining any singular standpoint from which objective Truth can be universally discerned. Rather than remain at the important but insufficient level of epistemology, my interpretive intervention of reading ideological critique via a perspectivalist lens ultimately pivots around questions of politics and ethics. In calling into question the possibility of developing a universally shared epistemological viewpoint, the preceding argument goes on to call into question the possibility of developing a universally-shared political imagination and set of emancipatory projects. The central contention presented suggested that, far from proving a distraction or detraction from serious and sustained projects of political emancipation, approaching truth in a perspectival fashion can potentially encourage a wider and more inclusive set of ideas and practices – *because of* and *not in spite of* perspectivalism's critique of universal vantage points and claims to knowledge.

Nevertheless, the possibility of epistemological plurality devolving into political and ethical relativism remains and requires serious and sustained reflection. Is it possible to perform

a critique without a – at least potential – universal epistemological foundation? On what basis, if not some external and general criteria of truth, can we *call into question* a particular claim to knowledge or truth? Conversely, on what basis, if not some external criteria of truth, can social actors justifiably *affirm* a particular claim to knowledge or truth? How, simply put, can we decide between better and worse claims to knowledge and, by extension, between better and worse practices and ways of being in the world?

This chapter considers Nietzsche's warnings of a looming epistemological catastrophe as aids for reflecting on the temptation of relativism presented by Nietzsche's own perspectival approach to knowledge. By reading his announcement of the 'death of God' through his reflections on the relationship between modern Western science and religion, an understanding of the relationship between Nietzsche's perspectivalism and relativism is clarified. In order to bring into relief both the moments of significant overlap and the even more significant moments of departure or denunciation that Nietzsche's perspectivalism can be understood to share with philosophical relativism, the chapter begins with a consideration of relativism as it manifests in the schools of the Strong Program's Social Studies of Knowledge and in Actor-Network Theory. Between these two approaches to the question of truth, the issues of epistemological and ontological relativism, symmetrical analyses of truth and falsity, and normatively agnostic evaluations occupy center stage. I contend that particular elements of Nietzsche's perspectivalism *can* plausibly be understood to rest comfortably within these relativistic approaches to knowledge. Nevertheless and crucially, Nietzsche's answer to the question of what grounds knowledge once again moves the issue of relativism away from the realm of the epistemological and toward the realms of the political and the ethical. By way of taking into account his warnings and tentative hope regarding the death of God in this chapter, as well as the

reflections surrounding the question of ideology in the previous chapter, I conclude by considering the potentials and the limitations of Nietzsche's provocation that "the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (*BT*, Attempt at a Self-Criticism: 5), and that what is now necessary is "*to look at science* [wisdom] *in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life*" (*BT*, Attempt at a Self-Criticism: 2). If I read him correctly, Nietzsche's contention is that questions of epistemology transform into questions of aesthetics and ethics; I add to this 'ground' the question of politics.[42] Approaches to knowledge and to truth rest on historically particular values, desires, and drives – ways of being in the world. Having tracked the potentials and potential pitfalls of perspectivalism against the temptations of relativism, we are lead back to one of the central animating questions of this work as a whole: what are the consequences for political imaginations and practices in the face of the deconstruction of traditional understandings of epistemology, in the face of less-than-stable, less-than-universal conceptions of truth and ideology?

I continue my interpretive intervention here by way of a meditation upon the character and consequences of epistemological relativism. Considering his account of perspectivalism as it was presented in the previous chapter, it is plausible to place Nietzsche within the tradition of philosophical relativism. Nietzsche's contention that claims to knowledge are by turns simply pragmatic, linguistically-based, perspectival and so socially-constructed, and also prone to unwarranted conflation into The Truth of a matter – therefore meriting cautious skepticism – appears to leave precious little opportunity to arrive at a classificatory conclusion other than relativism.[43] Were these indeed the punchlines of Nietzsche's understanding of knowledge, I

[42] The looming issue of Nietzsche's own political and cultural sensibilities occupies the following chapter.
[43] In light of the reading of Nietzsche in relation to Marx offered in the previous chapter, it is helpful to remember Marxists after Marx who saw just such relativism as central to Nietzsche's perspectivalism. Lukács (1923/1972, 1962/1980) provides perhaps the single fiercest version of this critique. Lukács reads Nietzsche's discussions of

would concur that his analysis fits comfortably, if not technically, enough within this philosophical approach. As previously argued in relation to Marx's critique of ideology, it will be structurally helpful in assessing perspectivalism's affinities with relativism to first work through the central theoretical characteristics and consequences of relativism as it is conceived and practiced by two leading schools of thought in the field of science and technology studies – the Strong Program and Actor-Network Theory, respectively. After outlining each approaches' key theoretical assumptions, I return to perspectivalism to demonstrate that, despite some not

perspectivalism as accounts that work to usher in a series of politically reactionary viewpoints under the mendacious guise of 'agnostic' epistemological relativism. Far from creating and maintaining spaces for multiply-situated subjects' understandings to be taken into account, Nietzsche's perspectivalism is a thinly-veiled attempt to render serious socio-political critique and change impotent by calling into question the validity of relatively standard and secure objective truth. In the process of destabilizing a generally-held objective viewpoint, perspectivalism robs social actors of the capacity to legitimately claim natural or social evidence, interest, or position x as definitely more real and true than evidence, interest, or position y (1923/1972, p. 187ff, 1962/1980, pp. 322-324). Deprived of such abilities of discernment, social actors are left with a series of competing understandings and meanings of the world without sufficient power or legitimacy to establish and act upon any solidly shared facts or principles. Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and illusion must, on this reading, devolve into a flaccid relativism, granting equal weight and right to claims and meanings up to and including claims and meanings in outright contradiction with one another. Lukács contends that such intellectual paralysis wrapped in the apparently radical cloaks of particular subjectivity is not at all incidental and in fact works to serve Nietzsche's real animating interest, namely, counterrevolutionary anti-socialism (1962/1980, p. 380ff). Nietzsche's perspectival approach to questions of truth and illusion is at bottom an "innocent" epistemological workaround that allows him to marshal an indirect defense against the possibility of radical socialist demands, while simultaneously providing cover and legitimation for the bourgeois status quo. In other words, Nietzsche's approach to epistemology works as an "indirect apologetics of capitalism" and capitalism's attendant projects of bourgeois imperialism (1962/1980, p. 320). Simply put, the destabilization of a general or universal set of objective truths provides Nietzsche with a "hyper-revolutionary gesture" capable of masking his counterrevolutionary political agenda (1962/1980, p. 321). Seemingly agnostic epistemological relativism is in fact a dogmatically reactionary form of politics. Against this blanket rejection, Habermas' (1968/1971a, 1985/1998) engagement with Nietzsche's work is significantly more generous – generous in the sense that Habermas accepts Nietzsche's guiding assumptions regarding the conventional character of knowledge. The interest-ladenness of knowledge is as central to Habermas' epistemic project as it to Nietzsche's, and Habermas shows little sign of Lukács' reluctance to take seriously the conventional or pragmatic relationships between truths, interests, and actions (1985/1998, p. 122). In spite of this more generous approach, Habermas nevertheless concludes that Nietzsche, "simultaneously developed and misinterpreted [the]… connection between knowledge and interests (1968/1971a, p. 300)." Nietzsche's presuppositions regarding the necessarily historical, interested, and fungible character of knowledge are plausible; it is the series of conclusions supposedly arrived at by way of these more or less sound presuppositions that Habermas rejects as epistemically flawed and politically unacceptable. While his own rejection of positivism leads Habermas towards a theory of intersubjective knowledge and interests, he claims that an otherwise similar rejection of positivism leads Nietzsche into the epistemically impotent position of radical subjectivism – and, from there, to intellectual and political nihilism by way of a loss of hope in reason, truth and democratic-liberal values (1985/1998, p. 118ff).

insignificant overlap, Nietzsche's approach to questions of truth cannot be shoehorned to fit with relativist approaches to questions of the same.

Perspectivalism: Relativism by Another Name?

I. The Strong Program

I turn first to a consideration of the work of David Bloor and Barry Barnes. Their Strong Program, or sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) seeks to demonstrate that epistemology is social 'all the way down.'[44] 'Strong' here refers to the desire to understand the internal constitution of truth from a social perspective. A so-called weak approach to the sociology of knowledge would follow Robert Merton (1973a, 1973b, 1973c) in examining the external institutions and norms in which otherwise sociologically off-limits truth exists. The Strong Program maintains that scholars must expand their investigations from instances of error caused by external sources – including instances of illusions or ideology – to the causal character of truth itself. In other words, the Strong Program aims to demonstrate that facts and truths are constructions achieved via a necessarily social series of processes, in the process contending that the epistemological validity of truth claims is fundamentally relative in character. The central contention motivating the Strong Program is that *all* knowledge – truth as well as error – can and should be explained sociologically. Both the construction and the content of knowledge are fundamentally social in character.

> The sociologist is concerned with knowledge, including scientific knowledge, purely as a natural phenomenon. The appropriate definition of knowledge will therefore be rather different from that of either the layman or the philosopher. Instead of defining it as true belief – or perhaps, justified true belief – knowledge for the sociologist is whatever people take to be knowledge. It consists in those

[44]See Barnes (1972), Berger & Luckmann (1966), Daston & Galison (2007), Fleck (1935/1981), Kitcher (1983), Knorr-Cetina (1999), Kuhn (1962/1996), Pickering (1995), Shapin & Schaffer (1985), Traweek (1992), and Winch (1958/2008) for similar contentions and explorations.

> beliefs which people confidently hold to and live by. In particular the sociologist will be concerned with beliefs which are taken for granted or institutionalized, or invested with authority by groups of people (Bloor 1976/1991, p. 5).

The classificatory *categories* that social actors and groups construct and deploy in order to organize and make sense of their worlds, the evaluative *criteria* by which objects and ideas are judged true or false, rational or irrational, and the particular *objects* deemed worthy of initial and continuing investigation are each historically-specific and social – often explicitly political – in nature (Bloor 1976/1991, pp. 3, 5-6). If it is to be adequately understood, not only how and why but *what* we understand to be knowledge requires a social analysis.[45]

The Strong Program's approach that Bloor (1976/1991, p. 7ff) initially formulates consists of four central tenets: the need to study all knowledge causally, impartially, symmetrically, and reflexively. Briefly, 'causality' refers to a concern with understanding the conditions which give rise to different types of knowledge. The search for causality is a search to explain the creation, reproduction, and transformation of knowledge in and across time and place. How and why does a particular collectivity share a set of ideas and practices relative to particular objects? What causes a social group to arrive at a knowledge of witches? What causes a social group to stop believing in the truth of witches? 'Impartiality' refers to a commitment to remain intellectually neutral with respect to what is considered true and false, rational and irrational. In order to explain a belief in the existence of witches, a sociologist may not allow her individual (dis)belief in witches to interfere with her ability to locate and analyze the causal conditions that explain the knowledge claims under investigation. Individual and collective

[45] Such a sociological approach to knowledge is a central component of the work of Emile Durkheim (1912/1995, esp. pp. 421, 431-440). Bloor is chagrined that the 'hints' Durkheim gestures towards have rarely been taken seriously in mainstream sociological studies of knowledge (1976/1991, p. 4). The symmetry principle advanced by the Strong Program explicitly parallels Durkheim's efforts to causally explain the creation and reproduction of both sacred and profane knowledges and rituals (1912/1995, pp. 412-417).

presumptions regarding the truth or falsity of a claim cannot inform an analysis whose aim it is to provide adequate explanations. 'Symmetry' refers to a concern with offering the same kind of causal explanation for knowledge deemed true or rational and knowledge deemed false or irrational. Whether a belief in witches is deemed true or false itself requires explanation. In other words, the fact of belief in the truth of a claim to knowledge and the fact of disbelief in the truth of a claim to knowledge are themselves proper objects of examination in need of causal explanation. 'Reflexivity' refers to the imperative that the Strong Program itself remain amenable to its own principles of causality, impartiality, and symmetry. The sociology of scientific knowledge cannot and ought not be taken for an Archimedean reference point against which other types of knowledge are explained and understood.[46]

The intervention that such an approach makes to understanding claims to truth and illusion is considerable. Bloor directly challenges the autonomy of truth that traditional philosophers and sociologists of knowledge explicitly or implicitly take for granted. As Bloor (1976/1991, p. 11) demonstrates, in order for a particular subset of human knowledge to be cordoned off as autonomous and treated as the baseline against which erroneous knowledge is evaluated, the sphere of autonomous knowledge must be conceptualized from a transcendental or teleological perspective. Knowledge that is presumed *a priori* to be progressing towards a predetermined understanding or goal remains beyond the scope of sociological scrutiny (ibid).[47]

[46] A fruitful engagement might be made between the emphasis on causality as both means and end in both the Strong Program and Actor-Network Theories and Nietzsche's reflections on the assumptions surrounding the characteristics of causality as (psychologically understandable) category mistakes. See in particular "The Four Great Errors" in *Twilight* (1889/1997b), and the discussion of free will in the first essay of the *Genealogy* (I:13ff). The will-to-truth, including the drive to adduce causes as explanations for all phenomena is taken up in chapter five.

[47] See also Barnes (1977, pp. 11-19). Barnes makes (the rather Marxist point) that 'old' knowledge is constitutive of 'new' knowledge (1977, pp. 20-21). More accurate knowledge and more rational methods are partially motivated by, and constructed out of, the now allegedly false or irrational knowledges and methods of times and places past. The fact that knowledge is continually *generated* should not involve the mistaken parallel assumption that knowledge is constantly generated *towards* some ultimate and final series of understandings (1977, pp. 24-25).

For a sphere of knowledge to come under scrutiny requires an acknowledgement of the fundamentally socially-constructed character of that knowledge. To acknowledge the fundamentally socially-constructed character of knowledge is to disabuse transcendental and teleological presuppositions. To disabuse the *a priori* existence or progressive character of knowledge is to call into question the very foundation of a normative and rational philosophy or sociology of knowledge. The logic at work here is that if truth and falsity or rationality and irrationality – either as classifications, content, or criteria – are themselves taken to be the objects under investigation, then by definition they cannot serve as the basis upon and against which knowledge is organized and evaluated. The contention being made here is that it is nonsensical to appeal *to* truth in order to *explain* truth. The historically-specific practices of classification, exploration, and evaluation as such require explanation.[48] Here we have a first and significant moment of overlap between relativism and Nietzsche's perspectivalism. As it is for the Strong Program, so is truth understood as a social construction by Nietzsche. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, for Nietzsche what is designated to be true or false is relative to the particular meanings afforded particular concepts by particular social actors in particular times and places; in other words, truth is created rather than presumed or arrived at. In this sense, Nietzsche's perspectivalism is very much in line with one of the central assumptions guiding the Strong Program's relativistic approach to knowledge.

A relativistic sociological approach to knowledge also works to discredit individualistic empiricism as an adequate basis for discerning truth from error. While Bloor recognizes that individual sense perception serves an important role in orienting individual social actors within

[48] Bloor provides a provocative demonstration of such an approach in his study of mathematical logic and practice (1976/1991, p. 107ff, especially pp. 110-118 "Is 'One' a Number?"). See also Kitcher (1983). For a related consideration of the social character of standards, see Lampland & Leigh Starr (2009).

their immediate physical milieu, he rejects the conflation of this limited truth with the sweeping claim that all empirically real knowledge can be traced back to individual sense perceptions.[49] True and false knowledge are meaningful claims collectively shared among individual social actors. The status of knowledge claims as true or false, rational or irrational, can only be understood and explained collectively:

> Does not individual experience, as a matter of fact, take place within a framework of assumptions, standards, purposes and meanings which are shared? Society furnishes the mind of the individual with these things and also provides the conditions whereby they can be sustained and reinforced. (Bloor, 1976/1991, p. 15)

Individualistic empiricism provides a limited framework for appreciating the social significance of knowledge claims. A sociological study of knowledge, by definition, requires an appreciation of the intersubjective, historically-specific conditions of knowledge. Barnes (1977) echoes and expands Bloor's critique of individualistic empiricism. Individualistic empiricism not only fails to account for the fundamentally social nature of knowledge; additionally, individual empiricist understandings of knowledge serve to render individual social actors passive and disinterested. Conventional empiricist accounts of knowledge begin their explanations by imagining an isolated and unbiased individual perceiving the unmediated reality of nature. What is required is to begin explanations by establishing the fact that social actors consciously and collectively work together to organize and manipulate their social and natural milieu. The activity of perception is always-already socially-mediated (Barnes, 1977, p. 2). What social actors perceive, how they perceive it, and what a given perception signifies cannot be adequately explained by reference to isolated sense perceptions of nature.

> Knowledge is not produced by passively perceiving individuals, but by interacting social groups engaged in particular activities. And it is evaluated communally and not by isolated individual judgments…An appropriate concrete model which

[49] See also, Barnes (1977, pp. 1-6).

> integrates these various themes can be provided by considering a society's knowledge as analogous to its techniques or its conventional forms of artistic expression, both of which are readily understood as culturally transmitted, and as capable of modification and development to suit particular requirements. (Barnes, 1977, p. 2)

Barnes (1977, p. 6) pushes the contention even further by suggesting that there *are no individual perceptions* that are not also interested representations, i.e., mediations. Social actors organize, interpret, and express elements of their particular natural and social milieu. These elements are meaningfully brought into combinations in order to express and serve context-conditioned aims and desires (Barnes, 1977). As Barnes understands it, knowledge is fundamentally instrumental in character.

While it is possible to read Nietzsche to be suggesting that, in the last instance, sense perceptions are the final – or first? – basis out of which abstracted concepts emerge, it would be mistaken to further deduce that from concepts there emerges directly and straightforwardly a conception of truth. As for Bloor and Barnes, so too it is the case for Nietzsche that for truths to carry meaning, they must be couched in a social context and remain relative to social interests and purposes. Truth is a component of a "legislation of language" and so cannot be reduced to individual sense perceptions (Nietzsche, *TL*, I: p. 81).[50] In order for something like meaningful designations of truth to exist at all requires, given the presumption of the constructed nature of knowledge, a social context in which such meanings can be deployed, resignified, or retired. Insofar as one remains at the level of epistemology, Nietzsche's assumptions can be read as

[50] See also Breazeale's (1979) introductory remarks to "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" and related early essays. Certainly though, Nietzsche's persistent concern with 'life' – itself very much concerned with individual but also social and cultural physiology – and its relationship to knowledge is crucial. Whether or to what extent a concern with life, the body, and sensual experience renders someone a positivistic materialist still requires unpacking. These concerns will be taken up in chapter five.

sharing the Strong Program's understanding of knowledge as being pragmatically instrumental in character.

The punchline for the Strong Program is *not* that knowledge, because it is actively constructed and conditioned by interests, is somehow unreal (Barnes, 1977, p. 10).[51] Even less is the point to discount the reality of the empirical world 'out there' (Barnes, 1977, p. 10). To the contrary, the ability of social actors to deploy the categories and criteria that they do deploy requires that particular, interested, instrumental knowledge claims actually relate in some fashion to the world. Barnes is clear: "…knowledge is found useful precisely because the world is as it is…" (Barnes, 1977, p. 10). The social construction of knowledge is instrumental to the extent that the world in which interests are expressed is real and responsive. Bloor's and Barnes' approach is realist in the sense that it acknowledges an independently existing natural sphere in and against which particular instrumental knowledge claims are socially constituted and negotiated. Bloor's and Barnes' approach is simultaneously relativist in the sense that it seeks to explain all such particular instrumental knowledge claims using a symmetrical, naturalistic, and causal method. The axis around which the Strong Program's naturalistic and relativistic stance pivots is a methodological one. This approach to questions of knowledge does not dismiss the fact of, or the need for, normative evaluation; what is rejected is a normative methodological approach that judges the epistemological validity of claims to knowledge beforehand rather than after the fact of investigation (Bloor, 1976/1991, p. 12). There is a crucial distinction between explaining the contexts and conditions that give rise causally to knowledge claims concerning

[51] To get a sense of the consternation generated by the Strong Program in the traditional philosophy of science community see Feyerabend (1975/2010), Friedman (1998), Hacking (2000), Pinch (1997), and Zammito (2004). The consternation generated by science and technology studies and postmodern theorizing more broadly is the subject of Sokal & Bricmont's (1999) now infamous *Fashionable Nonsense*. See also Gross & Levitt (1994) and Ross' (1996) rejoinder.

witches, and advocating on behalf of – or against – claims concerning the truth or reality of witches. Likewise, there is a distinction between explaining the contexts and conditions that give rise, causally, to a belief in the indeterminacy principle in quantum mechanics and advocating for or against the truth and reality of the principle. It is possible to retain a strongly normative perspective with respect to particular claims to knowledge while simultaneously providing a relativistic explanation of how and why particular claims come to be created, reproduced, or transformed (Barnes, 1977, p. 25).[52] The Strong Program is not in the business of adjudicating the validity of claims. It is in the business of explaining the causes of claims. Ultimately, despite its radical critique of traditional approaches to knowledge in philosophy and sociology, the Strong Program's motivation is to render investigation and explanation of knowledge more rigorous and accurate. In a paradoxical and persuasive move, Barnes and Bloor (1982, pp. 21-29) contend that "far from being a threat to the scientific understanding of forms of knowledge, relativism is required by it." A relativistic sociological approach to claims of truth is in fact modeled on the actual (if unacknowledged) assumptions and operations of the natural sciences. The Strong Program appropriates from the natural sciences a commitment to naturalistic causality whose adequacy requires epistemological relativism, i.e., symmetry.

It is in these final moments of the formulation of the Strong Program that Nietzsche's perspectivalism diverges and exposes its unique approach to the question of truth. The Strong Program's methodological relativism is effectively rescued from the charge of total relativism by its deployment of ontological realism in the last instance. In other words, the Strong Program is

[52] "It is sometimes felt that such arguments must be rejected simply because they represent a concession to relativism… it is felt that to do otherwise is to provide a license for any kind of nonsensical thought, and to display a lack of interest in what the world is really like… Nobody is enjoined to value all knowledge equally, or to choose which they will employ with a coin or a die. The prejudice of the argument is rather thoroughly naturalistic; it is naturalism which is being employed and advocated. The naturalistic equivalence of the knowledge of different cultures is merely a finding, something which happens to be the case" (Barnes, 1977, p. 25).

able to maintain that different social contexts allow for different understandings and evaluations of truth without maintaining that these myriad truths constitute the Truth of reality as it Really exists outside and apart from particular social actors and conditions. This ontological realism serves as the Strong Program's ultimate foundation. Nietzsche's perspectivalism does not rest on such a foundation; whether or not a real essence inheres in the things of this world - an independent noumena-like truth of reality - human beings are not in any case privy to it, rendering the questions of demonstrating (or even pre-supposing) its existence and comparing various particular truths to it is a futile endeavor. In a philosophically technical sense, Nietzsche cannot be considered a relativist on this point alone: that without an independent referent against which individually-invested ideas and facts can be compared, there is no sense in which the particular ideas and facts can be considered relative to one another. Such a technical answer to the question of Nietzsche's relationship to relativism is simple, elegant, and utterly unconvincing.

Beyond such technical considerations, what does convincingly set Nietzsche's perspectivalism apart from the Strong Program's iteration of relativism lies in the Strong Program's claim to methodological agnosticism in the face of their own explicit admission that there are in fact claims which are straightforwardly more real and true than others: "It is not that all beliefs are equally true or equally false, but that regardless of truth and falsity the fact of their credibility is to be seen as equally problematic… the incidence of all beliefs without exception calls for empirical investigation and must be accounted for by finding the specific, local causes of this credibility" (Barnes & Bloor, 1982, p. 23). This is a curious maneuver. On the one hand, it is understood that there is a real world 'out there,' leading some claims to be judged more valid and justifiable than others. At the same time, this admission of epistemological asymmetry – and,

implicitly, of the possibility of normative critique – is bracketed for the sake of being able to apply a non-normative causal explanation of various claims to knowledge in an agnostically symmetrical fashion.

In a move reminiscent of Weber in his *Science as a Vocation* (1917/2004), Barnes and Bloor appear to conclude that the purpose of scholarship is to lay out and explain the facts as they stand, only to step back and declare that the role of the scholar is to refrain from passing judgment either in favor of or against a particular set of facts. Such a pedagogical maneuver is reasonable when the impetus for deploying it is the avoidance of undue ideological pressure flowing from the authority of a teacher or researcher onto a relatively passive and less powerful group of students or lay folk; there is no evidence to suggest that Nietzsche would object to this conviction given such contexts. Nevertheless, when what is at stake is, to take one example, action based upon the knowledge we have surrounding climate change, then dedication to such agnostic symmetry in scholarship begins to ring hollow. The desire to maintain a distinction between epistemological analyses of the social construction of knowledge, and normative critiques of the social conditions and contexts that such knowledge emerges out of, works in just the fashion Barnes and Bloor wish to disavow. Without the power of normative critique and judgment, all claims to knowledge *are* made to appear "equally true or equally false" (1982, p. 23). By restricting their work to the level of epistemology, the Strong Program effectively presents each individual or cultural perspective as equally valid within their particular contexts. However justifiable we might find such an epistemological position, it serves to displace rather than erase the question of critique that is so central to appreciating Nietzsche's perspectivalism. Before moving to a discussion of the place and purpose of critique and value in analyses of truth,

it will help to consider the anti-realist relativism formulated by Bruno Latour in his pivotal *Science as Action* (1987).

II. Actor-Network Theory

Latour investigates concrete spaces of knowledge production in order to demonstrate how truth is constructed in and as processes of practice. His aim (1987, pp. 2-3) is to attend to the creation of "black boxes" – facts and processes taken for granted as natural and true and, as such, apparently beyond the scope of critique – in order to illustrate how and why truth and facts are not only epistemically but also ontologically social in nature. Without wishing to gloss over the animosity expressed between practitioners of the two approaches, there is significant overlap between Actor-Network Theory and the Strong Program that merits acknowledgment.[53] Actor-Network Theory's anthropological approaches to the creation and sedimentation of facts aims, like the sociological projects of the Strong Program, to explain the creation and transmission of knowledge from its historical socio-cultural points of origin to its eventual acceptance and black-boxing as indisputable truth and fact (Latour, 1987, pp. 2-3). Like the Strong Program, Actor-Network Theory shares a commitment to internal explanations of knowledge. The logic and nature of facts *as* facts are not taken as self-evident, but as in need of sustained analysis. Both approaches stress the underdetermined character of knowledge claims. Both approaches understand rationality and truth as consequences to be explained rather than as explanations or justifications. What counts as valid knowledge can only be known after it has become successfully legitimated in a particular social and historical context.[54]

Such significant similarities notwithstanding, Latour's approach to truth does make a series of essential detours from the Strong Program. Latour's reading of the Strong Program's

[53] See Bloor (1999a, 1999b) and Latour (1999)
[54] See also Collins (2004).

symmetry principle leads him to a radical understanding of the character and consequences of relativism. As we know, the symmetry principle as laid out by Bloor demands that the same kind of causal sociological explanations be made for knowledge claims deemed true or rational and knowledge claims deemed false or irrational. Latour appropriates the concept of symmetry and expands its scope, in the process significantly altering the concept's consequences. Actor-Network Theory calls into question any strict, *a priori* divide between the natural world and the social world. In addition to approaching true and false, and rational and irrational claims symmetrically, Actor-Network Theory approaches claims to objectivity as such symmetrically (Latour, 1987). Where the Strong Program's symmetry principle is contained within the sphere of subjective human knowledge *of* objective natural reality, Latour's (1987, pp. 78, 258) radicalized symmetry principle encompasses the literal nature and relationship between the subjective and objective as such.[55] The distinction between the natural and the social is repeatedly renegotiated, and so what is understood to be 'really' real and what is understood to be constructed remain perpetually open to investigation. Simply put, Actor-Network Theory extends the principle of symmetry from the realm of epistemology to the realm of ontology. From this plausible – if radical – premise, Latour goes on to argue that analysts of knowledge cannot successfully or justifiably explain anything in advance of the actions and pronouncements of knowledge producers themselves. Latour not only insists that analysts of knowledge production cannot presuppose what constitutes the natural and what constitutes the social, but also that analysts are not justified in extrapolating from existing social conditions and contexts to explanations of the construction of facts and truths:

> … there has been not a word yet on social classes, on capitalism, on economic infrastructure, on big business, on gender, not a single discussion of culture, not even an allusion to the social impact of technology. This is not my fault. I

[55] See also, Latour (1993).

> suggested that we follow scientists and engineers at work and it turns out that *they do not know what society is made of,* any more than they know the nature of Nature beforehand. It is because they know about neither they are so busy *trying out* new associations, creating an inside world in which to work, displacing interest, negotiating facts, reshuffling groups and recruiting new allies… To raise these questions we have to wait until scientists and their allies… have finished their work. (Latour, 1987 p. 142)

Analysts of knowledge production are enjoined to enter into the spaces of actual knowledge producers and trace what it is these particular social actors do and say. Only after examining science in action can analysts report about the conditions and convictions, the contingent constructions, of what nature here and now *is* and what the social here and now *is*. Nature and society are consequences of particular actions, not causes that can be marshaled to explain themselves.[56] As knowledge is created, renegotiated, and transformed, the qualities attaching to particular relations, elements, and processes themselves transform. What is understood as objective or subjective is open to negotiation in practice, and can only be pronounced with certainty after creation and contention have receded (Latour, 1987, p. 78).

On the one hand and to his credit, questioning the apparently neat distinction between subjective actors and objective conditions renders Latour's version of the symmetry principle methodologically consistent. At the same time, Latour's analysis of knowledge construction shares with the Strong Program the desire to grant peculiar concessions to those social phenomena that are otherwise being called into question; both approaches seek to observe and explain without providing any sense of normative critique.[57] In the process of troubling tidy

[56] "Since the settlement of a controversy is the *cause* of Nature's representation, not its consequence, we can never use this consequence, Nature, to explain how and why a controversy has been settled. Since the settlement of a controversy is the *cause* of Society's stability, we cannot use Society to explain how and why a controversy has been settled. We should consider symmetrically the efforts to enrol human and non-human resources" (Latour, 1987, p. 258).

[57] See also Latour & Woolgar (1979). In a later (2004) essay, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," Latour reflects upon the worrisome appropriation of central science studies concepts and approaches (including the reluctance to allow controversies to culminate in relative certainty, consensus, and closure, a penchant for the underdetermination of theories by facts, and symmetrical approaches to truths and

divisions between natural objects and social subjects, Latour goes beyond the Strong Program by plausibly demonstrating the contingent nature of both the natural and the social. However, Latour's reinterpretation of the symmetry principle fails at the moment when its otherwise radically critical insights are most necessary. If recourse to the pre-existing natural and social conditions, relations, interests, beliefs, aims, or constraints of social actors remain bracketed in the course of coming to understand claims to knowledge, (Latour 1987, pp. 62, 142) then explanations must emerge in and through performative actions. Normative critique

falsehoods) by actors involved in such projects as climate change denial and 9/11 conspiracies. In the ceaseless deployment of critique and deconstruction in the realm of epistemology, mainstream science studies has provided conceptual fodder for reactionary political agendas at the same time that it has neglected the very real political and ethical dimensions of the actors, cultures, and agendas otherwise given such critical attention in science and technology studies' accounts. Latour regrets that his prior work has been marshalled to such unintended projects, and suggests that the discipline of science studies as a whole is far past due for a reckoning of how and why it is that STS has (allegedly) come to hold a curious series of intellectual alliances. As one step towards dissolving the possibility for such appropriations and seeming alliances, Latour suggests we consider a turn toward a version of realism – but a realism of 'matters of concern' as opposed to 'matters of fact.' Relative to his previous approaches, this reevaluation of the place of politics and ethics in the domain of science studies is a welcome development on Latour's part. Still, it gives pause to note that Latour's understanding of what it means to attend to matters of concern involves a self-conscious step *away from* critique rather than a reiteration and reinforcement of it. As he says, "…the danger [is] no longer…coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact…but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as ideological biases! While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices" (2004, p. 227)? For Latour, the problem is that questions of social epistemology have been so successful in demonstrating the ideological, discriminatory, and exploitative components and goals of seemingly objective concepts and facts of science and technology that we must now turn our attention to making sure that real facts and the political and ethical matters of concern tangled up with them are taken seriously. Leaving aside the question to what extent we have, in fact, been successful at demonstrating the work of ideology, Latour's point is fair enough - we cannot afford to deconstruct ad infinitum in the face of serious political and ethical consequences. What is worth noting is that, outside of mainstream philosophy and sociology of science, these concerns are always already assumed. Drawing explicit attention to political and ethical matters of concern – whether conceptualized in a realist or some other fashion – explicitly structures the assumptions and approaches of scholars working within Marxist, feminist, critical race and sexuality, and postcolonial paradigms in both science studies proper and in its variously contributing disciplines. It seems to me that to lean away from critique for the sake of political and ethical concerns is to give far too much away to those same unsavory political peoples and projects that Latour is so rightly anxious about. To impose my own metaphor into his meditation, if scholars of social knowledge and epistemology do not wish to have such people in our beds, we should muster the intellectual and political organization to kick them out rather than abandon our hard fought (and ongoing!) critical work. Rather than yield to an apparently pragmatic realism or anxiously contribute to unfair caricatures of the critical sensibilities of studies of social epistemology, I contend that a move more akin to that of Donna Haraway (1988) is liable to prove more forceful and successful. Haraway expresses a series of concerns regarding radical social constructionism, but her refusal to shift focus from one pole (projects of radical critique and deconstruction) to another (attending to matters of fact and concern) suggests that this presentation of our options is in fact a false and unproductive dichotomy. Pace Latour, critique has not – and cannot afford to – run out of steam.

notwithstanding, Actor-Network Theory displaces its own explanatory aims. What *about* the performance of the action? What are *its* conditions of possibility? There is a crucial difference between acknowledging the underdetermined boundary between the natural and the social, and arguing that underdetermined relations, elements, and processes are explanatorily off-limits. In bracketing the admissibility of social interests and relations as justified elements in causal explanations, Actor-Network Theory remains at the level of description. What producers of knowledge claim to be facts and truths of the matter are such – the job of the analyst of these practices is to illustrate their processes, not to contest the substantive claims or findings.[58] There is a difference between demonstrating that nature and society are in perpetual states of negotiation unable to serve as the final arbiters of epistemological validity, and contending that prior and presently understood natural and social elements and conditions are inadmissible as evidence for explanations. You may not be able to marshal a static conception of Society in the service of explaining the construction of a particular social fact. Surely, though, you can marshal any number of historically contingent social relations and interests at play in a particular historical moment as elements of partial explanation.

As I read him, the metaphor of networks performs the epistemological heavy-lifting Latour otherwise insists cannot be performed by appeals to nature and society. The working up of material on which further practice takes place, the partial marshalling of past ideas and beliefs into current creative thinking and conceptualization, the necessarily interconnected and shifting web of objects and subjects – all of these relations are captured by the metaphor of a network. Networks are made up of stronger and weaker ties (actual and potential intellectual, political, and

[58] "We cannot be more relativist than the scientists about these parts and keep on denying evidence where no one else does. Why? Because *the cost of dispute is too high for an average citizen*, even if he or she is a historian or sociologist of science" (Latour, 1987, p. 100, emphasis mine).

cultural allies) between spaces of production (whose actors are actually or potentially afforded cultural legitimacy as knowledge producers for a host of socially-interested reasons) with stronger or weaker resource mobilization capabilities (preexisting and potential funding, availability of human labor time and physical space etc.).[59] If networks are metaphors for contingent social relations between actors, ideas, and material resources, then Latour's punchline seems to echo the Marxist contention – sans Marxist socio-political presumptions and analysis – that 'science *is* social relations' (Young, 1977). The question remains: How ought we understand social relations without some kind of understanding of social interests?

Latour effectively relativizes reality – not, to be sure, in order to call the *concept* of reality into question, but in order to keep the boundary and definition of reality perpetually open to contestation. In some respects, this radicalization of relativism provides a powerful approach for sociologists of knowledge. What is really natural or really social cannot be known in advance of its being collectively legitimated as really natural or really social. Nevertheless, it seems confused to draw from such a compelling premise the conclusion that analyses of knowledge are required to remain effectively apolitical by simply reporting upon whatever definition of facts, truths, and reality a particular set of social actors pronounce to be such without further analysis or critique.

The Strong Program aims to explain what members of various social and cultural groups believe to be true and false while remaining agnostic about the validity of such explanations. Actor-Network Theory hands the reins of explanation and validation to scientists and engineers who collectively constitute, negotiate, and black box knowledge. Whatever these particular social actors say truth and reality are simply is the case.

[59] See also Callon (1986).

> …when talking about a cold part of technoscience we should shift our method like the scientists themselves who, from hard-core relativists, have turned into dyed-in-the-wool realists. Nature is now taken as the cause of accurate descriptions of herself [sic]…If there is no controversy among scientists as to the status of facts, then it is useless to go on talking about interpretation, representation, a biased or distorted world-view, weak and fragile pictures of the world, unfaithful spokesmen. Nature talks straight, facts are facts. Full stop. There is nothing to add and nothing to subtract. (Latour, 1987 p. 100)

The Strong Program positions its methodological relativism against the normative rationality of traditional philosophers and sociologists of knowledge while maintaining an independently naturalistic realism as a fundamental baseline. Latour's conception of natural and social reality is relative. The relativity of Latour's reality, however, is not theoretically analogous to Bloor's and Barnes' methodological relativism. Bloor and Barnes reject *a priori* judgments within the realm of causal explanation. This realm of causal explanation is enveloped by a more fundamental natural reality. Latour rejects *a priori* demarcations of both the social and the natural. There is no further enveloping sphere in and against which Reality, capital 'R,' may be defined or epistemological relativism constrained. In addition, Latour's relativizing of the social troubles the quasi-reified character of this concept in the Strong Program's analyses. It is not only that facts and truths are socially constructed, but what the social is itself is also repeatedly constructed. Just as facts cannot stand as explanations for themselves, so too 'the' social cannot serve as an independent variable when the character of the social is in part precisely what is under investigation as being constructed.

In addition to those aspects shared by the Strong Program and Actor-Network Theory – that truth is as amenable to analysis as error, that truths emerge in particular contexts with particular aims, that the goal of analysis is to appreciate the processes and practices that work to bring truths into the world – it is this further anti-realist aspect of Actor-Network Theory's version of relativism that squares with Nietzsche's perspectivalism. Latour's understanding of

the natural and the social makes the appeals to natural realism made by the Strong Program impossible. Whether we find the application of the symmetry principle at the level of ontology plausible, it is theoretically consistent and in line with Nietzsche's contention that we cannot apprehend a realm of realism outside and independent of our individual and collective perspectives. What is real exists but also shifts across times, places, and spaces and so cannot be conceived in any strong sense as a theoretical or empirical foundation functioning as a final stopgap against the potentially risky political and ethical consequences of deploying wholesale relativism. Something other than an appeal to realism will be required to hedge such hazards.

From Agnostic Symmetry to Agonistic Perspective

I turn for the remainder of this section to a consideration of the warnings Nietzsche sounds about relativism by way of a consideration of his account of the death of God and the relationship between the loss of epistemic-moral guidelines and the rise of cultural nihilism. Nietzsche's perspectival approach to the question of truth and knowledge demonstrates the partial character of any claim to truth not in order to render questions of epistemology relative, but rather to render epistemology as such a redundant concept. The desire to know, the desire to grasp the truth of some process or some object, informs even the most relativist of social studies of knowledge scholarship. Why bother to study the processes by which knowledge is created and contested, if not to learn something about the processes or the meanings at work? Nietzsche maintains that there is no disinterested "agnostic" desire to knowledge; claiming to desire knowledge for its own sake itself belies an interest and a will that requires further investigation and understanding.[60]

[60] See especially Nietzsche (*BT*, *GS*, *A*, *Z*, *UM*, *BGE*, *TI*, *GM*).

In this sense knowledge, even in the context of a radically relativist approach to knowledge, appears to be based in the shifting grounds of human relations. In other words, historically particular human beings acting within particular conditions and in particular relations serve as the foundations out of which knowledge emerges and truth stabilizes or transforms. The ground itself is relational and, in this crucial sense, what is traditionally understood as epistemology is social relations 'all the way down.' Nietzsche provides a helpful bridge between politically and ethically-motivated normative critiques of ideology, and demonstrations of the necessarily partial and so relative character of knowledge and truth. In the sense that knowledge is perspectival, knowledge is relative. The question remains: relative to what? Nietzsche answers: 'relative to those who know;' relative to us. To ground truth in our social relations may prove liberating. It may also prove fatal.

An Anti-Annunciation

> Have you not heard of 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!" – As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? – Thus they yelled and laughed. (Nietzsche, *GS*, 125)

Thus speaks Nietzsche in aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science* (1887/1974). Here, Nietzsche begins to relate a parable concerning the death of God. One of the central critiques that abides in various guises across Nietzsche's works is a critique of morality.[61] It is understandably tempting to read Nietzsche in exactly the same fashion as those who laugh in the marketplace – as a cruel and taunting skeptic, ever mocking the herd-like masses for their stupidity, banality, and their generally pathetic servitude to slavish values and standards, as well as one who cherishes and

[61]Indeed, there are no properly published works where Nietzsche does not concern himself to some degree with critiques of morality – Judeo-Christian in particular, though by no means exclusively. See especially Nietzsche (*A*, *Z*, *BGE*, *D*, *TI*, *GM*).

seeks out those few individuals willing and capable of radical self-overcoming towards a healthier and more creative life. This understanding of Nietzsche has much to recommend it – but in a fashion and to a set of purposes often radically misunderstood by both those who condemn and those who celebrate such an ethos.

If we pause to consider the first few lines of the death of God parable, we see that the masses are those mocking the singular madman. Here, the multitude comprises the apparently sophisticated group of atheists who knowingly taunt and laugh at the supposedly contemptible individual creature still frantically searching for his God. Given Nietzsche's ceaseless critique of morality, his contempt with the modern masses, and his desire to foster heroic feats of self-overcoming, what are we to make of the opening scene in this iconic 'God is dead' parable? The parable begins, as do so many of Nietzsche's writings, by tempting the reader to identify with a particular character, statement, or point of view.[62] We all-too-knowing modern readers immediately feel a sense of smug pity for the character of the madman as he wails across the town square in search of God. While perhaps less actively cruel than the townsfolk, our response as readers is similar: we modern knowers are no longer so simple-minded or naïve as to believe in a God any longer. As intellectually sophisticated and skeptical intellectuals, we modern readers cannot help but scoff at or pity someone flailing madly about in search of a God that does not exist. My suspicion is that this identification with sophisticated skepticism is in fact Nietzsche's real target of critique. The parable continues:

> The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I'll tell you. *We killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us

[62]As David Allison (2001, p. vii) notes, there is a strong sense in which Nietzsche is always speaking directly to 'you' as the individual reader, and this apparent intimacy works to draw us towards whatever series of ideas Nietzsche appears to be working up. But as Ken Gemes (2006, p. 191ff) suggests, Nietzsche, "employs uncanny displacements and subterfuges in order to disguise his real target." I contend that such a maneuver is particularly evident in Nietzsche's analysis of the death of god.

> the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any way up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. (Nietzsche, *GS*, 125)

What began as an identification with the taunts of the knowing masses about the loss of God has suddenly and dramatically shifted to an identification with the madman and his terrified questions and accusations concerning the character and consequences regarding this loss. We as readers suddenly share the madman's anxieties and guilt. The news that, mere moments ago, inspired a knowing wink and laugh now inspires a most un-ironic chill and dread. Nietzsche's abrupt bait-and-switch works expertly as an unexpected aid to reflection. Just as quickly as we share in the seemingly obvious guffaws encircling the seeker of God, we shift our shared concern towards the disquieting consequences of his death. Upon reflection, the death of God presents modern individuals with a series of *problems* concerning values, morality, justification, and meaning; very much not a series of self-important *answers*.

Rather than relax in our supposed knowledge that the world has been shorn from all metaphysical and religious foundations, we modern readers and thinkers ought to take this recognition much more seriously. If the modern world really has lost its God, then under the patina of intellectual progress via a skeptical atheism, there lies the reality of a creeping cultural, political, and ethical nihilism. Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that, without a belief in God, modern humans must confront the ultimate groundlessness of their existence – including any meanings attached to their existence. Atheism may or may not offer an intellectually-sophisticated position relative to the question of the existence of God, but it cannot by itself

suggest or provide other foundations or meanings upon which humanity might secure its ideas and ground its practices. The task left us after the death of God is a sober assessment of the meaning of existence absent universal values and standards, absent some or another telos. Whither meaning and morality now? This leaves us with the question: what does this series of proto-existentialist concerns have to do with epistemological perspectivalism? I contend that Nietzsche gives us an 'answer' when he suggests that readers of his *Genealogy of Morality* return to aphorism 344 of his *Gay Science*:

> … it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests – that even we seekers after knowledge today, we Godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth that truth is divine… (Nietzsche, *GS*, 345)

In our quest for ever greater degrees of precision and accuracy, in our desire for a ceaseless accumulation of facts and data, and in our insistence on attaining an increasing amount of scientific and technological mastery over our natural and social worlds, we transfer many of the qualities and ideals embedded in the concept of God into the concept of Truth. Nietzsche contends that in many respects, scientific truth serves as a substitute deity. This apparently paradoxical contention is teased apart in the third treatise of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* (1887/1998).

In this work Nietzsche seeks, among other things, to trace the emergence and development of slave morality and the triumph of ascetic ideals.[63] Ascetic ideals can be understood as those values that cultivate and glorify restriction and constraint, deference and meekness; i.e., severe and subservient self-discipline in the face of material and psychological temptations towards excess. These values are resignifications of the physical realm that has historically been characterized by material scarcity and socio-political exploitation. In the face of

[63] The concept, character, and consequences of slave morality are considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

such threats to our being, we develop various measures of defense by which we seek to preserve ourselves. Over time, the real and understandable reactions taken to avoid physical and psychological threats as much as possible have come to be internalized and reconfigured as cultural and moral approaches to oneself and others. Unable to conquer others and the external world, the physically and politically less powerful have resignified such powerlessness to indicate a culturally and morally superior position vis-à-vis the powerful (Nietzsche, *GM*, I). At the same time, those made nominally more powerful in this fashion cultivate the presumption that humans are sovereign individuals who operate by means of their own free will. The presumption of free will carries with it the assumption of individual calculability and responsibility, which in turn promotes feelings of guilt and practices of punishment when actions are taken that fail to be socially predictable or acceptable (Nietzsche, *GM*, II). Finally, ascetic ideals serve as a means by which humans are able to partially stop up the anxiety the human condition produces, by providing a table of values by which some sense of supposedly static meaning can be gleaned out of an otherwise unanchored existence (Nietzsche, *GM*, P, III). Ascetic ideals, in other words, function – often unconsciously – as defense mechanisms against the brute force of the material and political world as well as the existential uncertainty posed by the often harsh and seemingly meaningless world into which we are thrown.

Historically, ascetic ideals and practices have been chiefly directed by and towards the concept of theological deities – deities who provide a sense of security and meaning at the same time that they command a level of submission and self-discipline.[64] What is important about ascetic ideals in relation to the current analysis is that Nietzsche demonstrates that the gradual shift from theological to scientific beliefs, values, and practices has in fact *refined* ascetic ideals

[64] See also Nietzsche (*GS*, *BGE*).

rather than *replaced* them. The presumption that scientific approaches to the world supersede and overcome religious approaches and their ascetic ideals is misguided. In their otherwise consistent skepticism, questioning, and disbelief in things unproven, individuals working in the modern Western scientific tradition maintain a seemingly unproblematic allegiance to – which is to say faith in – the reality of, and value in the pursuit of, truth.

> These negating and aloof ones of today, these who are unconditional on one point – the claim to intellectual cleanliness – these hard, strict, abstinent, heroic spirits who constitute the honor of our age, all these pale atheists, anti-Christians, immoralists, nihilists, these skeptics, ephectics, *hectics* of the spirit (all of them are the latter in some sense or other), these last idealists of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual consciousness today dwells and has become flesh – in fact they believe themselves to be as detached as possible from the ascetic ideal, these 'free, *very* free spirits' and yet, to divulge to them what they themselves cannot see – for they stand too close to themselves – this ideal is precisely *their* ideal as well, they themselves represent it today, and perhaps they alone; they themselves are its most spiritualized outgrowth, the troop of warriors and scouts it deploys on the front line, its most entrapping, most tender, most incomprehensible form of seduction: - if I am a guesser of riddles in anything then let it be with *this* proposition!... These are by no means *free* spirits: *for they still believe in truth*… (Nietzsche, *GM*, III: 24)

In other words, while the profession is predicated in part upon endlessly calling into question every concept and claim previously accepted – both in the sphere of religion and previous science – modern science stops short of calling into question the reality and desirability of truth as such. Nietzsche even suggests that not only does science and its quest for truth not negate the ascetic ideal, in fact, "science…is rather its *most recent and noblest form*" (*GM*, III: 23). Because scientific truth is assumed to work at a critical remove from religious concepts and claims, it misunderstands itself as being free from theologically-inflected presuppositions and valuations. It is this invisibility of its actual character that makes science the "…*best* confederate of the ascetic ideal…it is the most unconscious, the most involuntary, the most secret and subterranean

one" (*GM*, III: 25). Being the most unconscious, involuntary, and secret confederate arguably renders truth the most intractable 'God' humans have.

To return to this section's opening parable, perhaps the madman was mistaken and the laughing crowd premature in their merry mocking. Perhaps God is alive and well in the form of truth. In this sense, it can be argued that the death of the theological God works to open up more space for those committed to the practice of secular scientific truths [with truth as God]. To the extent that there is anything like a zero-sum game operating between belief in a religious deity and belief in secular science, the death of God as deity would seem to offer an expanded realm in which secular science could, as it were, 'take over' for God as the ultimate source of epistemological validation and so existential justification. And this would be in keeping with one aspect of the *Genealogy* just discussed. Understood in this manner, God, in a secular sense, is not dead but unconsciously thriving, unseen in broad daylight. Perhaps what is necessary is not the *rejection* of this new ascetic ideal but an honest and self-conscious *recognition* that this is in fact what scientific truth is: "All my reverence to the ascetic ideal, *as long as it is honest*" (*GM*, III: 26). And while Nietzsche does, as always, demand we cultivate and maintain an intellectual conscience, such honest recognition proves to be only a first step, insufficient by itself. The recognition that "we knowers" have inherited and even advanced the ascetic ideal begs a much larger and far more unsettling question (*GM*, III: 24). It leads Nietzsche to what is arguably his most significant analysis – in the *Genealogy*, and across the span of his works: what is the *meaning* and the *value* of our desire, our *will-to-truth as such*? This question frames and animates chapter five below. However, I contend that there is a second and equally unsettling implication to be read off of the parable of the madman as it comes to be reflected in the light of

both *Gay Science* and the *Genealogy*. Recall the madman's cries of anxiety to the knowing masses:

> *We killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? *What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any way up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?* Do we not feel the breath of empty space? (Nietzsche, *GS*, 125, emphasis mine)

Nietzsche may be read as suggesting that modern science and our desire for increasing stores of Truth – being transubstantiations of our prior belief in, and desire for, an omnipotent, omniscient, eternally real and true, and salvific deity – are at risk of suffering a fate similar to that of God: death. If his contention that scientific truth partially continues in another guise those desires and beliefs embodied in conceptions of God, then the death of God must be re-read in a heightened register. Considered retroactively, the death of God serves as an alarm, warning of the possibility of the death of stable and generally-agreed upon truths. As the presumed conviction in the validity of singular perspectives and static truths is challenged, and as challenges to traditional standards, classifications, and expertise increase, it could be that we run the risk of encountering the death of truth by way of infinite epistemic skepticism and instability.

Given his perspectivalist epistemic assumptions, and given his relentless critique of all things religious, it would not be unreasonable to read Nietzsche as reveling in our having become "unchained," our "plunging continually…backward, sideward, forward, in all directions…straying as through an infinite nothing." Insofar as such 'plunging' and 'straying' provides the potential for an increase in our ability to maintain a critical distance on claims to truth, as well as our ability to imagine and construct new 'truths' about ourselves and the world, it seems fair to conclude that Nietzsche remains open to some of the consequences stemming

from the death of God, and, by extension, the death of truth. Having "unchained this earth from its sun," we find ourselves at relative liberty to explore, experiment, and evaluate on our own terms. This loosening of moral restrictions is tied to and echoed in a relative loosening of epistemological constraints. Indeed, Nietzsche himself reflects in a later section of *The Gay Science* on the thrilling sensations afforded by the death of God:[65]

> … we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, when we hear the news that 'the old God is dead,' as if a new dawn shown on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea.' (Nietzsche, *GS*, 343)

This is indeed a potentially thrilling and emancipatory occasion considering the significance of frequently marginalized or silenced positions and perspectives working to assert themselves against the presumably universal epistemic and political status quo.

Without yet taking up the thorny issue of Nietzsche's infamously anti-democratic sensibilities, it is clear enough that celebrating the release from stable and secure foundations – whether in the realm of morality or in the realm of epistemology – must remain tempered by the recognition of how potentially risky this untethering may prove for projects aimed at increasing knowledge in the service of collective philosophical, pragmatic, and political projects. If scholars are able to provide a plausible explanation for why some groups of social actors take witches to be real and true entities, what is the consequence of adducing such an explanation, however thoughtfully-grounded in socio-cultural and historical contexts and conditions? Is the explanation meant to serve as an end-in-itself, a description of a natural or social fact meant to be stored

[65] It cannot be inconsequential that this exhilaration is tempered in the immediately succeeding aphorism (Nietzsche, *GS*, 344). This is the same aphorism that Nietzsche enjoins us to reconsider in the *Genealogy* and which relates the search for truth to a search for god; i.e., that sees the death of god as the possible death of truth, and so a path towards nihilistic relativism rather than life-affirming liberation.

away as a potential piece of data in yet another investigation of a new fact? What of the *conditions* that inform the otherwise well-explained claims to the truth of witches? And what of the *consequences* of the belief in the truth of witches? Likewise, if the truth and reality of some idea or fact can only be adduced in the light of those social actors who are themselves working to adduce said truth or reality, then what, if any, outside standard – epistemic or moral – can be used to *critique, challenge, or affirm* such internal accounts? In the light of relativism, we are presented with a choice between admitting the impossibility of attaining any stable and secure outside authority or admitting that, given this first premise, the only authority we can collectively turn to is the authority of authorities, i.e., we are left with relativism or relativism tempered by pragmatism. This choice in name only is unsatisfactory as much for Nietzsche as it is for many modern scholars concerned with the study of knowledge.

Now that we are in the process of "wipe[ing] away the entire horizon," well-intentioned celebrations of social construction, symmetry, and skepticism as significant tools of scholarship may be premature and misguided. The more appropriate response to the recognition that we are "straying as through an infinite nothing" without aid of either a compass or an anchor may be fear and frustration in the face of apparently perpetual moral and epistemological insecurity. In the face of climate change denial, in the face of creationism, in the face of anti-vaccination campaigns - in the face of brazenly moneyed interests involved and invested in every level of knowledge production - there is much to despair and struggle over. If there is any truth to the contention that the characteristics of relativism helped us arrive here, do we not indeed "feel the breath of empty space?" Has it not indeed "become colder?"

In assessing the consequences of the Copernican Revolution, Nietzsche's own ambivalence is apparent: "...man seems to have stumbled onto an inclined plane – he is now

rolling faster and faster away from the center – whither? into nothingness? into the '*penetrating* feeling of his nothingness?'…So be it! exactly this would be the straight path – into the *old* ideal? …" (*GM*, III: 25).[66] To the extent that humans are losing their hold on God and their self-importance vis-à-vis the cosmos, they are both liberated and falling fast towards potential nihilism. To the extent that we seek to level this inclined plane by way of science and the search for truth, we nevertheless remain invested in an ascetic ideal. Paradoxically, it is the ascetic ideal itself that has so far kept humanity from plunging into nihilism – the ascetic ideal makes sense, however painful, of the meaninglessness of existence (Nietzsche, *GM*, III: 28). Truth is meant to subvert the recognition of the meaninglessness of existence. It is possible that one day even this – truth – may, by its own self-annihilating logic, give way to nothingness, leaving us to grapple with the dialectic of liberation and nihilism – both epistemological and by extension political and ethical – yet again. "What meaning would our entire being have if not this, that in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself as a problem?...It is from the will to truth's becoming conscious of itself that from now on – there is no doubt about it – morality [now truth] will gradually perish: that great spectacle in a hundred acts that is reserved for Europe's next two centuries, the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also most hopeful of all spectacles" (Nietzsche, *GM*, III: 27).[67]

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[66] Compare with section 47 of *The Anti-Christ* where the concept and character presumed of God is conceived of "not merely as an error, but as a *crime against life*" (Nietzsche, 1895/1977a). I cannot help but wonder in anticipation of later chapters if this is not also a critique of the will-to-truth as such as a 'crime against life.'

[67] This mixture of anxiety and hope is echoed in the brief "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fiction" in *Twilight of the Idols*. Here, Nietzsche walks us step-by-step towards what I read as the history of ever-deepening secularized (and secularizing) relativism. The last moment: "We have done away with the true world: what world is left over? The apparent one, maybe?...But no! *Along with the true world, we have also done away with the apparent*!" (Nietzsche, 1889/1997). This seemingly catastrophic event continues: "(Midday; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA)" (Nietzsche, 1889/1997). Indeed, if we return to the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* we encounter the fact of the death of god in a different, cautiously hopeful register. If god is dead, and we have wiped away any trace of a horizon, there nonetheless remains the possibility of using this moment to create something entirely new and life-affirming. We are presented with the possibility of going beyond the past and present in the creation of the 'overman' (Nietzsche, *Z*, Prologue: 3ff). What and how this moment may be thus seized remains to be considered.

But, whether and to what extent we find Nietzsche's cryptic warning-qua-tentative hope of epistemic and moral relativism apt, it would seem to beg the question: is this Nietzsche's critique – his confession – of himself? If Nietzsche warns us against the potential and actual threats of relativism, we may still wonder if his own perspectivalism nevertheless remains in the potential service of such a philosophical enterprise. Recall that in chapter two, an analysis of the features attributable to Nietzsche's understanding of knowledge claims were made: pragmatic, linguistic, socially and culturally-embedded, and situated in particular perspectives, and therefore characterized as fundamentally partial. In this chapter we have seen that Nietzsche draws a connection between the death of God and the possibility of intellectual relativism, while remaining acutely anxious about just such a possibility. In one important sense, Nietzsche must necessarily remain implicated in the drive toward potentially nihilistic relativism insofar as his meditations question the plausibility of understanding truth in a straightforward universal or realistic fashion. In another sense however, the answer to whether Nietzsche is or is not implicated in the rise of relativism has to be negative. In addition to his concerns over the death of God, Nietzsche also explicitly contends that some perspectives are indisputably *better* than others.

The following chapter provides an extended discussion of this and related points, but it bears laying out the basic contours here in relation to this chapter's consideration of relativism. To the extent that perspectives are grounded in particular subject positions that remain differentially-situated in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, etc., then perspectives are unequal; socio-political and cultural hierarchies are baked in to Nietzsche's understanding of perspectivalism. In a theoretical move largely comparable to that made by standpoint theories, Nietzsche insists on the particular and partial character of knowledge while simultaneously

maintaining that some of these particular perspectives are better situated than others with regard to questions of understanding and evaluation.

Very much unlike standpoint theories however, by 'better' Nietzsche does not mean to connote 'more accurate' in an epistemic sense. For Nietzsche, 'better' must be understood in a social or cultural sense. To the extent that Nietzsche has anything like an answer to questions of epistemic accuracy in the light of perspectivalism, it seems to be the supposition that the more perspectives brought to bear upon a question of objective fact the better:

> There is *only* perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing', and the *more* affects 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. (Nietzsche, *GM*, III: 12)[68]

The key point to make here is that for Nietzsche, the central concern motivating his perspectivalist approach is not a question of epistemology – of accuracy, of certainty, of objectivity. These questions are important and necessary, but they are neither sufficient nor the most significant for Nietzsche. Far from privileging those perspectives that are historically marginalized, Nietzsche, at least at first glance, privileges the perspectives of history's 'winners.' In its critiques of Truth, perspectivalism aims to avoid relativism not so much by gesturing to the *epistemic* privilege of certain standpoints, but by gesturing to better and worse approaches to, and kinds of, *life*. For Nietzsche, 'better' perspectives are those perspectives that come from positions of relative freedom, power, health and strength; those who are in positions to act rather than merely react. He is particularly wary of ways of knowing, ways of valuing, and ways of

[68] This consideration of multiplying perspectives as a means toward objectivity should be read in light of the role of measured restraint: "A useful application of having learned to see: one will have become, as a *learner* in general, slow, suspicious, and resistant… Leaving all one's doors open, submissively flopping belly-down before every little fact, a constant readiness to jump in and interfere, to *plunge into* other people and other things, in short, the celebrated 'objectivity' of modern times is bad taste, is *ignoble* par excellence –" (Nietzsche, *TI*, What the Germans Are Missing: 6). In other words, a stress on multiplicity indicates neither a relativistic 'anything goes' nor a positivistic 'repeated verification of the evidence is tantamount to truth' approach to questions of knowledge.

acting that are characterized by 'ressentiment;' i.e., the reactionary mix of desire, envy, hatred, and fear harbored against the powerful, and the concomitant wish to receive recognition and admiration for being relatively powerless. While I argue against such a reading in the following chapter, one can be forgiven for reading in Nietzsche a privileging of masters over slaves, the heroic individual over the dumbly blinking masses, the Dionysian Anti-Christian will-to-power over the mendaciously pitiful herds. It is not possible to travel across Nietzsche's works without encountering these distinctions. And there is some truth in reading Nietzsche as championing the first over second moment in each such pair. While it can be at turns comical and horrifying to engage in Nietzschean critique, attending only to this aspect of his thought risks creating representations of Nietzsche as an unserious trickster, proto-fascist, or self-important superman. In order to avoid such a reading and in order to appreciate the central logic and motivation of Nietzsche's perspectivalism, it is necessary to consider the question of Nietzsche's political and cultural sensibilities. Doing so provides one the possibility to salvage what I contend is the liberatory character of his perspectivalist project. By way of a deeper consideration of feminist standpoint theories, the following chapter takes up the character and consequences of these sensibilities.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Question of Standpoint Theory in Light of Agonistic Distinctions: Beyond Slavishness and Systematizing

'Too bad! What? Isn't he going -- back?'

Yes, but you understand him badly when you complain. He is going back like anybody who wants to attempt a big jump.

–Nietzsche, "What is Noble," *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism 280

By way of comparison with Marx's epistemology and the variations of relativism deployed by the Strong Program and Actor-Network Theory, the previous two chapters have sought to demonstrate central characteristics of Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and understanding. Having first illustrated the significance of particularity and partiality for perspectivalism, I then demonstrated that in spite of some not insignificant similarities to relativism, Nietzsche's approach nevertheless refuses to collapse into either symmetrical analyses or agnostic evaluations. The key methodological point to take from toggling back and forth between universalism and relativism is the recognition that these approaches need not exhaust our epistemological imagination; additional approaches exist and may prove more adequate and satisfying in our desire to arrive at true knowledge. Still, the conceptualization of universalism and relativism as being two ends along an epistemological pole remains (Haraway, 1988, p. 578-579). For those dissatisfied with either end of the pole, this metaphor seems to suggest the need for a compromised middle ground: a third, perhaps pragmatic, way forward.

In some sense, Nietzsche's perspectivalism does offer a third way, though neither in the sense of being 'in between' universalism and relativism, nor as being pragmatic in either the philosophical or colloquial sense of the term. Nietzsche's perspectivalism gestures towards the

possibility – for him, the necessity – of moving beyond the false dichotomy of universalism and relativism by remaining attentive to better and worse ways of being in the world. In other words, Nietzsche's meditations on epistemology are always also a series of socio-cultural and political analyses. In chapter two, we saw how Nietzsche's perspectivalist approach to truth might be partially articulated with a Marxist critique of forms of ideological consciousness and the capitalist social relations that inform them, while also lending theoretical support to broad-scale social movements without collapsing multiple political and ethical projects into a set of unified or generalized truths or practices. Chapter three reversed the angle of concern. By simultaneously unpacking Nietzsche's reflections on the death of God and the translation of metaphysics and theology into methodology and modern Western science, we came to appreciate the threat posed by radical epistemological – and by extension, political and ethical – relativism. In addition to this existential meditation, we also began to unpack the significance of Nietzsche's contention that different perspectives are culturally and politically – and so epistemically – asymmetrical and so also necessarily agonistic in character. In other words, because social actors are situated in hierarchically-arranged sets of social relations, their various perspectives are not only different in the sense of being particular and partial, but are also different in the sense of being structurally and culturally unequal; some perspectives are superior to other perspectives. It was here that I pointed towards feminist standpoint theory as the epistemological approach whose assumptions and approaches appear to most closely align with Nietzsche's perspectivalism.[69]

[69] In the process of formulating and variously presenting pieces of this work, the question of if and how Nietzsche's approach was different in any significant sense from standpoint theories proved to be a constant query of my interlocutors. The hope for this chapter is that it provides a compelling answer.

The present chapter considers the relationship between Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint epistemologies and Nietzsche's understandings of truth and knowledge.[70] I contend that there is indeed a series of significant overlaps between these approaches and that fruitful work can be done to partially articulate them towards emancipatory epistemological and socio-political ends. In particular, feminist standpoint theories share with perspectivalism an insistence that better and worse perspectives exist from which to approach our natural and social worlds. On the one hand, while feminist standpoint and Nietzschean epistemologies share with Marx (including class-based standpoint theory) an explicitly normative concern with radical critique and transformation, feminist standpoint theories claim to share a wariness of the oversimplified universalism baked into some Marxist critiques of ideology. On the other hand, while feminist standpoint and Nietzschean epistemologies share with the various relativist approaches to knowledge an appreciation for partiality and particularity, they simultaneously reject the detached, allegedly non-normative agnostic symmetry deployed in relativist explanations of what counts as knowledge. These theoretical overlaps shared across feminist standpoint and Nietzschean epistemologies are themselves grounded in a larger overarching set of assumptions, the key feature of which we have seen at work continuously: the overdetermination of an otherwise underdetermined epistemology by socio-cultural, political, and ethical concerns. Feminist standpoint and Nietzschean appreciations for the partial and particular character of perspectives ultimately provide a foundation for truth that is political and ethical in character.[71]

[70] As with Marx in chapter two and Bloor, Barnes, and Latour in the previous chapter, Harding's foundational account functions here as the paradigmatic example of traditional feminist standpoint theory. See also Collins (1990), Du Bois (1903/2002), Harding (1988), Longino (1993), Rose (1983), Smith (1991).

[71] Of course, we must immediately contend with the recognition that politics and ethics themselves are not certain or stable, and so to the extent that they provide any foundation for our epistemic perspectives, we must remain alert to the fluid nature of these foundations.

In short, there is much to suggest that feminist standpoint and Nietzschean approaches to truth are motivated by a series of similar methodological assumptions.

By way of outlining the central components of feminist standpoint approaches, in what follows I first consider the formal overlaps just outlined and then turn to an analysis of the significant substantive differences between these methodologically similar epistemological projects. While it is the case that both approaches ground their epistemologies in socio-cultural, political, and ethical concerns, standpoint theories nevertheless remain strongly committed to increasing our proximity to, and our scope of, what is both philosophically and colloquially understood to be 'more objective' accounts of the natural and social worlds. In other words, standpoint theories appreciate the partial and particular perspectives brought to bear on a concept, fact, or situation precisely because it is presumed that certain social actors are uniquely positioned such that they are qualitatively better-suited to perceiving and understanding the truths of the world. While Nietzsche also grants that more particular perspectives – both in terms of sheer quantity and also in terms of quality – are liable to produce more 'objective' knowledge than an allegedly singular or universal perspective, two qualifications to this formal similarity belie the wide chasm separating the two approaches.

First, while we have seen that Nietzsche does grant that greater objectivity can be obtained from the accumulation of particular perspectives, the present chapter demonstrates that such *epistemological* accomplishments are ultimately ancillary to Nietzsche's primary *socio-cultural* concerns. In addition, as noted in passing in chapter three, a second crucial distinction between standpoint theories and perspectivalism lies in their different political and ethical sensibilities. Nietzsche's socio-cultural concerns are diametrically opposed to the political and ethical concerns expressed in feminist (and Marxist) standpoint theories. Until this point,

Nietzsche's sociocultural and politico-ethical assumptions and commitments have remained largely bracketed. In order to understand the ways in which his perspectivalism and feminist standpoint theories can and cannot be aligned or articulated with one another, the particulars of Nietzsche's discussions of master and slave moralities and the political manifestations of ressentiment require sustained consideration, as does his radical critique of epistemology as such. To anticipate briefly: standpoint theories presume that objective accounts of the world will be enlarged and enhanced by the perspectives of variously less powerful, less privileged social actors. This methodological presumption is grounded in the politico-ethical presumption that less powerful social actors, because of the perspectives and experiences afforded them due to their relatively peripheral or marginalized locations within a set of social relations, will better grasp the objective realities of their natural and social worlds. I explain the logic behind this presumption below; what is crucial for now is that for feminist standpoint theories, it is from the perspectives of society's less powerful social actors that a search for more and better objectivity is to be located. Whether we consider Nietzsche's own comments with regard to more and better objectivity, or attend to the socio-cultural concerns driving his analyses of truth, in both instances it is apparent that feminist standpoint theories' methodological, political, and ethical privileging of less powerful social actors is in direct contrast with Nietzsche's (*GM*) persistent critiques of perspectives characterized or motivated by the motley many.

To presume that social actors located in relatively less privileged or powerful positions are better suited in either an epistemic or political and ethical sense to perceive and understand the way in which the world is or ought to be constitutes, for Nietzsche, a disastrous (if, on his account, an unsurprising) error. The practices and projects that social actors aspire to and enact should instead emerge as instances and relations between those who are able to know and act out

of an overabundance of health, self-determined creativity, and delight. The final demarcation distinguishing those able and unable to embody and express an affirmation of life is the ability to find joy in the face of life; indeed, what is necessary above all for those who seek to overcome and become newly noble in the current table of values and practices is to 'learn to laugh' (Nietzsche, *Z*, IV: 20, *BGE*, 294). To look for either epistemological objectivity or politico-ethical motivations from those unable or unwilling to know and act in such an affirmative fashion furthers the historical development of amplifying the desires and wills of the reactive against the active. Such maneuvers simultaneously inflate and sanctify the self-pitying ideals and practices of the relatively powerless at the same time that they denigrate and vilify the ideals and practices of those who go beyond such constraints. This historical and ongoing leveling-down is the central symptom of the larger socio-cultural malaise of decadent mediocrity trending towards nihilism that Nietzsche aims to diagnose across his various texts. I unpack the logic and implications of Nietzsche's socio-cultural and political concerns later, but it is worth noting immediately what is perhaps clear already; namely, that Nietzsche's overarching philosophical project can be read as that of a reactionary elitist. Taking up in a more sustained manner ideas gestured towards in chapter two, I continue to contend that it is worth seriously engaging with Nietzsche's political and cultural considerations. Doing so provides an opportunity to better understand the where from and why for of Nietzsche's epistemic analyses, as well as helping to puzzle out if and to what extent his apparently conservative and elitist rejections of slave morality might be reconceptualized and appropriated to inform just those emancipatory projects that feminist and Marxist standpoint theories seek to articulate and create. Simply put: is it possible to be on the 'side' of the less powerful without resorting to slavish epistemology and politics? If it is possible, then we must also ask: in its quest to go beyond universalism,

relativism, *and* slavish standpoint epistemologies where, if anywhere, does Nietzschean perspectivalism leave scholars involved with questions regarding the character and consequences of social epistemology? This chapter meditates upon these questions.

Situated Standpoints

Sandra Harding (1986) weaves together the central strands constitutive of traditional feminist standpoint theories, providing scholars of social epistemology with both a comprehensive theoretical account of this approach as well as an extended consideration of its strengths and limitations relative to traditional and 'feminist postmodernist' approaches respectively. As has been the case across the other approaches to epistemology considered so far – Marxist, perspectivalist, relativist – Harding too aims to demonstrate that the form and the content of claims to knowledge are necessarily conditioned by the variously-situated standpoints of historical social actors positioned within particular sets of social relations. Knowledge is always knowledge of particular things, constructed by particular social actors, for particular social purposes. In a fashion formally similar to perspectivalism, feminist standpoint theory seeks to simultaneously recognize this socially particular and epistemically partial character of knowing while still maintaining that some claims to knowledge are more objective, as well as more valuable and desirable, than others. Feminist standpoint theories seek to bridge an emphasis on the socially-constructed character of knowledge with traditional normative ideals of increasing or progressing towards more accurate accounts of the natural and social worlds. The central epistemological challenge that feminist standpoint theory grapples with is whether and how it is possible to simultaneously acknowledge and center particular subjectivities while seeking or maintaining generalizable objectivity. In other words, what is necessary are accounts

of knowledge that recognize the reality and significance of social particularity and historical flux while avoiding a devolution into versions of agnostic relativism (Harding, 1986, p. 200ff).

Walking this theoretical tightrope requires reconceptualizing the concept of objectivity as such. Harding outlines three approaches taken by feminist analysts of science that have successively sought to reconceptualize traditional approaches to, and assumptions about, the practices and goals of knowledge production: what she terms feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism (Harding, 1986, pp. 24-29). Starting from liberal reform-minded 'feminist empiricist' accounts, standpoint theories and the situated knowledges that build upon them gradually develop alternatives to traditional epistemological understandings of what it means to characterize a knowledge claim as being more or less objective; this is accomplished such that objectivity is re-imagined first, to encompass the transcendence of false conceptual dualities and second, more radically, to contain within its definition seemingly subjective political and ethical interests:

> The epistemological problem for feminism is to explain an apparently paradoxical situation. Feminism is a political movement for social change. But many claims, clearly motivated by feminist concerns, made by researchers and theorists… appear more plausible – more likely to be confirmed by evidence – than the beliefs they would replace. How can such politicized research be increasing the objectivity of inquiry? *On what grounds should these feminist claims be justified?* (Harding, 1986, p. 24, emphasis mine)

What is at stake is transforming the recognition of the explicit political and ethical elements of all claims to knowledge into the contention that it is not only possible to ground epistemic objectivity in the spheres of politics and ethics, but that such a move is justifiable in the light of both moral necessity and epistemic validity. Two problems immediately present themselves. How do Harding and allied feminists arrive at the contention of achieving greater objectivity through particular subject positions? Relatedly, in anticipation of the present chapter's punchline

we can ask with Nietzsche: if one does accept that epistemology is essentially an expression of social relations, and that the basis upon which knowledge can be judged must be in terms of political and ethical needs, wants, and desires, then *what can it mean to speak of needs, wants, and desires as being accurate or inaccurate in character*?[72]

The question of achieving greater objectivity by way of particular subjugated subject positions commands attention first. Feminist empiricism diagnoses the study and practice of contemporary knowledge production – science in both the natural and social sense – as suffering from the malignancy of androcentrism; modern sciences have overwhelming been practiced by men and for men (Harding, 1986, pp. 24-25). Androcentric assumptions about what is or is not a problem worthy of sustained – if any – study, presumptions concerning what constitutes common or universal human nature, and the use of misogynistic metaphors to describe the activity of knowledge production all provide areas of intervention for feminist empiricist accounts. Such critiques emphasize the need for increasing the participation of women across the sciences as a means for decreasing or eliminating persistent androcentric distortions and biases. The central contention made across feminist empiricist accounts is that, in a quantitative sense, more women working as knowledge producers and analysts of knowledge will provide "an enlarged perspective" and that such an enlargement - both in terms of sheer scope and because of the more varied social locations occupied by those brought into the authoritative epistemic fold – will work to increase the degree of objectivity attainable (Harding, 1986, p. 25). The assumption at work here is that androcentric concepts, categories, and practices are correctable biases distorting

[72] Perhaps the rhetoric of epistemology cannot, in the last instance, be marshalled in the service of ultimate values: "Judgments, value judgments about life, for or against, can in the final analysis never be true; they have value only as symptoms, they can be considered only as symptoms – in themselves, such judgments are stupidities. One absolutely must reach out and try to grasp this astounding *finesse, that the value of life cannot be assessed* (Nietzsche, *TI*, The Problem of Socrates: 2).

an otherwise objective method that can be corrected if more and more varied perspectives are brought to bear on a given concept, claim, or series of evidence.

Superficially, this seemingly reform-minded approach of feminism in the service of truth aims to secure potentially good science against actually bad science (Harding, 1986, p. 25). However, as Harding demonstrates, the logic motivating feminist empiricism unknowingly draws upon far more radical epistemological assumptions and unintentionally gestures towards equally radical consequences. Seemingly reformist arguments in favor of, for example, affirmative action in hiring and advancement practices, betray a radical challenge to traditional scientific assumptions as such (Harding, 1986, pp. 25-26). By locating the source of androcentric bias in the particular characteristics and interests of particular social actors, liberal feminist empiricism calls into question the reality and validity of the traditional scientific norm of 'universalism.' This traditional norm of universalism suggests that in the interests of attaining and maintaining objectivity, the personal characteristics of researchers should not determine the style or the substance of their scientific work. What is studied, how knowledge is acquired, and (to a lesser degree) the manner in which evidence is interpreted ought, according to this traditional standard, play at most a minimal and epistemically inconsequential role in properly functioning scientific practices.[73] However, if, as feminist empiricism contends, the addition of women to the ranks of scientific thought and practice is expected to inform the substantive content of knowledge, then a central contention regarding the nature of objectivity – the relative unimportance of social locations to the attainment and interpretation of real truth – requires significant reconsideration:

> … the feminist empiricist solution [to androcentrism in science] in fact deeply subverts empiricism. The social identity of the inquirer is supposed to be irrelevant to the 'goodness' of the results of research…But feminist empiricism

[73](Merton, 1938/1973b, p. 270-273)

> argues that women (or feminists, whether men or women) as a group are more likely to produce unbiased and objective results than are men (or nonfeminists) as a group… feminist attempts to reform what is perceived as bad science bring to our attention deep logical incoherences and what, paradoxically, we can call empirical inadequacies in empiricist epistemologies. (Harding, 1986, pp. 25-26)

Building upon the unintentionally radical recognition by feminist empiricists of the importance of standpoints for the substantive content of claims to truth, feminist standpoint theorists both make explicit and extend this logic and its implications. Taking up the logic first articulated by Lukács in the service of a Marxist epistemology after Marx, feminist standpoint theories argue that social actors who are in positions of relative subordination and subjugation are afforded a "more complete and less perverse" perspective from which to formulate and evaluate claims to knowledge (Harding, 1986, p. 26). Historically and currently less powerful social groups occupy relatively marginalized social positions that, by way of affording relatively different experiences and relations with the natural and social worlds, in turn afford unique understandings of – standpoints on – the world. The reverse is also true. The unique perspectives afforded the less powerful in society, reflecting as they do unique experiences that are themselves the result of unequal positions in the hierarchy of social relations, render *more privileged* and powerful groups – in the case of traditional feminist standpoint theories, men or non-feminists – *less capable* (and often enough less willing) to apprehend the world in the same fashion afforded to less powerful social actors (Harding, 1986, p. 26).

Perhaps the contention that different social locations within sets of social relations afford their occupants different perspectives or standpoints on and of the world is underwhelming given the contentions of the preceding chapters. What makes standpoint theories of whatever variety provocative is their further assertion that these different subordinated perspectives are more objective – better – than other, more socially and culturally dominant perspectives. One way of

formulating this provocative dynamic is to contend that *epistemic objectivity is inversely related to socio-political power* and vice versa. In other words, "a feminist epistemological standpoint is an interested social location ('interested' in the sense of 'engaged,' not 'biased), the conditions for which bestow upon its occupants scientific and epistemic advantage" (Harding, 1986, p. 148). The goal of feminist standpoint theorists then is of course not to recover or craft a disinterested or unmediated series of sciences. Rather, the aim is seeking 'maximal objectivity' of and through particular, partial, and historically subordinate perspectives (Harding, 1986, p. 23).

Standpoint theories stake their claims to such maximal objectivity on the contention that members of subordinate and marginalized groups experience the world in a more holistic, comprehensive fashion. The tendency to perceive and experience the natural and social worlds in dualistic binaries – reason as opposed to emotion, mental as opposed to manual labor, culture as opposed to nature, objectivity as opposed to subjectivity, and of course men as opposed to women – is a reflection in consciousness of relatively abstract and alienated experiences that in turn motivate approaches to understand, explain, and evaluate the world in an erroneously dualistic, inherently antagonistic and hierarchical fashion. The truth of the reality of the natural and social worlds is, according to the standpoint theories, far more fluid, continuous, and tangled (Harding, 1986, pp. 141-150, 155-161). Arising as they do from positions in the social hierarchy that do not afford the same possibilities of experiencing life in such an abstract and dualistic fashion, subjugated perspectives are better positioned to recognize the less tidy and more objective reality of the world. This reconceptualization of objectivity rejects the dominant tendency in knowledge practices to abstract from and compartmentalize the full spectrum of lived experience (Harding, 1986, pp. 141-150, 155-161).

In addition to providing a less abstract, less fragmented, and so more comprehensive and objective perspective by grounding this objectivity in positions of relative marginalization, standpoint theories aim to transcend the social relations and their concomitant social distinctions – class, gender, etc. – out of which such bourgeois or androcentric abstract and fragmented perspectives emerged in the first place. In other words, from the particular positions and perspectives fostered by differential positions of power, standpoint theorists seek to move beyond and so render obsolete the differences that initially afforded such subjugated standpoints their purported epistemic advantage.[74] By recognizing, reconceptualizing, and re-evaluating the importance of the fact of interconnectedness in natural and social worlds, i.e., of better apprehending the whole rather than a series of discrete, partial, and antagonistic parts, the *particular* perspective afforded particular groups stands to offer a more *general* and more *objective* understanding of the truth of the reality of natural and social worlds. This maneuver of synthesis is crucial and I return to it at length after my consideration of Nietzsche's political and cultural sensibilities.[75]

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[74] "The leading feminist theorists do not try to substitute one set of gender loyalties for the other – 'woman-centered' for 'man-centered' hypotheses. They try instead, to arrive at hypotheses that are free of gender loyalties…From the perspective of feminist theory and research, it is *traditional* thought that is subjective in its distortion by androcentrism – a claim that feminists are willing to defend on traditional objectivist grounds" (Harding, 1986, p. 138).

[75] As discussed in chapter two, Lukács' original formulation of standpoint theory privileges the potentially – or, on a more deterministic reading, necessarily and actually – more comprehensive, more objective, more politically accurate perspectives afforded the proletariat relative to the bourgeoisie. Standpoint theory as it is reformulated by Harding and other feminists retains the formal logic of Lukács while, of course, positioning as most privileged the social group 'women.' While feminist standpoint theories may be understood to be a reaction to the weakness of standpoint theory as it was deployed by traditional Marxists, i.e., the tendency to code as 'working class' those who are masculine (and often white), it is nevertheless unsurprising that feminist appropriations of traditional standpoint logic retains these structural blind spots. Now, with 'women' centered as the privileged standpoint, considerations of race remain – 'women' are often presumed white - and the once privileged role of class requires renewed recognition – 'women' are also often coded middle or upper-middle class. Given that these various iterations of standpoint logic continually fail to consider or render invisible the compounding impact of multiple social locations, it is worth considering whether standpoint theory is theoretically capable of ever performing the radical and progressive work at which it aims. Irrespective of these structural considerations, the logic of standpoint theory – whether centered on the working class, women, people of color, or any other marginalized social group – tends, as we will see shortly, towards a politics and ethics grounded in a recognition of the experiences, understandings, and

The appropriate time for considering Nietzsche's reconstruction and critique of the kinds of politics and ethics that seek to ground themselves in the experiences, perspectives, and values of less powerful social actors has been reached. Standpoint theories of all iterations presume that less powerful and privileged perspectives are better positioned to apprehend objective truths of the natural and social world. As discussed, one component of the argument motivating such claims to enhanced objectivity is the possibility of transcending dualistic modes of experience, understanding, and value. The second piece of the argument is the contention that less powerful and privileged positions afford a more objective understanding of the world due to the fact that they make explicit and foreground the fact that there are objectively better and worse ways of existing in the world – and that particular groups are better able to recognize and formulate these better ways of existing as a result of their structural and cultural positions vis-à-vis other social groups. In other words, social groups acting from positions of relatively deficient social and cultural power and privilege perceive and understand in an epistemically and ethically better way how the world could and should be known, made, and valued.

Between their privileging of particularly-situated perspectives and their rejection of relativism, as well as their shared contention that there are better and worse ways of being in the world, Nietzsche's perspectivalism and feminist standpoint theories share a significant amount of theoretical space. From a formal angle, it is entirely appropriate to conceptualize standpoint theories and perspectivalism as being similar in character. Nevertheless, these not insignificant formal similarities are belied by a radical divergence in political and ethical assumptions and approaches. Feminist standpoint theories are motivated by an explicit commitment to grounding

values of the less powerful. The degree to which such an approach is self-evidently progressive – or even radical – concerns us below.

and justifying claims to knowledge in the positions, experiences, perspectives, and values of relatively or absolutely less powerful social actors. However much his perspectivalism formally maps onto standpoint theories, Nietzsche's larger intellectual project is diametrically opposed to purposefully privileging the experiences, perspectives, and values of the culturally and spiritually resentful, as well as the intellectually and politically sanctimonious, masses. Not only is Nietzsche allergic to the table of values of such social actors, but he also presumes that at the level of culture these tables of values have already emerged triumphant – in many ways to the socio-cultural and psychological detriment of modern humans. His assumptions and motivations are explored in what follows. Following this exploration, I return to a consideration of the epistemological and political strengths and limitations of feminist standpoint theories in light of the logic and impetus motivating Nietzsche's critiques of slavish perceptions and ways of valuing. Reading standpoint and perspectivalist theories together, I point up limitations to Nietzsche's analysis of slave moralities and their attendant feelings of ressentiment in order to suggest that perhaps his emphases on creativity, strength, and affirmation require a detour *through* the pitiful people and resentful depths he otherwise critiques. Finally, I return to the question undergirding all of the foregoing political and ethical reflections; namely, the question of the character and possibility of epistemic truth as such.

Genealogy of Slave Morality: Triumph of the Will to Mediocrity

Read in order, it is clear that Nietzsche's works are iterative in nature. The critique of modern moralities, including their conditions of possibility, their character, and their consequences remain a focus across his projects. When what readers they initially had failed to appropriately appreciate the analyses and motivations of *Daybreak* (1881/1997a) and *Beyond*

Good and Evil (1886/1989) – and before his rather more caustic refashioning of a similar exploration in *The Anti-Christ* (1895/1977a) – Nietzsche provided the more systematic *Genealogy of Morals* (1887/1998) to chart in a relatively step-by-step manner the emergence and growing power of reactive and life-negating systems of values. At turns mytho-historical, philological, sociological, and psychological in emphasis, Nietzsche aims here to explain how less powerful social actors worked to resist relationships of domination and exploitation by fostering apparent agency in the rejection of the privileges embodied and expressed by more powerful social actors. He contends that in the place of the affirmative actions and esteem of rank cultivated among the 'masters' of society, the 'slaves' came, by way of the relative power and legitimacy of the priestly caste, to express their needs and desires in and as reactive, resentful values. Less powerful social actors fashioned ascetic, life-denying tables of values that allowed them to develop a paradoxical sort of active agency in the sphere of culture and morality. Given their structural weakness, these rejections of the actions, values, and positions of the powerful in favor of reactive denial and negation served as perverse embodiments and expressions of power for those who embodied less.

To begin again, Nietzsche argues that the aristocrats of antiquity understood themselves to be embodiments of 'good.' "It was 'the good' themselves, that is the noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded *who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good*, which is to say, as of the first rank, in contrast to everything base, low-minded, common, and vulgar" (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 2, emphasis mine). Crucial to this account is the direction of action: noble individuals name themselves and their actions 'good.' Goodness is not afforded or bestowed from without, but is an expression of a given embodiment. The good are those individuals who are structurally well-positioned and materially well-taken care of and who, in light of such

positions of power and security, are afforded the opportunity to exist and act in culturally creative, self-determining, and life-affirming fashions in the absence of a host of social and moral constraints.

Such good nobles exist, necessarily and by definition, in relation to a far larger base of relatively and absolutely dependent lower castes. These non-noble individuals embody the 'bad.' The bad individuals are 'beast[s] of burden' who remain 'oppressed by toil' on behalf of the nobles (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: X). To risk an anachronism, the beginning of Nietzsche's analysis illustrates the logic of what is effectively a series of class dynamics. The conditions of possibility of freedom from social and moral constraints include an abundant natural-material environment. An abundant natural-material environment rests upon the working up of nature in the service of human beings. The freedom from social constraint afforded the good masters presupposes the work of the bad slaves. In other words, the ability to engage life in an affirmative self-driven fashion is originally predicated upon an individual's superior structural position.[76]

Nietzsche identifies the Judeo-Christian priestly caste as the social group primarily responsible for inverting and transforming the noble-centered understandings of whom and what are good and bad and for effectively beginning the unmooring of tables of values from their structural conditions. Their lack of power relative to aristocrats prompts priests as a social group to construct and legitimate challenges to the aristocratic table of values. Seen from the perspective of the priests, 'good' actors and their actions appear unfair, unjust, irresponsible, and so immoral. A priestly-initiated slave revolt in morality works to transform the meaning of 'good' into the entirely new concept of 'evil,' while simultaneously converting the traditional meaning of 'bad' into a radically different – slavish – meaning of 'good' (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 7).

[76] I flag 'originally' here, as the logic and consequences of slave morality quickly transform from the structural to the cross-structural sphere of cultural.

The relative weakness of the priests is converted into a spiritualized suffering which eventually becomes established as a primary virtue, while the positions and powers previously valued as 'good' come to be understood as not only bad but morally 'evil.' In other words, embodying and expressing privilege and power is evil, while 'choosing' not to embody and express such power is the hallmark of a morally good and valuable individual or social group.[77]

These slavish inversions and transformations are motivated by intense feelings of anger, envy, and spite; of what Nietzsche designates 'ressentiment.' These festering feelings drive the less powerful in society to attain a sense of agency and value through a series of reprimands and rejections:

> The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the ressentiment of beings denied the true reaction, that of the deed, who recover their losses only through an imaginary revenge. Whereas

[77] At the risk of re-routing the flow of this chapter's stream of thought, a related reflection concerning Nietzsche's understandings on the question of the subject are warranted here. Nietzsche locates the emergence of the concept of the subject in the individual and collective desire to ascribe purposive causality to actions in order to render actors free willed and, as free willed, normatively accountable (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 13). He contends that human beings do not possess by nature a sense of self understood as a causal, accountable subject (36). A sense of self as subject must be learned. Once this sense of self as subject has become 'unforgettable,' social actors can be held epistemologically and ethically accountable for their actions. A set of primary assumptions condition Nietzsche's genealogy of the subject. Nietzsche maintains that at the most fundamental level individuals express plays of drives, i.e., individuals 'will' (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 11). Prior to the emergence of a grammar that distinguishes between causal subjects and effected predicates there are beings as doings (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 13). Actors are actions. The will to power constitutes the self as such. A potential consequence of active willing is the imposition of suffering on other individuals. Such suffering may be an unintended consequence of an action. Alternatively, the suffering of an individual may serve as the motivation for action in the first place (Nietzsche, *GM*, II: 6). An historically frequent, if 'embarrassing,' source of pleasure has been the infliction of cruelty and suffering upon other actors (Nietzsche, *GM*, 6). The creation of the concept of a purposeful and responsible subject accomplishes two seemingly paradoxical tasks. Individuals desire to imbue sense into senseless suffering. By rendering particular actors causally – and so morally – responsible for the injuries suffered by others, otherwise arational willing is reconceived in terms of rationality and irrationality. The reconstruction of action as freely-willed choice is accomplished in the process of the construction of reasoning subjects at the same time that it masks the fundamentally irreducible character of the will (Nietzsche, *TI*, The Four Great Errors: 7, *GM*, II: 7). Less powerful social actors simultaneously desire to be in a position from which they too can will in an active manner. In fashioning the concept of a purposive subject, less powerful social actors can gain a sense of superiority over more powerful individuals by insisting that their relatively low distinction and lack of power reflect purposeful actions freely chosen (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 13. II: 4). In other words, by insisting that willing is reflective in character, the actions of the powerful are subject to condemnation, and the (re)actions of the less powerful are rendered commendable because freely-chosen. Human beings' fundamental 'instinct for freedom,' comes to be socially proscribed by responsibility, guilt, and punishment (Nietzsche, *GM*, II: 17-18). The socially accountable subject is achieved at the expense of instinctual drives and desires.

> all noble morality grows out of a triumphant yes-saying to oneself, from the outset slave morality says 'no' to an 'outside,' to a 'different,' to a 'not-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed. (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 10)

Through this transformation of values, the priests enact a "*spiritual* revenge" upon the *structurally* superior nobles (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 7). The slave revolt in morality works to invert and transform structural hierarchies at the level of culture and morality as a "sort of compensation for having been ill-favored by nature… malice spiritualized" (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 219) A consideration of the work that the prefix 're' is doing in the terms reaction, ressentiment, and revenge (as well as recognition and responsibility) is useful. Common to these words is the directional sense of moving back towards oneself in relation to something or someone external – this, as opposed to the noble arrow of direction that emanates outward from within. The central characteristics of slave morality presume and impose the significance of some other individual or social group acting in response to some individual or group beyond themselves. In contrast to those that act and create out of a sense of fullness and affirmation and without concern for the consequences that their actions may have for the less fortunate, slavishly-motivated individuals reject such apparently irresponsible actors on a two-pronged basis: the failure on the part of the powerful to attend to and care about the state of the less fortunate, and the desire on the part of the less fortunate to assert their moral supremacy by way of repressing the desire to act in a masterly fashion to begin with. What Nietzsche demonstrates in the master-slave dynamic then is the struggle between a life premised on unrestricted action and expression and a life premised largely or entirely on a moral refusal (premised, originally, on a material impossibility) of the goodness of acting in such an unrestricted fashion. To accomplish spiritual revenge, an external other beyond the self towards whom such ressentiment is directed, and against whom the suffering individual's sense of superiority may be established and maintained, is necessary.

Freely active individuals creatively will out of and for themselves while reactive individuals will only in relation to, and against, others. Slave morality's "reversal of the value-establishing glance – this necessary direction toward the outside instead of back onto oneself – belongs to the very nature of *ressentiment*: in order to come into being, slave-morality always needs an opposite and external world… its action is, from the ground up, reaction" (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 10). The slave revolt in morality, grounded in weakness, motivated by feelings of ressentiment, and effective only in the context of external opposition, affirms the inability to actively affirm life.

While Nietzsche fully appreciates how and why the less powerful obtain a sense of agency and value through designating themselves as good and the more powerful as evil, he contends that the consequences of adopting this slavish way of valuing have proven to be tremendously damaging.[78] In addition to the inner feelings of impotence, ressentiment, and repression that such slavish approaches toward life engender, there is for Nietzsche the equally problematic concern with a widespread, taken-for-granted series of such approaches festering within modern societies allowing for the ascendancy of cultural mediocrity. To appreciate the scope of Nietzsche's concerns, it is important to bear in mind that the slavish transformations in values come eventually to be established as morally authoritative across structural positions. To risk an additional anachronism, because of their relative spiritual power, priests are ultimately able to command at the level of what is effectively the psychoanalytic.[79] Consequently, it is not only the priests and the 'beasts of burden' who come to embrace and embody resentful slavish

[78] For all of the contempt he levels against the slave revolt in morality and the ressentiment that motivates it, Nietzsche grasps its function and appeal. The desire to express meaning and value in and as such slavish ressentiment "may be entirely justified if one cannot escape one's fear," and, I would add, material need and unfreedom (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 11).

[79] While anachronistic, it is a commonplace to read in the second essay of the *Genealogy* the blueprint for Freud's accounts (again mytho-historical) of the rise of guilt by way of memory which itself comes by way of pain from punishments (Freud, 1930/1989). Together, these work to create a 'second' human nature that submerges (partially) brute physicality and amoral life-affirmation for morally responsible social actors. Nietzsche as Zarathustra preaches elsewhere: See chapter five for further reflection on the significance of 'second natures' in Nietzsche's analyses.

approaches to life. These values come to inform entire cultures, in the process informing beliefs and actions up and down social structures. Those who we today identify as belonging squarely in the middle-class or even the upper-middle class are equally susceptible to the trappings of slavish understandings of the world. Indeed, such 'flies of the market place' who place economy and state over culture make the legitimately lowly seem noble by comparison (*Z*, On the Flies of the Marketplace, *TI*, What the Germans Are Missing: 4, *BGE*, 263). As the originally Judeo-Christian slave morality expands out of the confines of religion and spirituality it undergoes processes of secularization, coming in time to inform additional spheres of life. Perspectives grounded in ressentiment, perspectives that assume truth can and ought to work in the service of recognizing and being responsible for the many, are now perspectives deployed by many in positions of relative material security and power. In other words, it is not necessary to occupy positions of severe structural disadvantage in order to cultivate and deploy a reactive morality and epistemology. This way of seeing, understanding, and evaluating nature and society has gradually established itself as the default taken-for-granted perspective of the majority.

It may be useful to turn to Nietzsche speaking about his *Genealogy* a year after its composition and compare this analysis with the connections he draws between the slave revolt in morality and modern secular values:

> In my *Genealogy of Morals* I offered the first psychological analysis of the counter-concepts of a noble morality and a morality of *ressentiment* – the latter born of the No to the former: but this is Judeo-Christian morality pure and simple. So that it could say No to everything on earth that represents the ascending tendency of life, to that which has turned out well, to power, to beauty, to self-affirmation, the instinct of *ressentiment*, which had here become genius, had to invent another world from whose point of view this affirmation of life appeared as evil, as the reprehensible as such. (Nietzsche, *A*, 24)

A few pages later we are told:

> The poison of the doctrine of 'equal rights for all' – it was Christianity that spread it most fundamentally. Out of the most secret nooks of bad instincts, Christianity has waged war unto death against all sense of respect and feeling of distance between man and man, that is to say, against the *presupposition* of every elevation, of every growth of culture; out of the *ressentiment* of the masses it forged its chief weapon against *us*, against all that is noble, gay, high-minded on earth, against our happiness on earth. 'Immortality' conceded to every Peter and Paul has so far been the greatest, the most malignant, attempt to assassinate *noble* humanity. And let us not underestimate the calamity which crept out of Christianity into politics. Today nobody has the courage any longer for privileges, for masters' rights, for a sense of respect for oneself and one's peers – for a *pathos of distance*. Our politics is sick from this lack of courage. The aristocratic outlook was undermined from the deepest underworld through the lie of the equality of souls; and if faith in the 'prerogative of the majority' makes and *will make* revolutions – it is Christianity, beyond a doubt, it is *Christian* value judgements, that every revolution simply translates into blood and crime. Christianity is a rebellion of everything that crawls on the ground against that which has *height*: the evangel of the 'lowly' *makes* low. (Nietzsche, *A*, 43)

In the previous chapter we saw the connections that Nietzsche draws between belief in God and belief in foundational scientific truth and objectivity. Here, we see a not dissimilar reasoning connecting the slave revolt in morality with the seemingly secular projects of equality, democracy, and the implication that these are matters of progressive and fair social justice. Slavish spirituality is transfigured rather than transcended and continues to work to undermine self-determining, life-affirming embodiments and expressions. While clearly evident to Nietzsche, it is not necessarily obvious to the reader what connects the drive of reactive ressentiment with projects aimed at increasing democracy and equality today. I suggest that the link lies in the last phrase above: "the evangel of the 'lowly' *makes* low" (Nietzsche, *A*, 43). The connection between the reactive revenge of slave moralities and projects many today would categorize as *proactive* social projects aimed at eliminating the conditions of possibility that give rise to such expressions of ressentiment in the first place, is Nietzsche's contention that these putatively progressive projects function only by way of bringing down to an average (which for 'higher' spirits is a lower) playing field. That is, as Nietzsche understands it, in order to achieve

or attempt to achieve something approaching true equality in politics, culture, art, education, or science necessarily means that the mediocre drag down the better. Such projects contain the not too subtle sentiment that: 'If I'm a lowlife, you should be one too' (Nietzsche, *TI*, Raids of an Untimely Man: 34). If I am limited or incapable of embodying and expressing myself in an unconstrained, self-determined, and life-affirming manner, then neither shall – nor should – anyone else.

Approaching an author with intellectual integrity requires honesty about the author's potential flaws and blind spots and a refusal to sweep unsavory projects under rugs. In the same measure, it requires a generosity such that valid concerns and arguments are not rendered incidental or invisible. In the light of a Marxist, feminist, or even relativist approach, honesty requires that one reckon with the fact that Nietzsche holds a number of elitist, reactionary assumptions. It is certainly far from implausible to file Nietzsche under the title of a conservative. My aim here is neither to cheerlead for or against nor explain away aspects of Nietzsche that one might find objectionable. Rather, I contend that there is an additional component within his storm and stress that gives very serious pause. In the spirit of generous reading, I suggest considering the concept of 'making low' from another of Nietzsche's own angles in order to allow his political and cultural sensibilities to shine a different light on the question of social epistemology.

Bracketing momentarily whether or to what extent Nietzsche's apparently zero-sum understanding of the relationship between democratic equalities and self-forming creative distinctions are valid, we can consider his concerns from the angle of liberation. If I read him at all correctly, what is ultimately at stake for Nietzsche is the issue of artificial constraint – a

constraint that is unnatural, unhealthy, and unjust in the Nietzschean senses of the terms.[80] This constraint is a constraint of primal amoral will-to-power, what Nietzsche (*GM*, II: 18-19) defines as our original and ever-present (if viciously repressed) 'instinct for freedom.' His rhetoric surrounding animals is instructive.[81]

Motivated by feelings of ressentiment and cloaked in the name of a heightening of culture, humans have gradually been bred into 'domestic animal[s]' (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 11). Speaking of the harm rendered by priestly modes of living – and here I think it plausible to read this in a religious but also a secular democratic sense – Nietzsche suggests modern humans are being animalized – and, strikingly, not to the insult of animals but to both sets of creatures:

> Both the taming of the human beast and the breeding of a particular human species have been called 'improvement'… To call the taming of an animal 'improvement' sounds almost like a joke to our ears. Anyone who knows what happens in menageries has doubts about whether any beast gets 'improved there.' The beast gets weakened, it is made less dangerous, and through the depressing feeling of fear, through pain, through wounds and hunger, it becomes a *sickly* beast… It is no different with the tamed human being whom the priest has 'improved.' (Nietzsche, *TI*, Those Who 'Improve' Humanity: 2)

In lieu of creative (and unequal because differently distinguished) self-cultivation, 'better' humans join their unfortunately physically-constrained animal brethren in cages of moral and cultural constraint.

Moving from the language of predator and prey in his initial formulation of the master-slave dynamic, Nietzsche's narrative goes on to consider the emergence of responsibility and guilt that were necessary to transform humanity into something

> enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace… The man who, for lack of external enemies and resistance, and wedged into an oppressive narrowness and regularity of custom, impatiently tore apart, persecuted, gnawed at, stirred up, maltreated himself; this animal that one wants to 'tame' and that

[80] For Nietzsche, justice is characterized by equality and good will amongst actual, – as opposed to abstract or assumed – equals (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 265).
[81] See the brilliant work by Vanessa Lemm (2009) on the role played by animals in Nietzsche's thinking.

> beats itself raw on the bars of its cage… this longing and desperate prisoner became the inventor of 'bad conscience.' In him… the greatest and most uncanny of sicknesses was introduced, one from which man has not recovered to this day, the suffering of man *from man*, from *himself*… (Nietzsche, *GM*, II: 16)

To create a new kind of human – a socially responsible, peaceful, and non-distinct human – requires an education in pain and punishment that emanates from within as much or more so than from without. Over time humans develop a new 'instinct,' an instinct that ferociously denies and punishes earlier instincts for freedom and the affirmation of life that occur as unrestricted expressions of will-to-power. The majority who take up the banner of 'peaceful society' – which comes to include an insistence on the justice of democratic equality and the need to both recognize and hold responsible those who do not – do violence to themselves in the process.[82]

In one sense, the taming of 'blond beast[s]' and 'birds of prey' brings relief to the herd who suffer in seemingly senseless fashion from the actions of such predatory creatures (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 11-13). To the extent that our original instincts for freedom entail arational violence, gleeful cruelty, and a pathos of distance – an emotional relationship to others grounded in distinctions afforded by hierarchical social relations – predicated on gross material inequalities, then it is understandable that such will-to-power may be found by many to be worthy of contempt and rejection. For all this, it is still difficult to discount the concerns of being contained externally and then internally. The character and the emphases that Nietzsche gives his understanding of will-to-power may prove too much for some readers. Nevertheless, as belied by

[82] It must be noted that this infliction of violence is not simply an unfortunate process with simply contemptible consequences. It is mistaken to read Nietzsche as being 'for' unfettered power and 'against' all things slavish and mediocre. In the first place, these once literal designations now also function as ideal types that can be seen at work "directly alongside each other – even in the same human being, within a *single* soul" (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 260). Additionally, it will due to remember another consequence of forming second slavish natures. Humans, the 'most bungled of all the animals,' 'the sickliest,' those who have 'strayed… dangerously from [their] instincts' are also 'the most *interesting*' (Nietzsche, *A*, 14). Memory, punishment, and guilt do violence, but they also create psychological depth. Finally, as I emphasize below, the point for Nietzsche is to go *beyond* these and related dualities.

his choice of language, one cannot overlook the fact that for all of Nietzsche's critiques – of slave morality, ressentiment, their secularization into the mediocrity of equality and the leveling down of democracy, and the external and internal pain that these new instincts impart – they also carry with them a sense of compassion. His outlook is at least as much one of careful concern as it is one of cruel contempt.

Seen in the light of such compassion, Nietzsche's foundational concern with an approach to life that seeks cultivation rather than domestication, freedom for distinction rather than confinement in cultural cages, and the passion wrought from creativity as opposed to that of morality remains intellectually and ethically provocative and worth safekeeping. Such Nietzschean concerns can be taken up in fashions that do not presuppose violence, cruelty, or gross inequalities. They may be taken up in fashions that Nietzsche himself may not intend, but that nevertheless remain fruitful for thinking through liberation in relation to social justice and democratic equality.

Resolutions to Subjugated Standpoints?

Two final questions present themselves in light of the foregoing considerations. First, are feminist standpoint theories slavish in character? Second, what are the implications for thinking Nietzsche's critique of equality in the sphere of epistemology? In particular, is there a way to articulate the concerns of the subjugated in a manner that overcomes the concerns of mediocre leveling? I take up both of these issues by way of conclusion and end by tracing the outlines of the master question that haunts the preceding considerations, providing the impetus for the succeeding chapter: the will-to-truth as such.[83]

[83] See Oliver, K., & Pearsall, M. (Eds.). (1998) for a compelling because conflicting collection of essays concerning reading Nietzsche *as* a feminist as well as using Nietzsche *for* feminist purposes.

In one sense, the answer to the question of whether the logic, motivation, and consequences of standpoint theories are slavish in character must be yes. At their most basic level, standpoint theories are motivated by the desire to achieve greater objectivity. The fundamental logic grounding standpoint theories' claims to greater objectivity is the contention that natural and social worlds can be better comprehended by marginalized social groups. The experiential realities of less powerful social actors are assumed to afford significant epistemological advantages. At both the structural and the cultural level, to claim that the subjugated are better positioned to apprehend the truth of the world cannot but strike Nietzsche as a fundamental misunderstanding of what the world as will-to-power *is*. What is of significance at this juncture is understanding that standpoint theories purposefully center a set of political and ethical claims grounded in the desire for a more emancipatory relationship between the natural and the social worlds for all. The central consequence of taking seriously the motivations of standpoint theories is the foregrounding of cross-structural cultural sensibilities favorable to a politics grounded in democracy, equality, and social justice – and a concomitant politics of responsibility (if not explicit recognition). To ground truth in political and ethical commitments to democracy, equality, and social justice would seem to run in a direction contrary to a Nietzschean critique of leveling mediocrity and an emphasis upon hierarchies of cultural distinction, *a*rational and *a*responsible expressions of creation and strength, and a joy for life in the face of suffering. Nevertheless, however honest such an appraisal of standpoint theories may be, it is not generous.[84] It is in this lack of generosity that such a reading begins to point out the problematic assumptions that appear to be guiding Nietzsche's analysis of slavish mediocrity. If the conclusion to be drawn from standpoint theories is that they aim to level down to an average

[84] See also Conway (1993) and Tapper (1993) on the relationship with regard to a notion of knowledge and of freedom conceptualized beyond recognition and seemingly responsible democratic equality.

the truths and politico-ethical possibilities of the world, this must come as a surprise to standpoint theorists. This, not least because the inherited logic of standpoint theories is that of dialectical transcendence – a 'leveling up' in the process of working through dualistic contradictions.

Feminist standpoint theories were crafted as a response to both the political impotence of symmetrical relativisms, as well as to traditional androcentric understandings of generalizable objectivity – including Marxist articulations of objectivity (Harding, 1986, p. 26ff). This crucial divergence notwithstanding, the punchline of feminist standpoint theories reads identical to that of the Marxist logic that was the focus of my critique in chapter two. Drawing explicitly as they do on the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, feminist standpoint theories aim to decrease distortion, ideology, error, and semblance in favor of reasonable, rational, demonstrable, and generalizable sets of objective facts and evidence about natural and social worlds. It is presumed that perspectives can potentially transcend their partiality and particularity in the name of greater comprehension and generalizability; certain perspectives are assumed to better capture the truth of reality in the service of challenging, dissolving, and so transcending initial particularities. As before, the solution to the question of the attainment of a higher totality lies in and through contradictory partial particulars.

Indeed, as far as the political consequences of various approaches to social epistemology go, a concern with democratic equality working as a harbinger of mediocrity might be more generously laid at the feet of the various relativisms considered in the previous chapter. As we saw, it is actually the case that – intentionally or not – a commitment to capturing the truths of differently-situated actors while simultaneously holding normative judgments in abeyance allows for a descent into symmetry; into a level lack of distinction. The issue of equality within

standpoint theories works at a different point in the epistemic process. Here, as with Nietzsche, there are better and worse perspectives and ways of being in the world. Standpoint theories are fundamentally grounded in distinctions. If there can be said to be equality-induced 'leveling' in standpoint theories, it seems to me that it must be occurring at the end, rather than the beginning, of the epistemic process. In other words, where relativism takes as equal variously-situated perspectives and *their truths*, standpoint theories aim to raise to an equal level distinctly-situated perspectives to *the truth*.

As was the case with Marx's project, I contend that feminist standpoint theories deploy the particular-general dialectic in a misguided fashion. The desire to transcend the particular in favor of an objective series of truths about reality that are generalizable – if not universal – inspires both Marxist and feminist iterations of standpoint theory; this, as opposed to understanding generality and objectivity as fluid configurations of perspectives that *remain* particular in their fluctuating positions and resist conflation into sets of fixed truths. Notwithstanding the not insignificant exchange of one subjugated social group for another, this chapter's reading of feminist standpoint theory as being of a piece with Marxist analysis is perhaps a matter of course, making the present analysis much ado about the already analyzed. The key distinction lies in the fact that feminist standpoint theories have come to realize that their thought works to radicalize their own logic (Harding, 1986, pp. 26-27, 161ff). In a manner similar to that of the feminist empiricists considered above, so too does feminist standpoint theory's own internal logic presume and gesture towards an approach that is yet more reflexive in the recognition of the fundamentally non-generalizable situatedness of knowledge.

Harding acknowledges the fact that standpoint theories gain much of their traction by an unfortunate reliance on essentialized subject identities. Having taken as her own starting point a

critique of the androcentric assumptions built into traditional Marxist theories that center the standpoint of the theoretically-generalizable working class, Harding reaches a point in her iteration of standpoint analysis that faces a parallel problem. What can it mean to speak of 'a' or 'the' feminist standpoint, or of 'women' as a cohesive and obviously straightforward social group? While such essentialized standpoints may be strategically utilized to counteract the biases and omissions of traditional knowledge practices, these deployments carry with them the temptation and threat of erecting new limitations to what counts as objective knowledge.[85] Harding ultimately cautions against relying – even strategically – upon such essentialized identities in the service of commanding maximal objectivity. This caution is articulated by way of a final approach to truth that Harding categorizes under the umbrella term, 'feminist postmodernism[s].' Feminist postmodernism calls into question the actuality and desirability of essentialized identities mobilized on the basis of either sincerity or strategy. Broadly understood, feminist postmodernist approaches to truth assert that the 'fractured,' which is to say multiply-situated self, can and ought to be the point of departure for perceiving and constructing knowledge (Harding, 1986, p. 28).[86] Knowledge fostered from, among, and in the interest of difference offers an approach that extends the logic and consequences of feminist standpoint theories. Multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory standpoints can be brought into

[85] Not only this, but there is a real problem in those "… tendencies to exalt women's different reality when it is also *less than the reality we want,* is not the only alternative reality, and is disappearing" (Harding, 1986, p. 176, emphasis mine).

[86] "This approach [feminist postmodernism] requires embracing as a fruitful grounding for inquiry the fractured identities modern life creates…it requires seeking a solidarity in our oppositions to the dangerous fiction of the naturalized, essentialized, uniquely 'human' (read 'manly') and to the distortion and exploitation perpetrated on behalf of this fiction. It may require rejecting fantasized returns to the primal wholeness of infancy, preclass (sic) societies, or pregender 'unitary' consciousness of the species – all of which have motivated standpoint epistemologies. From this perspective, feminist claims are more plausible and less distorting only insofar as they are grounded in a solidarity between these modern fractured identities and between the politics they create" (Harding, 1986, p. 28). The rhetoric here – 'infancy,' 'primal,' 'pre,' – all suggest a going backwards that I do not see as the logic or motivation of any standpoint theories. Nevertheless, the problems raised by seeking unity, totality, and non-contradiction remain significant.

productive conversation and practice while retaining degrees of tension – tension in need of recognition and reflection rather than repression or transcendence (Harding, 1986, pp. 174-175).[87] Here, objectivity is an expression of actual needs, desires, and interests as they are conditioned by, and experienced within, particular sets of historical social relations. To the extent that social relations are contradictory, so too will the meaning and criteria of objectivity be multi-faceted and open to change.

Writing in partial response to standpoint theories, Donna Haraway captures the challenge of feminist postmodern knowledge projects. On the one hand, there is the continuing relevance of standpoint theories' emphasis on overcoming relativism by way of a focus on normative judgments. "Feminists have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything…in traditional philosophical categories, the issue is ethics and politics perhaps more than epistemology" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579). At the same time, there is the need – necessarily risky and so uncomfortable – to move beyond standpoint theories' assumptions regarding a transcendental move up towards a set of truths.

> Ambivalence towards the disrupted unities… requires not sorting consciousness into categories of 'clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology' versus 'manipulated false consciousness', but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game… *We do not need a totality in order to work well*. (Haraway, 1991/1995, pp. 172-173, emphasis mine)

In other words, the theoretically and practically productive alternative to toggling between the poles of universalism and relativism is an approach characterized less by leveling pluralism or

[87] Harding here echoes my own concerns: "Coherent theories in an obviously incoherent world are either silly and uninteresting or oppressive and problematic… coherent theories in an apparently coherent world are even more dangerous, for the world is always more complex than such unfortunately hegemonic theories can grasp" (Harding, 1986, p. 164). To paraphrase Haraway, visions of total escape via transcendence prove to be little boy's tricks (Haraway, 1988).

pragmatism and more by distinctions based in partiality: shareable epistemologies motivated by solidarities in agonistic politics. As Haraway suggests (1988, p. 580), projects of social epistemology would do well to construct a new metaphor entirely: it may be helpful to exchange the rhetoric of poles for that of 'vision[s].'[88]

One vision that can be imagined in the light of both standpoint theories and Nietzsche's epistemic and cultural sensibilities is the mitigation of the conditions that make possible and help reproduce the spiritual and secular expressions of slavish approaches to life in the first place. Rather than take the pyramidal configurations of historical and social hierarchies for granted, the analysis of the production and reproduction of the existence and reification of such structures seems necessary. Such a reframing of the problem of slave epistemologies and moralities allows for the possibility of change to the structures of societies such that the many would no longer feel compelled to seek out recognition or impose 'responsible' repression. Logically at least, standpoint theories gesture towards what a 'leveling up' might look like. Providing Nietzsche with an Hegelian 'third moment' in and through the master-slave antithesis is tempting and not without theoretical merit. Attending to the possibility of leveling up structurally in response to cultural concerns weaves a reasonably tidy thread between Marxist, relativist, and feminist standpoint approaches. In the context of a reimagined Nietzschean perspectivalism, such a vision serves as a kind of knot tying the strands of social epistemology together. On this reading, perspectivalism could satisfy the otherwise conflicting desires for simultaneously increasing objectivity and giving due attention to the significance of particular contexts, while also insisting on the ultimately political and ethical foundations grounding claims to knowledge.

[88] Such visions need not be misconstrued as final or static epistemic or politico-ethical answers or guarantees; rather, they can exist as moving goal-posts given to perpetual negotiation. Visions shorn of security or stability can nevertheless serve non-moralizing motivational functions.

A vision of 'leveling up' in a materialist sense, allowing for a structural democratic equality that creates the conditions of possibility for cultural distinctions absent the specter of resentful mediocrity is key. Material conditions of plenty and of freedom can be used to secure the space for displays of physical prowess, cultural creativity, and a pathos of distance absent the reality of a structural or cultural herd. Epistemologically, given such political and cultural conditions, it might be possible to secure what Haraway (1988) refers to as 'situated knowledges' grounded in 'embodied objectivity' – an objectivity that refuses the 'God trick' (a view of everything from nowhere) – while maintaining that the natural and social worlds can be evaluated as more or less real and true when measured against the ability to flourish in the face of an ultimately epistemically and existentially uncertain life.[89]

The key to appropriating the liberatory potential in Nietzsche's perspectivalism seems to me to lie in reconsidering two overarching themes that animate his analyses across the subjects of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. If I am reading him at all correctly, these central themes are projects of *overcoming* – of going beyond both past and present presumptions and practices – and the centrality of *life*. What appears on the surface to be a potentially problematic attack of slavish social actors turns out to be a subtle recognition that individual and cultural embodiments and expressions – social relations and forms of life – that are now historical remain to inform the present while in no way suggesting straightforward recovery. Nietzsche compares and contrasts higher and lower forms of life not simply to praise or disparage each in turn, but in order to understand how and why present reality has the shape and substance that it does. Of course, as we have seen, for Nietzsche modern relations, values, and

[89] Simply put, what is necessary is a non-totalizing third moment. As Haraway has it: "We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (Haraway, 1988, p. 580).

forms of life leave much to be desired. What is necessary, then, is a way forward – out and over. No admirer of Hegel, and persistently 'distrust[ing of] all systematizers,' Nietzsche nevertheless deploys a version of dialectics within his texts; one that Adorno, reflecting on similar subjects from a similar philosophical and cultural (if not a similar political) angle, describes as 'negative dialectics' (Adorno 1966/2007; Nietzsche, *TI*, Epigrams and Arrows: 26). Negative, because this understanding of the world remains theoretically doubtful towards, and politically averse to, teleological and all-too-tidy syntheses of conflicts and contradictions. Dialectical, because in spite of such suspicions, such an approach remains committed to the possibility, however tentative, of radical emancipatory change.[90] However much Nietzsche reads as a reactionary to some readers, he is clear on the direction that his projects points. Indeed, this is "'Whispered into the conservative's ear – …a reversion, a reversal in any sense or to any degree is completely impossible" (Nietzsche, *TI*, Raids of an Untimely Man: 43). It is neither possible nor desirable that we should revert back or remain at either a masterly or slavish way of being in the world. It seems to me that Nietzsche is suggesting that the way out of modern malaise is through it.[91] To the extent that Nietzsche does yearn for anything like a reclamation of pre-slavish forms of life, such a return "is really not going back, but *coming up* – up into high, free, even terrible nature and naturalness, a nature that plays with great tasks, is *allowed* to play" (Nietzsche, *TI*, Raids of an Untimely Man: 48). Such a 'return' is better characterized as a physical, emotional, and

[90] I hasten to add that the point for Nietzsche is not to go beyond or leave behind the various epistemological projects aimed at increasing practical knowledge and understanding. It is the ascetic ideal animating our understanding of truth (and opposed to 'mere' appearances, becomings, partialness, deceptions, and falsehoods) that remains the target of his critiques. As for the practitioners of science: "least of all do I want to ruin the pleasure these honest workers take in their craft: for I enjoy their work" (Nietzsche, *GM*, III: 23).

[91] Recall that Nietzsche, like Freud after him, appreciates the cleverness and the interesting depth that slavish forms of life develop. The repetition of Zarathustra's going 'under' as cultivation and anticipation of an overcoming recommend such a reading (Nietzsche, *Z*).

cultural 'recovery' (Nietzsche, *TI*, Forward). As Zarathustra teaches, the task at hand is finding the courage to say yes to life; what is necessary is the cultivation of a '*new* nobility' (*Z*, III: 11).

In a post-script-made-preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1967) Nietzsche reflects upon what, ultimately, he has been trying to elaborate and emphasize across his intellectual career. His realization encapsulates what – if anything in Nietzsche can be said to be an 'answer' – the answer is to the questions he has been considering across his works: "To look at science in the perspective of the artistic, but at art *in the light of life*" (*BT*, Attempt at a Self-Criticism: 2, emphasis mine). Writing one year later, he prefaces a new edition of *The Gay Science* by contending that:

> I am still waiting for a philosophical physician…to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all "truth" but something else – let us say, health, future, growth, power, life. (Nietzsche, *GS*, Preface for the Second Edition)

The basis or foundation against which Nietzsche determines the relative value of a perspective is that of material lived existence mediated via the realm of the aesthetic. What is considered real and true must be considered in the light of an affirmation rather than a negation of life. What perspectives, what standpoints, what facts, truths, and understandings of reality embody and express a good life? What are the conditions that might yet allow us to say 'yes' to life – are these even possible and, if so, how? I have been gesturing towards my own attempt at an answer by suggesting a material leveling up that provides the conditions of possibility for agonistic cultural ranks and distinctions absent a resentful mediocrity qua leveling down.

Two objections – which is not to say wholesale refutations – to the vision of radically different materialist-structural conditions considered above must be acknowledged. The first objection comes by way of both a Marxist and a Nietzschean-inspired suspicion. If, as Nietzsche

suggests, spiritualized and secularized ressentiment is a cross-structural cultural phenomenon, then it is not clear or obvious just how a revolution in the materialist base would necessarily translate into a revaluation in the cultural superstructure. Taking a cue from Althusser's pessimistically persuasive reconceptualization of Marx's critique of ideology, it might just as well be the case that versions of slavish moralities, once reified and taken for granted as both real and valuable, take on a life of their own such that breaking the ideological loop becomes far more difficult than adjusting the material conditions that originally motivated its emergence in the first place (Althusser, 1968/2001). Woven as they are into the fabric of social life, slavish tables of values may very well resist such tidy treatments. How the knot of an ideological loop is loosed remains a critical but vexingly difficult question. The second objection to such a vision issues from Nietzsche directly. For Nietzsche, it is fundamentally misguided to imagine a world whose tables of values pivot around the increase of pleasure, the decrease of pain, and the progressive abolition of suffering; the strength and passion embodied and expressed *in spite* of the inevitability of suffering in life is the more appropriate approach to appreciating Nietzsche's worldview: "You want, if possible – and there is no more insane 'if possible' – to *abolish suffering*. And we? It really seems that *we* would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being as you understand it – that is no goal, that seems to us an *end*, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible – that makes his destruction *desirable*" (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 225).

On this reading, it is both impossible and undesirable to imagine or aim to introduce a set of conditions that would mitigate or eliminate distress. Where a Marxist or feminist approach can be marshaled in the service of fashioning conditions for agonistic distinctions shorn of unnecessary or artificial suffering, a Nietzschean pathos of distance appears to presume and desire conditions of, and in service toward, hardness. However, it seems more to the point to

recognize that Nietzsche's rejection of the increase of pleasure or decrease of pain, of the desire to 'abolish suffering,' and his mocking of such desires as having anything to do with real freedom, are bound up with the 'end' that is never an end; creative self-overcoming by way of intellectual and aesthetic projects of affirmation. In other words, it is his disdain for seeking or finding contentment in peace and comfort at the expense of ceaseless cultivation that Nietzsche finds objectionable. If this is at all correct, then a Marxist or feminist vision of radical change in conditions of possibility can be made – not without tension – to hold alongside Nietzsche's epistemic and cultural sensibilities. Such conditions are precisely that – conditions that make possible some other set of goals or ends and without which desires for overcoming mediocrity and ressentiment remain difficult. The passage above continues:

> The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness – was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 225)

His worry pivots once again around leveling mediocrity – this time a mediocrity born from relative contentment.[92] Yet again, such concerns read as a form of negative dialectics; there is no way to go backward in history or morality, nor is the present set of practices and values satisfactory. To go above and beyond the past and present by way of what I understand to be existential if not literal physiological suffering, while always recognizing the absence of anything like an epistemic anchor or foundation, brings the previous three chapters into something approaching a circle.

[92] One is reminded of those 'last men' who declare to Zarathustra that they "have invented happiness," and whose defining characteristic is their propensity to 'blink' blankly (Nietzsche, *Z*, Prologue: 5). We will have opportunity in the subsequent chapter to consider in greater detail such happy last men as they relate to seemingly sophisticated epistemological nihilists.

Having considered the productivity of Nietzsche's perspectival approach in the light of Marxist, relativist, and feminist standpoint theories, we have touched upon the significance of partiality, particularity, and the limitations of totalities that seek transcendence, as well as relativisms that avoid the agonistic tensions engendered by conflicting understandings, knowledges, and values. The final reflection that remains to be considered is the place of knowledge itself in relation to kinds of life. Relativistic accounts appear to seek out the various and contradictory truths of the world in a fashion not unlike one who cultivates a collection of some item; the process of collection and display, coupled with a motivation to cultivate an appreciation for and tolerance of the variety of kinds in existence, function as both a means and an end. Marxist and feminist accounts eschew symmetry in favor of using standpoints to make and take stands in the realm of politics, culture, and ethics. They do so in part by focusing on the significance of developing and deploying a correct epistemology; a central assumption guiding such accounts being the belief that finding or approaching closer to true accounts of the world will ultimately work to foster the possibility of a better world and better forms of being in the world for all. Such accounts are guided by and have as their end goal the vision and reality of better political, cultural, and ethical forms of being; truth acts as a necessary way-station, as a means toward emancipatory ends. With enough struggle and solidarity, errors and ideologies, distortive dualisms and partial truths can be seen in the light of a real, rational, and transparent series of objective truths. This transcendence into a kind of totality will provide the conditions of possibility for the attainment of the good life. It remains to be considered: is it possible that truth may be a consequence or expression of higher forms of life, rather than the path upon which they are achieved?

What remains to be taken up is the question of the various motivations for, and consequences arising from, the desire to quantitatively increase and qualitatively enhance objectivity. Simultaneously an epistemic and a political project, universalist, relativist, and feminist approaches each aim for truth in the name of some or another form of being in the world – some kind of life. Nietzsche reverses this line of thought and calls into question the will or desire for truth as such, in the process troubling the overlaps or family resemblances that I have so far read into Nietzsche's perspectivalism and these various schools of thought. The question of the will-to-truth as such informs the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Question of the Will-to-Truth in Light of Life

> The paradox, the dialectical secret of a true politics, consists in choosing a critical standpoint which does not hypostatize itself as the positive standpoint.
>
> –Horkheimer and Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 12

Across the previous chapters, I have considered how and to what extent Nietzsche's intellectual sensibilities might be articulated with universalizing, relativizing, and standpoint-specific social approaches to truth. Nietzsche's perspectivalism – including the political and cultural sensibilities that inform it – works to bring into sharp relief the character and consequences that various social epistemologies embody. In particular, the previous reflections variously highlight the privileged position that truth holds as both a means and an end relative to understandings of the good life. Whether motivated from a purportedly pure or purposefully politically-interested angle, the social studies of knowledge considered against and in light of Nietzschean perspectivalism each understand their job to be the attainment of ever more and ever better approximations of the truth about the reality of our natural and social worlds.

I have considered how formally or methodologically, Nietzsche's epistemic assumptions can perform fruitful work alongside Marxist concerns of dismantling ideological forms of consciousness, while also cautioning such projects against their tendency towards seeking something like a totalizing transcendence beyond particular and partial perspectives. I then turned to face the potential of relativism arising from such a rejection of generalizability. In spite of their shared rejection of totality, we saw that Nietzsche's perspectivalism cannot be persuasively counted as an iteration of relativism; to the contrary, Nietzsche warns us about just such a looming epistemological and existential threat. Nietzsche makes very clear that his

perspectivalism is grounded in the contention that there are better and worse perspectives of, and approaches to, the world. Having exhausted the fruitfulness of toggling between universalism and relativism, I considered whether Nietzsche's perspectivalism might be read as of a piece with feminist standpoint theories. In spite of the immediate qualification that substantively, Nietzsche cannot in any obvious sense be read as an instance of, or alongside feminism, the best epistemic match to his formal approach appears to be such standpoint theories. In such theories there is an emphasis upon partiality and particularity, as well as an explicit rejection of symmetry and relativism on the grounds that some perspectives of the natural and social worlds are fundamentally better than others. Here, so it seemed, was Nietzschean perspectivalism by another name. However, as was the case with relativism, it became clear that standpoint theories – feminist and otherwise – cannot be read as of a piece with perspectivalism even at the formal or methodological level. Not only do Hegelian-informed standpoint theories privilege the slavish over the masterly in their dialectics, but the fact of their having an ultimately transcendental dialectic at all necessarily serves to distance them from Nietzsche's non-systematic sensibilities. Perspectivalism makes fruitful interpretive interventions with the approaches to social epistemologies outlined in the previous chapters, while remaining non-reducible to any of them. These reflections on their own are interesting enough; nevertheless, there is one final question that the preceding chapters collectively beg: the question of the will-to-truth as such.

The previous chapter concluded with a consideration of how the order of causation between truth and life is conceptualized in accounts of social epistemology. In each of the accounts considered in relation to Nietzsche's perspectivalism, the arrow of causation runs from truth towards something like the good life; for Marxists and feminist standpoint theorists, particularities and dualistic abstractions posing ideologically as false generalizations require

recognition and dismantling in the service of actually objective – because reflective of the actual realities of the social relations of the many – truths. Such truths then work as a central means for securing the good life. In other words, so long as distortion and misunderstanding about the way in which social relations 'really' work are assumed and reproduced, the possibility for overcoming present relations in favor of something better must necessarily remain partial or stalled. The will-to-truth here results from a series of political-ethical assumptions about what the good – or at least a better – life consists of, with truth functioning as an epistemic warrant upon and through which such a life can be both secured and justified. The means-ends arrow moves from truth towards life: good forms of life rest upon the recognition of, and reaction to, the true character of natural and social reality.

On the face of it, forms of epistemic relativism avoid the temptation of seeing in truth anything like a political-ethical roadmap. Indeed, as we have seen, iterations of relativism work to demonstrate the existence of multiple (and at least potentially equally-justifiable) truths across social spaces and places; one perspective or standpoint is here of an epistemically-level piece with any other. Nevertheless, the intellectual goal of relativism is to work towards increasing the description and social scientific causal explanation of the singular Truth *about* the historical and socio-cultural character of various otherwise plural and relative truths. Again, the project of securing more and better accounts of the Truth of truths functions as a means toward the end of what is here the good life in an intellectual, if not political-ethical, sense. In other words, the approaches to social epistemology against which I have been considering perspectivalism each conceptualize the significance of truth in relation to its function as a necessary way station on the path to attaining and legitimizing better forms of intellectual and material life.

Nietzsche presents the provocative possibility of reversing this means-end arrow in order to secure and justify truth by, and as a series of embodiments and expressions *of,* a good life. At once both physiological and cultural, good living here informs what is true; what is correct or accurate about the natural and social worlds must, on this reading, be a reflection of a 'correct' material and intellectual condition. What is traditionally conceived of as a question of epistemology is transformed by Nietzsche's understanding into questions of culture and the conditions of material existence. Conventional concerns regarding whether 'x' is or explains something true about the reality of the world shift into a series of concerns with what forms of life do or might exist. Rather than functioning as a means of, and a justification for, particular forms of life, truth in Nietzsche's hands is *the result* of healthy and higher forms of life that ceaselessly create, express, and *justify themselves*. In other words, the spheres of epistemology and methodology – social or otherwise – must ultimately be understood within the more fundamental sphere of the material-ontological.

Such a conceptualization of truth is neither universal nor relative in character. Additionally, this conceptualization of truth refuses to trade in slavish and resentful desires driven towards processes of mediocre leveling. Insofar as one seeks or requires a 'ground' upon which intellectual or existential understanding may be built and secured, Nietzsche's contention that truths can be justified in light of forms of life directs attention to material embodiments and their expressions; focus ultimately belongs on the particular material and cultural conditions and social relations in which particular lives are constituted and related. The emphasis upon particularity and partiality that we have continually seen at play continues to be a defining characteristic in this final understanding of Nietzsche's perspectival approach to truth and life. Likewise, the insistence that there are fundamentally better and worse ways of being in and

knowing the world remains paramount. In an important sense, the pride of place afforded the concept of truth in other social epistemologies is here greatly diminished. Truth is no longer *doing* much; as an end to be achieved rather than the means towards achieving something beyond itself, truth might now be understood as something not unlike an afterthought stripped of its former intellectual – which is not at all to say its practical – agency. At the same time, as an accomplishment wrought from a series of justifications of and by forms of life, truth can also be understood to occupy a rather more elevated position than it has in other social epistemologies. No longer relegated to a stepping stone on the way towards a set of social conditions beyond itself, truth is now afforded the status of indicating the accomplishment of a desirable form of life.

This concluding chapter first provides a final angle for considering the relationship between the spheres of epistemology and ontology. Here, I pause to reflect upon the significance of recognizing in Nietzsche's work the possibility of material life being a series of relations that express a fundamental 'illusory' character motivated by both rational and irrational desires. I contend that Nietzsche's concern with materiality is not only a critique of iterations of idealism, but also and significantly a critique of anything like a crude positivism that reduces down to brute facts of the matter the questions of what is real, true, and desirable. I take the liberty in this final chapter of taking Nietzsche's reflections on the character of material life and extending out their logic in a preliminary speculative fashion. I consider that if life can be understood as a series of variously rational and irrational embodiments and expressions of desires, then the character of real material life is in some important sense 'illusory,' 'apparent,' or even 'erroneous' when measured against the standards of even radically social epistemologies. If the

yardstick for truth is in some crucial sense forms of material and cultural life, then we must contend with the character of life as a series of more and less risky desires.

In the wake of this final speculation, I am compelled to take up its potential limitations and the lingering suspicions or dissatisfactions with which they may leave those of us versed in traditional social epistemologies. As provocative as Nietzsche's causal reversal is, it begs – one is tempted to say 'screams' – a series of further questions. However sympathetic one may be to the argument that lived reality – individual and collective conditions, relations, and the rational and irrational desires that motivate them – is and ought to remain paramount in any consideration of what is true or correct, what does such a conceptualization do to conventional questions of science, technology, and the policies that attend these spheres and their projects? While managing to eschew straightforward relativism, does not Nietzschean perspectivalism still ultimately hinge upon something to the effect of: 'I am flourishing in my context, so the world is good and true?' If not relativistic, is such a conception of truth not lazily – and very likely dangerously – solipsistic, narrow, and so politically and ethically hollow? Likewise, if life is understood as fundamentally partial, fluid, and playful, lighting across shifting surfaces and semblances and refusing to remain still or certain, are we not compelled to wonder: how might anything requiring seriousness or certainty – scientifically, technologically, politically, or otherwise – be taken up in a satisfactory manner? If life is conceived as expressions of will-to-power, and if will-to-power is fundamentally and by definition a sphere incapable of capture by traditional epistemic categories of accuracy and error, correction and mistake, then is not life in some sense fundamentally an (and in) 'error' by way of its arational and amoral directions and expressions? Must not such an understanding necessarily contribute to a climate of knowledge

and social relations that we might today call 'post-fact' or 'post-reality,' with their attendant political and ethical consequences?

Perhaps. These questions are reasonable and require generous engagement. I contend that despite the real and really risky possibility of Nietzsche's perspectivalism working in the fashion captured by such questions, his approach to the truth of reality in fact offers one potential way of combatting just such concerns. Far from contributing to it, Nietzsche's account of truth offers an approach to moving out of and beyond the current 'post-truth' epistemological-political morass. In order to arrive at the concluding section in which an articulation of exactly how and why such crucially productive interventions may be possible, the second half of this chapter is devoted to a consideration of the character and consequences concerning the will-to-truth as such developed in the light of Nietzsche's thought. Before considering the potentially positive practical *effects* of taking seriously Nietzsche's reversal of truth and its relationship to life (with the attendant 'conclusion' that life, as playful illusion, must then suggest that epistemic truth as such is an error), a prior set of concerns need to be considered. Before rejecting Nietzsche's deflation of epistemology as paralyzing or reactionary, it is necessary to reflect upon what a continuing adhesion to truth as a necessary means for intellectual, political, or ethical ends can entail. Having arrived at Nietzsche's counterintuitive elision of conventional epistemology in favor of 'post-truth' materiality and desire, I argue that reversing the angle of critique from the seeming lack of solid truth to the unquestioned assumption of the goodness and necessity of such truth proves crucial to fully evaluating the merits of all approaches to social epistemology. I contend that it is just exactly in efforts to contend with life's ultimately uncertain and risky relations, conditions, and desires that the will-to-truth emerges and gains its power and persuasiveness. Paradoxically, it is in those attempts to tame a fundamentally risky reality of desires by means of

the capture and control of truth that certain desires find socially-acceptable outlets and investments that actually deny life.

If this is at all correct, then two questions remain. First, what motivates this motivation? That is, if the will-to-truth serves to motivate particular projects, what informs this will in either its first or final instance? What, specifically, drives an individual or collective towards a ceaseless accumulation of facts and evidence, along with the ever more fine-tuned methodological precision that enables these accumulations? Nietzsche's final contention at the end of his *Genealogy* is by now well-rehearsed: humans "would much rather will *nothingness* than *not* will…" (Nietzsche, *GM*, I: 28). To appreciate the full significance of the essay's pregnant last phrase, I turn to a consideration of the nature of will understood as desire as this is developed in the work of Sigmund Freud. Essential to fully understanding and appreciating the implications of Nietzsche's questions and contentions, the psychoanalytic approach as theorized by Freud more fully develops and explains the how and the why of the willing (desiring) – including the ceaseless will-to-truth – that Nietzsche has identified for us. Freud's systematic elaboration of the character and meaning of desire brings into helpful relief the elemental inspirations motivating the search for truth; both the discussion of the death of God in *The Gay Science* in chapter three, and the analysis of ressentiment and the eventual drive towards truth as a central means of respite on the way to transcendental resistance that such ressentiment inspires raised in the *Genealogy* and considered in chapter four is productively expanded and better understood in the light of Freudian psychoanalytic insights into the nature of desire.

In possession of this expanded meditation on how and why desire flows in the fashions that it does, we are in a solid position from which to examine the potential and real downside of attaching foundational significance to the search for, and accumulation of, truth. A final iteration

of the will-to-truth that Nietzsche's previous critiques bring into sharp relief is best articulated by the early Frankfurt School – the counterintuitive process of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002). The concern here is that the will-to-truth as unquenchable desire for more and better truths about the natural and social worlds can work in the service of something like an anti-Enlightenment. In other words, the fetishizing of more and better facts about the world, of ever-increasing accuracy, technical efficiency, and an unthinking exaltation and investment in truth, comes to work – even if unintentionally or unconsciously – in the service of life-denying projects. The consequences that can emerge from an overemphasis on the attainment of truth range from the decadent nihilism that emerges from substantively vacant positivism to the material and existential terror that stems from the reification and totalitarian application of 'really true' concepts, facts, and classification schemes. As discussed in chapter three, the transformation of moral and theological into methodological and epistemological questions was examined. The central contention of the chapter was that Nietzsche, far from gesturing towards relativism, in fact warns against this possibility; given the relationship between morality and epistemology, the death of God signals a crumbling of both moral and epistemic foundations even as it paradoxically suggests that morality is very much a feature of modern agnostic or atheistic cultures. Relativism both fosters and results in positivism and that, taken together, the resulting epistemological and existential condition is that of an apparently self-satisfied but really perpetually discontent nihilism. The quest for more and better understandings of various and relative truths is, ultimately, itself a positivistic search for the Truth of our natural and social worlds. I suggested above that the ceaseless desire to collect more and better accounts of the world serves as a means towards the end of a better or good life – 'life' here in the sense of an all-encompassing intellectual project. Here, we see that a good intellectual

life is in fact an 'end' that lacks any finality or termination. In other words, relativism and positivism – understood individually or as one conflated into the other – are motivated at a fundamental level by a perpetually unsatisfied will-to-truth.

The desire for more and better truths about the natural and social worlds as the means towards, and foundational justification of, better intellectual, technological, political, and ethical forms of life can, counterintuitively, emerge from, and seek to attain and maintain social structures, relations, and sensibilities characterized by various degrees of fatal falsehoods. Whether as statically-ridged, mindless, and taken-for-granted facts and data that serve as their own reason for existence, or as concepts and pieces of evidence that serve to 'explain' and so validate a host of insidious ideological imperatives, simplistically singular fixations on acquiring truth can prove to be as or more harmful than helpful or liberating. It is in the light of such considerations on the character and consequences of the will-to-truth that I consider the significance of Nietzsche's perspectivalism.

Life as Essential Illusion?

If we follow Nietzsche in evaluating truths from the perspective of kinds of life, it becomes necessary, as was done in the previous chapter, to attend to the particular conditions and relations in and of which such kinds of life emerge, reproduce, and transform. In addition to an exploration of the socio-cultural and political contexts informing forms of life, there remains the final issue of how life itself can be characterized and understood. Considerations concerning the character of life necessarily lead beyond the realm of the epistemic, through the realm of the socio-cultural and political, into the final and fundamental realm of the ontological. In addition to

recognizing and seeking to understand the how and the why of better and worse forms of life, the question of the condition of life as such informs our understanding of the status of truth as such.

Here, I offer a brief speculative reflection on how life as such may be understood in the light of Nietzsche's perspectival approach. I do not aim to capture what Nietzsche's own ontological commitments are; rather, I consider one possible interpretive intervention regarding the relationship between truth and life informed by the provocative elements of Nietzsche's perspectivalism considered in the preceding chapters. By turns focused upon particular individuals' bodies and their healthy or diseased functions, natural drives and their expression or repression, as well as the circumstances seeking to structure the direction of the will to power and its manifestations, Nietzsche remains ever-attentive to the particular material milieu in which human beings emerge, exist, and express themselves individually, in relation to others, and in relation to broader natural and social worlds. While he remained allergic to trading in labels and 'isms,' I contend that Nietzsche's philosophical project as a whole must be understood to be rooted in the broad tradition of philosophical materialism and so fundamentally suspicious of projects grounded in versions of idealism. Indeed, as we have seen across the previous chapters, Nietzsche consistently opposes understandings of the world that fall under the broad banner of idealism; appeals to conceptions of a 'beyond' that is unanchored from material life arouse suspicion and rejection. Projects which attempt to locate, secure, and justify knowledge, reality, or ethical imperatives in an ideal sphere – whether this sphere is characterized as Platonic Forms, religious divinities and their providence, Cartesian rationality, Kantian noumena, or Hegel's Absolute – each make the fundamental and fatal mistake of seeking out and attempting to ground claims to certain truth outside of material life.

In addition to the essential error of seeking the source of reality, truth, and goodness beyond the realm of the material, idealist projects by definition trade in problematic dualistic schemas. In such readings, the material world of existence and embodiment is understood and evaluated against an immaterial realm or sphere; this immaterial realm is not only distinct from the material world, but it is understood to be better or higher – more real, more true, and more good. Crucially, such dualistic schemas impute the real, true, and good to immaterial realms on the basis of the assumption that such realms are already essentially static and eternal realms housing Being; conversely, such schemas may recognize processes of change and becoming, while still presuming that such processes of becoming are ultimately motivated by and towards the achievement of a teleological end point. In their fundamental essence, the really Real, True, and Good are non-material and are already or on their way to becoming Being.

The double maneuver of first presuming a dichotomy between material life and a realm outside of material life and then arranging this dichotomy as a hierarchy that treats that which is beyond life as superior on the basis that non-material realms do or can potentially allow for timeless truths about reality invites a series of counter-maneuvers. Idealist schemas not only invite a process of inversion that positions the material world as the superior basis upon which claims to truth about reality ought to rest, but the dualistic distinction of a material realm set off against an ideal realm is itself denied. I contend that this two-step materialist counter-maneuver that both inverts and dissolves idealist dualisms might be inspired to undergo one further and more provocative move by way of Nietzsche – a move that leads to a series of considerations regarding the meaning of appearance and illusion as they relate to the material world.

In countering idealist understandings of truth, materialist understandings must reject distinctions suggesting that the real material world is ‘merely apparent’ while variously

stipulated ideal realms contain or allow for the achievement of the real, true, and good. To claim that the material world is an apparent world rests upon the taken-for-granted moral assumption that stasis, stability, and certainty are and ought to be the key characteristics of anything that is actually real and true. All concepts and empirical observations that are subject to change, challenge, or chance are less real and true than those ideas, facts, and ethics that already are or are in the process of seeking to attain an essence of eternal being. If a concept, observation, claim, or imperative is subject to change, it is not actually or not yet fully real and true and so it is 'apparent' or incomplete relative to the real – a real which is found or achieved in the realm of the ideal. As implied by the qualifier 'merely,' the notion of something – in this instance the material world – being 'merely apparent' suggests the character of relative or absolute lack or deficiency. Morally, the characterization of 'merely apparent' signals that the material world is less good and desirable than another, immaterial, world. Epistemically, the characterization of 'merely apparent' suggests that there is something wrong in the sense of being untrue or erroneous about the knowledge derived from our natural and social worlds. Again, the central contention around which these epistemic-moral judgments are based is the rejection of fundamental fluidity, challenge, and chance being characteristic of something real, true, or good. Simply put, the material world and the knowledge we have or seek from it must necessarily be and remain at least partially wrong or imperfect because of its mutable nature.

When considering materialism in light of Nietzsche's perspectivalism I am struck by the sense that, while suspicious of idealistic notions of finding the real, true, and good 'beyond' this world, Nietzsche does not appear to reject the significance of appearance in relation to real material life. In other words, perhaps it is not necessary for materialist understandings of life to reject the concept of the apparent in favor of the real in order to claim in a positivistic or

naturalistic fashion that the material world is the only real world and, thus, the only source for stable and solid truths about reality that can be secured. Rather, perhaps it is possible to accomplish a counterintuitive resignification of the concept of 'apparent' as being the real and true (and presumably also the good) character of life itself. It is in his early reflections on the relationship between art, knowledge, and life and the significance of dreaming that I find in Nietzsche a productive reimagining of appearance, illusion, and primal life.

> … the more clearly I perceive in nature those omnipotent art impulses, and in them an ardent longing for illusion, for redemption through illusion, the more I feel myself compelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption. And we, completely wrapped up in this illusion and composed of it, are compelled to consider this illusion as the truly non-existent – i.e., as a perpetual becoming in time, space, and causality – in other words, as empirical reality. If, for the moment, we do not consider the question of our own 'reality,' if we conceive of our empirical existence, and that of the world in general, as a continuously manifested representation of the primal unity, we shall then have to look upon the dream as a *mere appearance of mere appearance*, hence as a still higher appeasement of the primordial desire for mere appearance. (Nietzsche, *BT*, IV: pp. 44-45)

The passage comes amidst a discussion on the role of the sphere of aesthetics relative to forms of life and the types and ways of knowing that life gives rise to. The broader context of this particular passage involves Nietzsche drawing a distinction between relatively serene and dream-like 'Apollonian' from intoxicatingly irrational and primal 'Dionysian' forms of art. The Dionysian forms of expression and embodiment, including theatre, dance, and music, work to create states in which individuals temporarily lose their sense of being distinct elements of the universe; the intoxication of the Dionysian arts works to dissolve not only social and moral inhibitions, but also our very sense of being individuals that exist at a level of remove from one another and from the natural world. Hence, we can speak of the reality of a 'truly existent primal unity' underlying our day-to-day existence that then requires the calm Apollonian arts to return a

sense of measure, reason, and artificial order and distinction to what is actually undifferentiated life as flows of will.

In extrapolating this logic, one can argue that Nietzsche grasps the fundamental ontological character of life – the 'truly existent primal unity' – as a will that 'seeks redemption' and so justification through a continuous series of recognitions of empirical reality – through measure, rationality, and orderly distinction. The issue however, is that seeking such pleasurable illusions in the empirical world is troubled by the fact that the world itself is 'a perpetual becoming,' which is to say, a necessary 'pleasurable illusion.' The fundamental impulse of desire constitutive of life seeks affirmative expression and justification of itself; this affirmative expression and justification of what *is* paradoxically finds its justification in what perpetually *becomes* – and so this pleasurable – and perhaps necessary – illusion of reason by definition is only ever mere appearance. Crucially however, this appearance does not indicate lack or deficiency; 'mere' appearance now serves to describe the nature of the expression of our fundamental desires and ways of existing in and as part of the 'primal unity' that is life.[93]

In a paradoxical sense, the material world itself is grasped only through shifting plays of appearance; i.e., though 'illusions.' In a sense, this understanding of the material world is of a piece with idealist understandings; the material world is only ever grasped as transitory, fungible, and subject to change and chance. Concepts, empirical observations, and understandings of the real and true *do* transform over time and across psycho-socio-cultural contexts. Whole

[93] Not only this passage, but the ideas put forth in *Birth of Tragedy* as a whole provide productive - if sometimes interpretively ambiguous - suggestions about the significance of the realm of aesthetics for understanding the ways in which we come to know and relate to our worlds, up to and including our modern scientific sense of knowing. While a sustained consideration of Nietzsche's theory of aesthetics is beyond the scope of the current project, it is the obvious next step that further research into the question of desire and the will-to-truth raise. In his reading of *Birth of Tragedy* and his development of the radical Kantian concept of a 'transcendental heuristic,' Strong (2012) provides a provocative path in this direction, suggesting that the 'ground' or basis of 'ultimate' justification for otherwise unmoored political, ethical, and epistemological projects may be aesthetic in nature.

intellectual systems and schemas of justification arise, are challenged, and die off. Likewise, the human beings who aim to recover or achieve knowledge are themselves creatures subject to the fundamental mutability that characterizes life as such. By recognizing that, "all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error," Nietzsche's materialist-perspectivalist understanding does indeed lend itself to understanding life itself as ultimately unreal unstable illusion (*BT*, Attempt at a Self-Criticism: 5). The punchline here is that precisely those characteristics that idealist accounts identify as reasons to remain skeptical of materialist accounts to knowledge are the characteristics that Nietzsche identifies as truths about the world.

To contend with Nietzsche that the material world must be understood through a shifting series of appearances is to recognize its fluid, historical, and contextual character. It is to appreciate that claims to knowledge are indeed necessarily partial and not only, as demonstrated in chapter two, because perspectives are perspectives from particular individuals or groups. Nor is it only, as demonstrated in chapter four, because perspectives arise from and speak to and about better and worse kinds of life. These recognitions are crucial, but the point here is even more fundamental. The point now is that life *as such* is fundamentally incapable of being grasped in either an idealist or brute materialist sense. Both the objects to be known and the subjects who aim to do the knowing are in and of life and so are characterized in this one essential sense – that they will always elude the realm of essence itself. Material life is and expresses a continuous series of more and less drastic, more and less frequent fluctuations. Whether considered at the level of individuals, societies and cultures, the micro, meso, or macro-levels of organisms and natural environments, or the wider cosmos, matter is subject to flux and difference.

Despite the contention that the whole of life may be ultimately and essentially something akin to a 'primal unity,' such unity is itself the unity of contradictory and fluid states and plays of desires. In other words, while the material world is of course capable of being captured in particular constellations at given points in time and space, such capture or fixing is always already also in a state of change; what *is* both exists together in a unified series of relations and *shifts* in diverse and contradictory directions. What is 'only apparent' is the fantasy of a world other than the material one of which we necessarily gain the knowledge that we do gain as creatures in and of this world. That this material world is fundamentally non-essential and so non-certain makes it, in some sense an error or illusion.

The counterintuitive conclusion that Nietzsche can help us arrive at is that the fundamental character of life – fluid mutability understood as 'mere' appearance, error, or illusion - *is the truth* of life. This lack of essence, this "error," is the truth of the world. If the truth of the world is that it is non-essential, then the truths that are achieved in and of this world must also be ultimately non-essential and so ultimately unstable. If the truths of this world are ultimately non-essential and so ultimately unstable, then by definition *the conception of and desire for stable and certain truth itself must be an essential illusion.*

To run the above logic partially backwards, if truth is an error, then the life which gives rise to such truth is itself in some sense an error. But, as Nietzsche asks with no small amount of incredulity in chapter four, what can it possibly mean to suggest that life is an error? Life cannot be understood in terms of accurate or inaccurate, true or false. Life properly understood transcends epistemological categories. To suggest that life is an error is literally meaningless. Life is. Life can be expressed as better and worse embodiments and sets of social relations. However, to recognize that life is bad in the physiological, psychological, politico-cultural, or

ethical sense does not render life as such an error. If claims to truth are judged by their stability and certainty, then truths wrought from life must remain in some sense unsatisfactory – forever in need of more or different examination, explanation, and justification. If positivist or idealist tables of values are operative in a given approach to epistemology, then that epistemology will find truth lacking. By transferring to ontology the table of values appropriate to positivist or idealist epistemologies, life is found lacking. Life comes up short and, like truth, life itself requires something more or different that can render it complete, stable, and secure. Positivist accounts desire ever more data that is ever more specific and accurate in capturing the reality of the natural and social worlds. Idealist accounts desire access to a realm of reality and truth beyond the material world. In both, the animating drive is to secure something additional that remains lacking. Life either has not yet or cannot ever serve to secure foundational truths and so it is perpetually in need. The twin senses of lack and longing animate the will-to-truth as such. It remains to be explored what exactly constitutes and animates these senses of lack and longing.

Above, I indicated two worrisome consequences that have the potential to arise out of a fixation on the accumulation of truths about the natural and social worlds: the emergence of a seemingly self-satisfied secular scientism aimed at nothing in particular outside of its own activities, and the even more dangerous transformation of such storehouses of truths into both the components and the rationalizations necessary for orchestrating apparently obligatory and justifiable – because 'simply' expressions of neutrally-progressive science – intellectual, technological, political, and ethical projects that are deeply damaging to embodiments and expressions of life affirmation. In what remains I consider such potential results stemming from an overemphasis upon the will-to-truth relative to other expressions of desire in life. Such considerations should not be read to suggest that a drive towards truth is inherently misguided or

destructive. Rather, these reflections serve to keep in perspective the contention that the attainment of more and better truths is always obviously necessary, justified, and valuable. Having taken these two pauses in the light of Nietzsche's understanding of truth in relation to life, we will finally be in a position to consider the strengths and limitations such perspectivalism presents to contemporary intellectual and political projects.

Will-to-Truth I: The How and Why

Nietzsche begins *Beyond Good and Evil* with an iconic series of questions about the will-to-truth and the investments of value this will elicits from us.

> The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect – what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now – and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun. Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn away impatiently? that we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? *Who* is it really that puts questions to us here? *What* in us really wants "truth"? Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will – until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth; *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth came before us – or was it we who came before the problem? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks. And though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never even been put so far – as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes and *risk* it. For it does involve a risk, and perhaps there is none that is greater. (Nietzsche, *BGE*, 1)

Throughout the present work, we have seen how Nietzsche's articulation of the relationship between truth and life provides a uniquely provocative angle from which to consider, compare, and critique various approaches to social epistemology. What remains to be unpacked – the questions remaining to be 'risked' – are those questions concerning the motivations driving or being expressed in the will-to-truth as such as well as the real and potential consequences that

arise from investments in this will. Before concluding by way of a consideration of the stakes of taking Nietzsche's materialist-perspectivalist approach seriously, a detour through first Freud's psychoanalytic understanding of desire and then the early Frankfurt School's reflections upon the consequences resulting from overinvestments of such desire are in order. The two projects are intimately connected. I turn to Freud's analyses of desire in order to make better sense of Nietzsche's deployment of the concept of will-to-power. Recall from the previous chapter that will-to-power is, for Nietzsche, living creatures' 'instinct for freedom' (GM, II: 17-18). In exploring the character and consequences of the master-slave dynamic, we began to gain something like an intuitive sense of what 'instinct for freedom' might mean; in what follows, I turn to Freud's theory of libidinal investments as a way of better unpacking what it means to suggest that human beings are fundamentally embodiments and expressions of will, i.e., of desire. At the risk of trading in just such systematic formulations that arouse Nietzsche's suspicions, Freud provides a useful breakdown of the specific processes at work in and as will-desire.

Having used Freud as a way in to better understanding the character of will as desire, I consider the implications of truth and method transforming into objects of libidinal desire and investment. It is precisely such expressions of desire stemming from real or imagined fear, scarcity, uncertainty, and the parallel desires for security, comfort, and material well-being identified by Freud that inform Horkheimer and Adorno's critique and warning of the seemingly neutral desire for truth. In other words, the project of seeking and securing ever-greater stores of facts, ever-more precise concepts and classification schema, and of ever more efficient and productive uses of technology – all in the name of increasing the scope and strength of neutral truth in the objective interests of all – is motivated in no small measure by what can only be

understood as subjective – in the sense of particular, situated, interested (if not biased), desires stemming from rational or irrational desires which themselves are expressions of and responses to various kinds and conditions of material life. While it is inaccurate to read either Freud or the early Frankfurt School as simply or only echoing Nietzsche's analyses of power and materiality, I do contend that read together, these three strands of thought paint a particularly striking picture of the character and consequences of reading truth and our will for it in the light of life. That an overinvestment in truth can in fact prove fatal to forms of life is the sobering punchline towards which Nietzsche, Freud, and the early Frankfurt School collectively gesture. After considering the specifics of Freud and Horkheimer and Adorno's analyses regarding the character and consequences of the will-to-truth, we will return to a final assessment of Nietzsche's perspectivalism in order to arrive at a more ambiguous if no less risky series of concluding thoughts.

Arational Desires: Will as Psycho-Material Libidinal Investments

Social actors express need and desire in even the most unfavorable social relations. Expressions manifest in more and less conscious, more and less rational actions. In line with the tradition of philosophical materialism broadly understood, Freud's theory of arational desires as libidinal investments and identifications aims to make sense of seemingly irrational beliefs and actions by ultimately referring back to forms of life. In a fashion akin to Nietzsche's materialist-perspectivalist understanding of knowledge and social action, Freud's understanding of social relations as instances of investments and identifications rests upon concrete material social embodiments and experiences while simultaneously blurring the boundaries between social actors' particular perspectives and perceptions – including their particular illusions or fantasies – and the material world in which such perspectives emerge and are expressed.

Freud provides us with an understanding of psychological investment to account for the emergence and repetition of both collectively-held illusory beliefs and what he terms 'mass' actions and institutional practices (1921/2004a). Individuals are always also social, and Freud's psychoanalytic explanations of individual behavior are essentially social in nature (1921/2004a, p. 17).[94] Human action is driven in character; that is to say, human activity is desire expressed as investment in self and others. Individual humans are socialized through an expanding series of "Others" – other selves and other objects – who serve to meet, and so help to shape, an individual's needs and desires as they transform over time (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 17). Objects potentially capable of satisfying needs and desires are 'charged' in the process of the desiring subject's investment (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 55). In other words, individuals invest objects with material and psychic significance in the process of acting with and through them. Conversely, other selves and objects may just as well be understood as real or potential obstacles partially or entirely blocking the fulfillment of particular desires (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 17).

What Nietzsche designates as 'will' is in Freud understood in terms of libido or desire; there is a fundamental or essential 'energy' or animating force that is variously expressed within particular material conditions (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 41).[95] Our drives constitute the basis of our psychic and material lives. This formulation is deceptively simple. In one sense, Freud's theory of libidinal investment may be read as too broad and in another sense as too reductive. Human

[94] Freud considers the possibility that "the social drive is perhaps not an original, irreducible one… the origins of its formation may be found in a smaller circle" (1921/2004a, p. 18). Reading as a sociologist, 'a smaller circle' (i.e. the so-called primitive family or clan) would constitute 'the social.' As is the case with Nietzsche's deployment of 'will' as both a concept and an explanation, there remains a sense in which Freud's discussion of libidinal desire reads as a somewhat ahistorical general force acting within particular sets of social relations.

[95] "Libido is how we refer to the energy…of those drives having to do with everything that can be brought together under the heading of love. The core of what we call love is of course what is generally known as love and poets sing of, namely sexual love with the goal of sexual union. However we do not separate off from that the other things that share the name of love: self-love, on the one hand, and on the other hand, parental and infant love, friendship, general love of humanity, and even dedication to concrete objects as well as to abstract ideas" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 41). This expansive definition of libido allows for an interpretation of Freud that avoids what I contend is the mistake of reading him as a utilitarian.

life is essentially a series of more or less successful attempts at satisfying needs and desires, and such needs and desires are by turns material and sexual in nature – full stop. It is a distortion of Freud's analytic insight to read off from his primary theoretical assumptions any easy deflations such that all social action is 'merely' or 'really' just individuals seeking functional satisfactions. To the contrary, Freud sees in even the most apparently rational actions, the more or less contained potential of the arational unconscious (1921/2004a, p. 39). He understands his task to be the exploration of "the conditions under which influence is exerted for no adequate logical reason" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 41). Freud's theory of libidinal investment is compelled to recognize that needs and desires, including the objects and relationships available to capture and create desire, are historically particular and fluid in nature.[96, 97]

Libidinal investments can be understood as practices of identification and repression (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 57). Identification is an emotional attachment that can result in the transformation of an invested object into an ideal to be attained by an investing self (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 57). The well-worn example of Freud's reading of the Oedipal structure provides a useful illustration of such libidinal investment and identification.[98] Here, Freud speculates that identification first emerges as a response to a failed attempt at libido investment. In quick outline: a young boy initially charges his mother with erotic investments. The child wants *to have* something (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 57-58). The young boy comes to recognize the power and authority of his father and so comes to realize that his desire for his mother must remain

[96] Freud recognizes that his theory of the structure and function of the libido is not the only thing "at work" in the world, but insists that without an appreciation of libido, explanations of social action will remain inadequate (1921/2004a, p. 47).
[97] See also Wilhelm Reich (1972). Reich reads Marx and Freud through one another in order to better understand the historical character of particular sexual relations, investments, and repressions.
[98] The specific substance of the Oedipus example may provide an easy target for incredulity. Whether one finds the substantive specifics of Freud's theoretical family triangle plausible, the form, i.e., the dynamics of power and desire at work and play, is what is significant here.

unfulfilled (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 57-58). One way that the boy may work to resolve this unsatisfying situation is through actively repressing his desires for his mother. Freud introduces identification as a second process through which the boy can partially resolve his frustrated investments. The boy recognizes in the role of the father a power capable both of bestowing recognition and figuring as an ideal to be realized (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 57-58). The boy identifies with the father. The boy seeks recognition from this idealized object and in doing so seeks to become this idealized object. The child wants *to be* something. The motivating source of identification is the frustrated set of relations occurring in the original libidinal encounter, namely, the desire to have an object. Who or what we want to have and who or what we want to be are intimately related (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 58). Having and being, action and self, are tangled phenomena.

The experience of falling in love – where love is meant to signify a combination of sexual investment and emotional attachment – brings into sharp relief the significance of desire and identification as primary ways of acting and being in the world. Freud speculates that a new "love object enjoys a certain freedom from criticism, with all that object's qualities being valued more highly than those of unloved persons or than at a time when it was not loved" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 65). This phenomenon of 'sexual overestimation' arises because of the twin processes of investment and identification (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 65). Initially, we invest our libido into an object and so attain more or less satisfaction. But falling in love involves a further process beyond an otherwise temporary erotic charging (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 68). In these instances, libidinal investments partially transform into investments of identification.[99] In other

[99] This transformation appears to result from an inability to satisfy libidinal drives immediately or completely. "Goal-inhibited sexual tendencies that achieve lasting attachments between people [sic] they are incapable of complete satisfaction, whereas uninhibited sexual tendencies find themselves extraordinarily reduced as a result of their removal in the wake of each attainment" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 68).

words, "in the condition of being in love a great deal of narcissistic libido overflows on to the object…the purpose of the object is to take the place of a person's own unattained 'I'- ideal. The object is desired because of the perfections that a person has striven after for his own 'I' and now seeks to acquire in this roundabout way in order to satisfy his narcissism" (Freud, 1921/2004a, pp. 65-66). The consequences of this overestimation are clear enough. A self that produces an object that is both libidinally-charged and ideal is capable, paradoxically, of being 'consumed' by this object (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 66).[100] The object, for however long this investment and identification proceeds, is largely incapable of doing wrong. The self is abandoned in favor of its idealized object. Finally, the supposed barriers between reality and illusion, between transparency and distortion dissolve for the self in question. What is key is that this identification with the desired object comes about because of, or after the fact of, the initial drive. Investments condition identifications. If identifications are conditioned by investments, and if investments are conditioned by particular historical contexts and are at least partially unconscious, then the identifications we come to express are underdetermined, which is to say actively open to reinterpretation and so transformation. I return to the central significance of this claim shortly.

Freud telescopes from the investments and identifications operative within a 'mass of two' to explore whether and how these same relational processes may come to create and sustain broader social actions and beliefs (1921/2004a, p. 68). Freud designates as a mass "a number of individuals who have set one and the same object in place of their 'I'- ideal and who have consequently identified with one another in terms of their 'I'" (1921/2004a, p. 69). A mass is structurally neutral; it is a set of relations between selves and objects and selves and other selves.

[100] "The 'I' (may) becomes less and less demanding, the object increasingly splendid and more precious; eventually, the object acquires the whole of the self-love of the 'I', with the result that the latter's *self-sacrifice* becomes a natural consequence" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 66, emphasis mine).

"Mass psychology deals with the individual as member of a tribe, people, caste, class institution, or as one element in an assemblage of human beings who at a particular time, and for a specific purpose, have organized themselves into a mass" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 18).[101] The relationships that social actors develop may attain lasting significance through a shared object or meaning of investment. The object or meaning so invested becomes a source of self-identification, and this identification of selves to their partially shared object becomes a source of shared identification amongst members of a mass (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 46). The partial satisfaction and partial stability generated in a social group is an expression of libidinal attachments to someone(s), something(s), or some meaning(s) and such attachments remain active and meaningful insofar as they provide an avenue for identification (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 52).

The longevity of a given social mass is related to the inhibited manner in which it functions. That is to say, a social mass is more or less tenacious relative to how well that mass expresses identifications, which to recall are those "goal-inhibited sexual tendencies…incapable of complete satisfaction" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 68). Long-term social formations indicate a 'deflection' of immediate erotic drives (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 55). Freud's notion of deflection shares with Nietzsche's notion of dissimulation a refusal to collapse into distortion. Deflective or displaced actions and beliefs are no less real because of their sidereal character. Normative evaluations are warranted only with respect to the effects or consequences of actions and beliefs, whether deflective or immediate. Actions and meanings become stable over time, because they

[101] The neutrality of the meaning of 'mass' is understandably missed, not least because of its frequent pairing with 'suggestibility.' Freud argues that suggestibility is a stillborn concept in need of his active theory of libido (1921/2004a, p. 41). Likewise, a mass is not a thing, sui generis: "I cannot concede that this kind of furnishing of the 'mass mind' with organization means hypostatizing it – that is to say, granting it independence from the mental processes present in the individual" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 38 footnote 13).

serve to satisfy partially a shared set of partially conscious investments.[102] From these partially-satisfied, partially-conscious investments, new investments are produced and so transform older investments.

As noted above, when his logic is drawn out, Freud's theory of libidinal investment must be interpreted as fundamentally fluid and open-ended. If the formation of a mass is positively characterized by identifications as expressions of libidinal inhibitions, then the transformation of a mass is ultimately dependent upon tensions generated by the relative increase of, or acute failure to satisfy, latent investments. Therefore, Freud's explanation of mass formation contains within its internal logic the means for social transformation. Freud explicitly notes that his theory of mass action and belief presupposes concrete conditions that individuals variously act to navigate and transform: "If a drive-situation may (as is indeed usually the case) turn out in various ways, we shall not be surprised to find that the eventual outcome will be the one associated with the possibility of a certain satisfaction, whereas a different one, even a more obvious one, will not ensue because actual circumstances refuse to let it attain that goal" (Freud, 1921/2004a, pp. 74-75).

As social actors, we express needs and desires, creating reality and meaning in the process. The apparent and the actual blur in action. As we act in an historically-conditioned world we sometimes fetishize our own actions and meanings as realities acting, in some sense, above and upon us. Paradoxically, action provides the motivation for itself. Once a set of actions or beliefs acquire an appearance of objective reality, the transformation of social conditions as a strategy adequate to the task of transforming social actions and beliefs becomes less obvious. Freud locates the ideological moment in those successive instances of identification where social

[102] "The attributes 'stable' and 'artificial' appear, in case of masses, to coincide or at least be closely associated" (Freud, 1921/2004a, p. 51 footnote 1).

selves come to take as real – and so as authoritative – just those realities that their own dynamic investments have worked to produce. Social conditions are detached from social action and desire and in the process, come to function as the basis for further action and desire. Any epistemic norms must transform into social and ethical norms if sense and significance are to be granted to some actions and beliefs and not others. Attempts at emancipation must finally be understood as emancipation through our current selves and any "proof" of emancipation must finally be located in active performance (Freud, 1927/2004b).

In his *Future of Illusion*, Freud traces the relationship between individuals and their social conditions in order to examine the parameters of desire in relation to cultural reality (1927/2004b).[103] Why do significant numbers of individuals continue to hold on to improbable beliefs in spite of their incredible nature? Using religion as his specific example, Freud concludes that illusion performs a 'triple function' (1927/2004b, p. 123). Illusory belief is invested in "warding off the terrors of nature, reconciling humans to the cruelty of fate, notably as revealed in death, and compensating them for the sufferings and privations imposed upon them by living together in a culture group" (Freud, 1927/2004b, p. 123). Beliefs that are otherwise incredible retain their potency because of the potency of the desires and anxieties that drive the creation and reproduction of the illusions. Illusions serve to decrease anxiety, increase satisfaction, and provide some measure of certainty of self and society. Freud's punchline is significant: "the secret of [illusions'] strength is the strength of [our] desires" (1927/2004b, p. 138). Such illusions are not false in the sense of epistemically erroneous, nor are they simply expressions of irrationality. Such 'illusions' emerge out of particular social milieu as humans

[103] "An illusion is not the same as an error, nor is it necessarily an error…the illusion is not necessarily false, i.e. unrealizable or in conflict with reality" (Freud, 1927/2004b, pp. 138-139). "We refer to a belief as an illusion when wish-fulfillment plays a prominent part in its motivation, and in the process we disregard its relationship to reality, just as the illusion itself dispenses with accreditations" (Freud, 1927/2004b, p. 139).

negotiate their desires with and against what are believed to be the boundaries of social possibility (Freud, 1927/2004b, pp. 127-128). If social actions emerge as expressions of needs and desires, then social ideals are stabilized instances of meaning derived from practice. To the extent that they do persist, social ideals may continue to imbue action with meaning even if the initial conditions responsible for the emergence of a given ideal have been transformed. Freud is gesturing to the possibility that social investments and identifications have the potential to more or less disengage from their immediate material-libidinal contexts (1927/2004b, p. 124).[104] Freud's consideration of religious illusion as misrecognized libidinal investment leads him to speculate on the nature of other idealized premises: "Could it be that the premises governing our state institutions must likewise be termed illusions, could it be that relations between the genders in our culture are clouded by one or a number of erotic illusions? *Our misgivings once aroused, we shall not even shrink from asking whether our own conviction (that by applying observation and thinking in scientific work we can learn something of external reality) is any more firmly grounded*" (Freud, 1927/2004b, p. 142, emphasis mine).

In elaborating Freud's theories of libidinal desire and its relation to illusion, the focus has so far remained on the fundamental fluidity of desire; this, because Freud's logic leaves open the possibility that changes in the social structure can facilitate the emergence of more or less radically different trajectories of desire. In other words, our overabundance of repression and aggression might yet be transcended. Nietzsche's animals may yet find forms of life beyond the current cages they find themselves gnawing on. Nevertheless, Freud subsequently provides a more pessimistic approach to the character of desire and the possibility of its radically re-routing in his subsequent work, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1989). Here, Freud explicitly

[104] "The rules of culture are themselves deemed to be of divine provenance; exalted above human society, they are extended to nature and world events" (Freud, 1927/2004b, p. 124).

rejects the suggestion that a radical change in social relations could or would result in a radical change in consciousness.

> The communists believe that they have found the path to deliverance from our evils. According to them, man is wholly good and is well-disposed to his neighbor; but the institution of private property has corrupted his nature. The ownership of private wealth gives the individual power, and with it the temptation to ill-treat his neighbor; while the man who is excluded from possession is bound to rebel in hostility against his oppressor. If private property were abolished, all wealth held in common, and everyone allowed to share in the enjoyment of it, ill-will and hostility would disappear among men. Since everyone's needs would be satisfied, no one would have any reason to regard another as his enemy; all would willingly undertake the work that was necessary…the psychological premises on which the [communist] system is based are an untenable illusion. In abolishing private property we deprive the human love of aggression of one of its instruments, certainly a strong one…but we have in no way altered the differences in power and influence which are misused by aggressiveness, nor have we altered anything in its nature. Aggressiveness was not created by property…we cannot, it is true, easily foresee what new paths the development of civilization could take; but one thing we can expect, and that is that this indestructible feature of human nature will follow it there. (Freud, 1930/1989, pp. 70-72)

Given such foreclosure that desire might yet be redirected given different social relations and conditions, Freud nevertheless does provide a partial way 'out' of our libidinal repressions and aggressions. In this later work, Freud contends that scientific scholarship is one of two social activities (the other being art) particularly well-suited to channeling desire in non-destructive, socially-productive directions. Science as the theoretical and empirical search for and practical application of truth serves as a positive means for the sublimation of otherwise dangerous repressions and expressions of desire. Read in the light of his conclusion in *Future of an Illusion* three years earlier, Freud's theory of science as a socially-acceptable avenue for libidinal sublimation is jarring. Recall that in this earlier work, Freud's logic leads him to conclude that even the most seemingly solid truths about reality developed by the various branches of science might ultimately also be expressions of libidinal energies. In other words, it might be the case

that desire – will – is the fundamental basis of all individual and social activities. It was this radical reasoning that left open the possibility for radical restructurings of selves and societies.

As frustrating as this foreclosure on the possibility of radical change might be, what is most significant in the context of this chapter is Freud's pivot to science as a tool of sublimation. No longer an expression *of* fundamental libidinal energy, science now works to secure a socially-acceptable channel *for* otherwise destructive desires. Rather than interrogate if and to what extent various scientific theories and projects express particular desires, science functions as an outlet for other desires. This pivot in the conceptualization of science is profoundly regrettable. Not only is the realm of science presumed to be primarily positive, but the radical suggestion that science may best be understood as motivated by particular – if unconscious – desires is lost. In developing his systematic understanding of how and why desire works in the manner that it does, Freud provides a useful way in to grasping Nietzsche's contentions concerning will. Indeed, like Nietzsche, in drawing out the logic of his own theories, Freud leaves us questioning the status of science and of truths more broadly. The question of the will-to-truth as such is presented in preliminary form – and then abandoned in favor of a quasi-pragmatic acceptance of science as a relatively innocuous libido conduit.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to the conceptualization of the dialectic of Enlightenment provided by Horkheimer and Adorno. Weaving together the thought of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno provide what I contend is a crucial combination of materialist political economy, psychoanalysis, and the cultural and ethical critique of modern science and technology. In their refusal to bracket off the realm of truth from sustained critique, Horkheimer and Adorno provide one 'answer' to the question of the will-to-truth as such. Simply put: given our particular material conditions and social relations that are characterized by

scarcity, exploitation, anxiety, and frustration, and given our fundamental drive to achieve liberation of our libidinal energies, the apparent stability and security, brute power and established authority of modern science and technology works to simultaneously express *and* channel expressions of conscious and unconscious desires for mastery; mastery of self, of society, and of life as such. Such mastery wrought from the control and prediction of the natural and social worlds then seems to promise a real liberation from anxiety and by providing the comfort of a world made stable and secure. In other words, the aim to achieve the truth about reality – the will-to-truth as such – is the attempt to achieve mastery over a world that frightens and frustrates our will to liberated life at every turn. The fatal flaw – the truly tragic dialectic – of the will-to-truth lies in the fact that, in our feverish attempts to pin down and so control the world and ourselves, we in fact stamp out the fundamentally fluid character of life – of will, desire – itself. Compulsively-driven attempts to achieve the truth of reality have the counterintuitive consequence of 'amputating' the very truths and reality of the life that is attempting expression. The will-to-truth then results in one or both of the following: the existential nihilism discussed in chapter three that ceaselessly seeks more and better truths as endless ends in themselves (motivated by both positivistic and relativistic assumptions), or the still more horrifying existential dread that emerges out of the totalitarian attempt to 'fix' – both in the sense of capturing and rendering static, and in the sense of making correct - the natural and social worlds in the interest of mastering life and its constitutive libidinal desires. I unpack this final paradoxical consequence of the will-to-truth below.

Will-to-Truth II: To What End?

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – The Existential Terror of Totalitarian Truth

Radical critique must not seek to fit reality to itself but rather, seek to reconstruct the reality that has thus far been falsely equated with the given. The Enlightenment aimed to free humanity from fear and want; its self-conception was that of a series of conceptual and empirical projects aimed at achieving the secular mission overcoming irrational, mythological thinking. Myths, illusions, and errors are understood to stem in a rather straightforward fashion from ignorance. In order to overcome fear of, and deference to nature, the projects of the Enlightenment aimed to dispel such myths and illusions by progressively uncovering the truths of the world. The double maneuver of overcoming via uncovering was undertaken across the myriad spheres in which humans seek to achieve mastery over the natural and social worlds – in the spheres of the conceptual, the empirical, and the technological (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 1).

In order to understand the emergence and the ongoing character of the secular Enlightenment project, Horkheimer and Adorno turn *to* the realm of the mythological, in the process identifying the roots of the Enlightenment project's attempt to overcome mythological thinking just exactly *in* the realm of mythological thinking (1947/2002, p. 25). The authors contend that across its various historical and cultural iterations, mythological thinking is characterized by cyclical, repetitious, and fateful accounts of individuals and their relations to powerful natural forces. Echoing contentions at work in Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that mythological illusions stem ultimately from real human fears. Trembling at the sight, sound, and touch of the unknown secrets of nature and of the social collective, individuals experienced the vastness of the natural and social totality and recognized themselves to be relatively insignificant and powerless in the face of larger natural and social forces. It is in such primary

material weakness and accompanying existential anxiety that mythological thinking has its genesis (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 10-11).

At the same time, such experiences of weakness, fear, and anxiety are experienced as awe; at the same time that it experiences terror in the face of the totality of forces surrounding it, humanity feels a simultaneous compulsive – perhaps instinctive? - desire for the seemingly cosmic powers at play in the natural and social world. Humans express this simultaneous dread and desire in and through material objects in nature. Objects are given names that express their existence and their physical properties. Additionally, objects are given names that attest to their power over humans as forces of nature. Humanity "fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, permanently linking horror to holiness" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 10). As do Freud and Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno understand these processes from a materialist approach to life. The processes of naming humanity's fear and awe should not be understood as a process of simple projections onto nature of human qualities, desires or fears. "The soul is (not) transposed into nature…the moving spirit is not a projection but the echo of the real preponderance of nature in the weak psyches of primitive [sic] people" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 10-11). Rather, material reality, including particular constellations of social relations, creates and sustains human action, emotion and concept formation.

Mythological thinking also seeks to comprehend what is understood to be the fate of nature through processes of 'mimesis.' The cycles of nature - seasons, days, human reproduction and death - are understood as eternal regularities that, by definition, repeat themselves in shorter or longer sequences. In seeking to comprehend these repetitions, mythological thinking also seeks to placate the powers presumably undergirding various cycles. Humans mimic what they

take to be the forces of nature; rituals of speech and of action are attempts to embody and therefore soften the displeasure, or heighten the pleasure of, superior material forces (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 12, 15). Early humanity did not believe itself capable of overcoming nature. Nature as object is eternal and all-powerful; humanity as subject, is an ultimately dependent and reactive moment of an ultimately uncontrollable and overwhelming totality.

Horkheimer and Adorno contend that humans subsequently develop responses to their milieu in a fashion beyond that of the merely reactive; they manage to achieve a sense of relative independence in their efforts at overcoming weakness, dependence, and fear. From original mythological accounts concerned with the relatively undifferentiated primal powers of the universe come distinct deities that embody particular traits and powers. These deities in turn gradually transform into natural forces such as fire, water, and air. These pre-Socratic elements accomplish the seemingly secular intellectualizations of previous myths and deities (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 3-5).[105] The development of a specifically scientific understanding of the world can then be seen as a logical moment in what was originally a mythological accounting.

Mythological thinking gave way to enlightened thought, which was characterized by a split in the subject and the object. Within a properly scientific understanding of the world, humanity as subject no longer trembles in the face of nature as its object; the subject instead begins to seek to approach its object from a perspective grounded in the will to overcome

[105] The historical specifics of this account are implied rather than documented. In a fashion similar to that in Nietzsche's *Genealogy* and in Freud's descriptions of libidinal development, Horkheimer and Adorno's account of myths and their relationship to later science has the flavor of a mytho-historical account. What is important here is the central contention that the desire for scientific truth is related to both practical and existential anxieties and desires.

positions of relative dependence. These processes of demarcation require the power afforded by ever-greater degrees of distinction via abstraction: "Abstraction, the instrument of enlightenment, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 9). Nature is understood to exist at a degree of remove from humanity; the primal sense of universal immediacy between subject and object – including the dread induced by the overwhelming and immediate power of nature - is gradually lost. Modern scientific thought seeks to increase the precision of measurement in order to increase human understanding and predictability of the physical world. Knowledge must become increasingly exact if humans are to succeed in fully grasping the reality of nature. Universals, whether in the form of origin stories, deities, or even foundational natural elemental forces remain too indistinct - and therefore too unpredictable.

Crucially, Horkheimer and Adorno stress that abstraction requires a natural world that is understood to be frozen. In order to know any object in its entirety, that object must be relatively or entirely stable. A fluid or historically mediated object would be an object not entirely knowable. Scientific thought in its seeming progression and fluidity actually presupposes a 'petrified' natural object, whereas in supposedly compulsively repetitive myths, what appears to be a 'ridged ritual' in fact presupposes a conception of the natural world that is relatively 'subtle' and fungible (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 7).

As indicated, the power that individuals exert over nature is predicated upon a separation between themselves and their object. This separation is itself predicated upon the subject's ability to fully know its object. In order to fully know an object, said object must become transparent; it must be understood totally and such total understanding requires that human thought become autonomous (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 7). A double abstraction is

necessary in order for the Enlightenment project to proceed: “The abstract subject dominates the abstract object” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 6). This double abstraction leads to consequences not dissimilar to those created by mythological mimesis. Enlightened science examines nature in order to construct laws that order objects through rigid systems of deduction and classification. In the process, scientific investigation seeks to identify the causes, patterns and consequences of these objective processes. In such practices, truth is sought for the purposes of prediction and control over the natural world. This makes necessary a conception of truth that is eternal. The truth of nature is understood to be a fixed and necessary ordering of petrified materials. Subjects seek to discover the truths of their objects in order to secure a stable, and therefore safe and controllable, position for nature relative to human agents. “The self which learned about order and subordination through the subjugation of the world soon equated truth in general with classifying thought, without whose fixed distinctions it cannot exist” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 10). Truth itself is both a process and an object of petrification. Truth is a kind of death.

For all of his critique and suspicion, Nietzsche does not reject or even object to the practical processes and projects of science in everyday action; likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno, in spite of their relentless deconstruction of its origins and present uses, do not reject out of hand the potential usefulness of systems of abstract analytic classifications or to the deductive logic these classifications utilize. These are not, by themselves or by definition, unhelpful strategies for exploring and predicting elements of our world. What they object to is the ‘prejudged’ character of enlightened scientific thinking more generally: the taken-for-granted assumption that enlightenment science as such is by definition a series of positive progressions that are necessarily helpful or desirable and that are obviously linear and progressive in their direction.

Enlightenment's "untruth (lies) in its assumption that the trial is prejudged…enlightenment believes itself safe from the return of the mythical" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 18-19).

Modern science not only seeks to uncover and understand its objects. In exploring nature, science also presupposes the kinds of 'answers' it must eventually uncover. In order to obtain and utilize certain and true knowledge of the objective world, humans seek to make all properties and all actions of objects known in their essence, to know their 'really real' core properties and principles. Particularity of objects makes the project of abstraction more difficult and therefore, makes more difficult the project of discovering generalizable knowledge for use in prediction. In order to know objects in a fundamental sense, there occur reductions of particular qualities, distinctions and outlier cases to simple, quantifiable, equivalent matter. "The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 4). The desire to secure stable truth works to strip qualitative particularities and normative distinctions from objects. In seeking to fully understand and control nature, we ignore the real and fluid reality of objects. Thought seeks to recognize reality for what it 'really' is. Ironically, what reality 'really' is has been carefully constructed and maintained by that thought which now seeks to comprehend its own production! Thought then "apes the machine it has itself produced" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 19).

Echoing Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that our desire to be rid of fear and insecurity coupled with our dependence upon nature has resulted in two crucial consequences. Humans have sought an increasing amount of distance between themselves and nature; the subject and object of a more primal totality have split and now exist as divided abstractions. Secondly, human thought, in its division and abstraction from nature, has sought the truth of its

object by way of a reduction of all material to quantifiable equivalent properties. In making nature into a set of systematic, ahistorical and predictable axioms, the Enlightenment project ironically remains wedded to mythology. Compulsive mythological repetition is resignified as progressive secular regularity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 8). In addition, our domination over objects informs and sustains the domination of subjects over themselves.

The construction of subjects and objects as two distinct and partially conflicting spheres has been translated and deployed as the schema for understanding relations between distinct individuals. Just as humanity in the abstract is separated from nature in the abstract, so too are 'spheres' of individuals grouped together and separated from other groups of individuals. Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that a division of individuals mimics the aforementioned division of material totality into natural object and human subject. The same logic that helps explain the original mythological division helps explain the modern classification of individuals into a hierarchical divisions based on race, gender, sex etc. Horkheimer and Adorno focus in particular on the creation and maintenance of a hierarchical division of labor. On a practical level that would legible to Marx as much as Nietzsche or Freud, the fear of the unknown translates into a desire for domination, control, and ultimately, autonomy from want and dependence. Just as humans desire independence from the fate of nature, humans likewise desire independence from the dread of physical necessity and the labor required to overcome said necessity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 16-17). Humans seek domination over other humans with the aim of overcoming necessity and arduous labor at the same time that they seek control over presumably scarce resources. Additionally, the ordering of the social world into a deductive ladder of labor is analogous to – indeed provides the template for – the ordering of the natural world into an hierarchical classificatory schema. In other words, particular constellations of

social relations simultaneously cultivate particular expressions of desires, while also working to structure our conceptual consciousness. “The repetition of nature… manifests itself in later times as the permanence of social compulsion… the deductive form of science mirrors hierarchy and compulsion… the entire logical order with its chains of inference and dependence, the superordination and coordination of concepts, is founded on the corresponding conditions in social reality, that is, on the division of labour” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 16).

Social compulsion represents current social hierarchies and patterns of domination as simple and secure facts of the matter. At the individual level, the consequence of knowing the social world as a set of given static facts is that it hinders critical thought, shutting out possibilities for action aimed at changing existing social structures and relations. Apparently self-evident – and so neutral or even progressive - Truth mimics what ‘is’ and *this ‘is,’ becomes, all there is*. “The actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 20). Understanding nature and society as twin pillars of inevitable facts hides the historically-created moments embodied in both, effectively cutting off any belief – or even desire – for change, distinctions, and difference.

Collectively, social compulsion under the guise of plain facts of the matter allows for the domination of the majority even as it seeks its own justification in the purported equality of these masses. “What is done to all by the few always takes the form of the subduing of individuals by the many: the oppression of society always bears the features of oppression by a collective” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 16). Horkheimer and Adorno call attention to this unfreedom, arguing that in the interests of so-called equality, relations of unfreedom and domination spread almost proudly amongst the majority of a group as proof of their equality. “The horde…is not a relapse into the old barbarism but the triumph of repressive *egalitie*, the

degeneration of the equality of rights into the wrong inflicted by equals" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 9). As traditional justifications for hierarchy such as family lineage collapse, new hierarchies based upon seemingly meritocratic because equal reward and punishment appear in their wake.

A second consequence of the social compulsion that Horkheimer and Adorno identify is an increasing tendency to treat all impulsive 'irrational' action – including many instantiations of human pleasure – as not only suspect but as literally senseless (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 19). Those actions and desires which do not conform to what is known and expected must either be brought into line with established expectations or forfeit the right to be acknowledged at all. In seeking truth, control and recognition, an increasing portion of individual and collective action begins to mimic already existing structures and relations. "Impulse as such, according to this view, is as mythical as superstition… (progress)… has anathematized the self-forgetfulness both of thought and of pleasure" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, pp. 22-23). These structures and relations, because they are understood as necessary, acquire a normative legitimation. Action and desire that fall outside of what is - and so what should be - are ignored, deemed illogical or irrational, or are actively denied or destroyed. The incommensurable idea, desire, or human being is figuratively or literally 'amputated' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 9). The compulsive insistence on reduction that initially (and understandably) seeks to establish relatively stable relations of domination in order to overcome fear and necessity has transformed into both utterly thoughtless as well as quite purposefully fatal rejections of different or distinct forms of life. What cannot be securely known, predicted, controlled and ultimately dominated has no place left in the natural or social world.

This matching of action to reality leads humans back to a state of mimesis, similar to that experienced in earlier epochs. While secular humans may claim to have largely discarded mythological rituals and hierarchies, in accomplishing this, they have created a static and unchangeable reality that mimics myth. "The pure immanence of positivism, (the Enlightenment's) ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of a universal taboo" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 11). Fear and necessity lead to a desire for control and domination. In order to achieve control and domination, certainty of truth and knowledge must be attained – or constructed. From this certainty of truth comes a reification of what is in reality a specific and historically conditioned moment leading to the life-denying petrification of social relations, desires, and ideas. Classifications of power relations are now natural and so inevitable and so good. The division of labor appropriates the ideologies of equality and merit in order to legitimate itself. In the process, humans lose the ability to know and challenge their position within the larger social totality. Horkheimer and Adorno go so far as to suggest that human beings are quite literally developing into automatons. "… the transcendental subject of knowledge, as the last reminder of subjectivity, is itself seemingly abolished and replaced by the operations of the automatic mechanism of order…" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 23). Finally, the demarcation between the subject and the object that initially informs these processes itself ultimately dissolves, leaving a social compulsion that mirrors a natural compulsion. "Positivism, which finally did not shrink from laying hands on the idlest fancy of all, thought itself, eliminated the last intervening agency between individual action and the social norm" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 23). The progress of and by truth reverts to repressive repetitions of reified relations and the possibility of radical critique and change – including the

possibility of a radically new Nietzschean 'beyond' that would work in the service of affirming life - is lost.

Horkheimer and Adorno conclude their reflections by arguing that the project of Enlightenment followed what in retrospect is a logically necessary trajectory. Born from the dread and desire of mythology, the Enlightenment project retained the mythological abhorrence of the unknown and the concomitant desire for mastery and power (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 20). The reproduction of social inequalities and unfreedoms can be identified in the projects centrally animated by the concern to seek and secure ever increasing stores of stable truths about the world; as these projects increase humankind's ability to manipulate the natural and social worlds, they simultaneously work to maintain systems of classification and hierarchy, notions of fixed and eternal facts of the matter, and take-for-granted justifications for the continued existence of particular constellations of social relations that 'naturally' afford power and the good life to some and not others. "The wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 1).

The Question of the Will-to-Truth in Light of Life – Concluding Considerations

This final chapter began with a consideration of whether taking Nietzsche's critiques and understanding of the character and consequences of knowledge seriously must ultimately result in an inability to make definitive claims in support of secure and valid truths, leaving us floundering in a sea of ceaselessly competing claims to knowledge. Knowing as we do that Nietzsche himself sounded just such an alarm and that he also gestured to better forms of life as the only and final basis upon which contentions about the world might ultimately seek justification, we can be forgiven if we nevertheless continue to harbor a suspicion that following

Nietzsche up to and through a critique of the will-to-truth as such leaves us with the counterintuitive contention that science itself 'amputates' the life it means to serve; save a return to brute positivism, unmoored idealism, or politically-quietist pragmatism, what approach is adequate as a response to such a radically pessimistic conclusion?

If we follow Nietzsche and Horkheimer and Adorno in recognizing that science can both stem from and work to concretize life's desire to secure its own flourishing, it seems to me that one punchline must be that social epistemologies are in the main correct. Knowledge is indeed conditioned by the historical, socio-cultural, political, and psychological contexts from which it emerges and transforms. The significance of context cannot be overstated when seeking to describe, explain, or understand the what, how, and why of claims to knowledge. In this, the various approaches to social epistemology considered in this work concur. Likewise, there is nothing in any of the accounts considered here – including Nietzsche's – that forecloses the use of knowledge – scientific, technological, or otherwise – in an everyday pragmatic sense. In other words, we need not insist that because all knowledge is fundamentally social in character that such knowledge is therefore not actually real or true in the practical sense that it so obviously is. We can safely leave such bad faith strawmen behind us. What has concerned us here is instead the following pair of sobering questions. First, if we agree that knowledge ultimately emerges from and remains accountable to life - *what of* life? Second, once we recognize the will-to-truth as the crucial expression of our attempt at mastery in the service of liberating life, what are we to make of and do with the paradoxical dialectic of Enlightenment in which this will-to-truth curtails the same life-affirming possibilities it attempts to make possible?

I do not conclude this work with a set of answers to these questions; my aim has rather been to bring the insights of prominent schools of social epistemology into critical conversation

with Nietzsche's perspectivalism, his warning of the death of God, and his critique of slavish ressentiment. This series of interpretive interventions builds towards a master question: is there something about our desire for truth as such that invites pause and critical investigation? It is here that I find Nietzsche to be invaluable for those examining questions of social epistemology. Nietzsche pushes us to consider: if we have come to recognize the fundamentally conditioned character of knowledge, might we not also recognize the fundamentally conditioned character of our desire for such knowledge?

A significant amount of theoretical heavy-lifting is provided by Freud's understanding of the how and the why of desire in relation to historical material social conditions; appreciating just how seriously conditions (or the perception of conditions) of scarcity, insecurity, exploitation, and unfreedom generate conscious and unconscious expressions of anxiety and aggression as well as more and less successful attempts to blunt or overcome these life-denying perceptions and conditions is key. Appreciating that the animating force underlying these expressions is life itself attempting to secure some form of affirmative outlet brings the present work full circle. The question of the will-to-truth is the question of life itself. If, as we saw earlier, Nietzsche understands life itself as being fundamentally fluid, which is to say fundamentally - and not 'merely' - apparent, then attempts to fix concepts, facts, and technologies must be capable of cutting off life itself. Nonetheless, social epistemologists cannot stop with a critique of knowledge practices that aim to fix a fundamentally fluid life. Fluid as life is, human reality is structured at the most basic level by concepts, theories, knowledges, and practices; each of these are, by definition, characterized by some relative degree of fixity. The final point then cannot be to criticize the search for truth as such as being simply and inherently flawed. Both practically and philosophically, critique by itself – however valid – is insufficient.

If the kinds and claims of knowledge we have are cultivated by particular forms of life, and if the processes by which we seek to capture these knowledges likewise emerge out of and respond to various forms of life, then the central question is the question of life as such. The soil of knowledge and knowledge practices is life. If I am at all correct in seeing in this formulation one of Nietzsche's master punchlines, then the beginnings of a conclusion must contend that the 'basis' upon which all projects of social epistemology – up to and including the question of the will-to-truth as such – are to be found in politics and ethics: embodiments and expressions of power and desire.

To pivot from the question of epistemology to the question of politics and ethics brings this work back to Marx. At stake are particular forms of life as they are patterned by particular social relations and the ways of knowing and relating to one another and the world that such forms and relations encourage or foreclose. If the kinds of knowledge and knowledge practices that we embody and express are found limited or even fatal, this points us back to a consideration of the kinds and forms of life that have cultivated these claims and practices to begin with. Marx reminds us that to be 'radical' is to attend to the roots of a matter, and that the roots of all consciousness – claims to knowledge and truth included – are us – human beings (1844/1992a, p. 251). Nietzsche too draws upon the imagery of roots and processes of cultivation in order to argue that we might yet develop a radically new and different kind of root – a new form of human nature as life – *beyond* our current forms of embodiment and expression.

> [Mankind] must have the strength, and use it from time to time, to shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live: this he achieves by dragging it to the bar of judgement, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it; every past, however, is worth condemning… It is not justice which here sits in judgment; even less is it mercy which here pronounces judgment: but life alone, that dark, driving, insatiably self-desiring power… Its verdict is always unmerciful, always unjust, because it has never flowed from a pure fountain of knowledge; but in most cases the verdict would be the same were justice itself to proclaim it… It

> takes a great deal of strength to be able to live and to forget how far living and being unjust are one… Occasionally, however, the same life which needs forgetfulness demands the temporary destruction of this forgetfulness; then it is to become clear how unjust is the existence of some thing, a privilege, a caste, a dynasty for example, how much this thing deserves destruction. Then its past is considered critically, then one puts the knife to its roots, then one cruelly treads all pieties under foot. It is always a dangerous process, namely dangerous for life itself: and men or ages which serve life in this manner of judging and annihilating a past are always dangerous and endangered men and ages. For since we happen to be the results of earlier generations we are also the results of their aberrations, passions, and errors, even crimes; it is not possible quite to free oneself from this chain. If we condemn those aberrations and think ourselves quite exempt from them, the fact that we are descended from them is not eliminated. At best we may bring about a conflict between inherited, innate nature and our knowledge, as well as a battle between a strict new discipline and ancient education and breeding; we implant a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature so that the first nature withers away. It is an attempt, as it were, *a posteriori* to give oneself a past from which one would like to be descended in opposition to the past from which one is descended: – always a dangerous attempt because it is so difficult to find a limit in denying the past and because second natures are mostly feebler than the first. Too often we stop at knowing the good without doing it because we also know the better without being able to do it. Yet here and there a victory is achieved nevertheless, and for the fighters who use critical history for life there is even a remarkable consolation: namely, to know that this first nature also was, at some time or other, a second nature and that every victorious second nature becomes a first. (Nietzsche, *HL*, III: 3, pp. 21-22)

If the question of the will-to-truth resolves itself to the question of life, which in turn resolves itself to questions of power and desire as politics and ethics, then one plausible take-away of Marx and Nietzsche's discussions concerning the significance of the critique and cultivation of forms of roots is theoretically – if not practically – straightforward in the sense of operating at the level of rational self-consciousness. On this reading, social actors consciously seek to recognize and then reorganize present social relations as forms of life such that truths about the world express affirmations of now-liberated and flourishing embodied existences. In other words, knowledge that affirms life emerges out of the soil of a life that is worthy of affirmation and continuation. If our forms of consciousness are understood to ultimately emerge out of particular social relations, then a radical restructuring of said social relations might yet lead to

radically different – and presumably better in the sense of being life-affirming and truly emancipatory – forms of knowledge.

Such a take-away allows reading Nietzsche through Marx, feminist, and other iterations of standpoint theory; material social relations and the politics and ethics informing and contesting them cultivate various forms of consciousness – whether said consciousness is conceived in terms of knowledge and truth, ideology and illusion, or something else. Yet, we must also recall from the previous chapter that Marxist and feminist understandings of the relationship between social relations and consciousness seek ultimately to enhance objectivity by decreasing or eliminating the various social bases of illusion and ideology; in such accounts knowledge functions as a crucial means allowing for the end goal of better forms of life. In addition to his critique of the cultural sensibilities of slavish politics, Nietzsche rejects the telos of such means-end understandings of the relationship between knowledge and present or future forms of life. However much Nietzsche's understanding of the relationship between material life and forms of consciousness appears to echo these other approaches, his rejection of telos, coupled with his contention that the truths that emerge from forms of life are fundamentally fluid, necessarily introduces and maintains a crucial separation between his and other socially-constructed approaches to knowledge.

Considered in light of this crucial separation, if the question of the will-to-truth resolves itself to the question of life, which in turn resolves itself to questions of power and desire as politics and ethics, a second and equally plausible take-away is decidedly less straightforward than the account outlined above. Nietzsche's iteration of materialism does not provide a sense of any stable or final resting place; his emphasis upon life as unceasing flows of will moving now in one and now another direction – by turns intoxicated, playful, and tragic in nature – tempers

projects of mastery insofar as mastery is conceived in terms of stasis, control, and relatively certain prediction. If we dig all the way down to the root of a matter, we will indeed unearth a series of social relations from which we can usefully draw out explanations for particular claims to knowledge. Nevertheless, a series of shifting social relation*s* in the plural is non-identical to the image of a solid or singular root anchoring a particular kind of life. As the lack of fit between such images suggests, Nietzsche's materialism invites us to consider the 'base' or 'ground' of forms of consciousness in a fashion more akin to what Deleuze and Guattari, in their resignification of Marx through Nietzsche identify as a 'rhizomatic' structure (1980/1987). While remaining within the imagery and rhetoric of cultivation and therefore maintaining the emphasis upon social relations and conditions, shifting the master metaphor from a singular vertical root to a series of horizontal rhizomes better captures the many-pronged and multi-dimensional character of desire – and so of life itself – that Nietzsche's understanding of materialism entails.

Desire both shoots out from and slips towards a multitude of socio-material nodes that cannot be easily traced or pre-directed. Desire and its objects of investment simultaneously exist and shift; any given snapshot of socio-political relations provides an important picture of the material conditions from which we can understand and judge various forms of consciousness, including claims to truth or error. It is from such synchronic analyses that we can recognize and form understandings of those processes of conceptual, classificatory, and positivistic reification that Horkheimer and Adorno so urgently identify and resist. Nevertheless, however much such reified understandings of truth and reality remain perniciously persistent and however critical it is to be able to trace such life-denying hypostatizations to their various historical material and political sources, the possibility of instability amidst an otherwise scientific stasis provides a

reason to hope that radical rhizomatic change remains within the realm of possibility. In one sense then, Nietzsche's particular understanding of life as it relates to truth provides a refreshingly hopeful response to the utterly unhopeful conclusions regarding the will-to-truth that his other analyses identify and explain. Where multi-directional flows of desire are at least potentially at play, there remain spaces and places open to more or less radical restructurings and revaluations.

It is in such slippage and multi-directional flows that Freud's analyses of desire find fruitful traction. Freud's analyses read comfortably alongside those we have just been considering. However, the element of the relatively irrational unconscious remains central to Freud's understanding of how and why social actors express themselves in particular situations – often enough in a manner that appears to run partially or entirely counter to their seemingly obvious objective political, economic, or psychological self-interests. This kernel of unconscious and so unpredictable irrationality tempers a more straightforward analysis wherein a change in relations manifests in a change in consciousness. However well we are able to identify and understand the conditions of life that foster particular expressions of desire, the matter of desire remaining in some sense unconscious – and so beyond simple control or prediction – renders even the most sophisticated historical materialist analyses partial. Running a line of logic from particular forms and contents of consciousness back to their material source can only provide so much in the way of understanding why social actors express desire in a particular fashion and not another.

Taking Freud's insistence on the often unconscious and irrational character of desire leaves any analysis of the character of consciousness – be it in the form of claims to certain truth, ideology, illusion, or provisional knowledge – not entirely within the realm of mastery, and so

fundamentally fluid. Attempts to lift veils off of various ideologies and illusions in order to get to the real and rational root of matters of truth and fact are troubled with the possibility that such well-intentioned attempts must necessarily miss the role and significance of the unconscious. [106] Conversely, heeding the analyses of Horkheimer and Adorno suggests that the desires animating our compulsions towards fixing greater stores of the natural and social world into static facts, schemas, and formulas while aiming towards greater mastery, control, and prediction of life itself are by no means self-evidently positive and progressive in character. Indeed, the will-to-truth can function as a symptom of a broader series of structural relations rooted in particular material political economies that seek to configure and so control the world for particular (though under the ideological guise of general) interests.

We saw that the troubling punchline provided by Horkheimer and Adorno is not only that the compulsive desire for more and better truths and techniques for its procurement are worthy of explanation in their own right; in addition, we can observe that projects aimed at fixing life – in some sense by definition – are life-denying in their attempt at security via stasis. What makes Horkheimer and Adorno's reflections invaluable for the present study and, by extension, for the social study of science more broadly, is the compelling manner in which they weave together central insights from materialist understandings of political economy with understandings of desire provided by Freudian psychoanalysis. On this reading, the fact of our will-to-truth and the measures and methods for securing it can be investigated at the level of both conscious – rational or irrational – and unconscious desire. We can approach social epistemology from the angle of

[106] Recall from chapter two that there is also the possibility that something like an Althusserian ideological loop will arise; here, straightforward resolutions of consciousness to social relations are troubled by the inertial effect exerted by a desire originally expressive of or in response to particular material social relations. Once expressed and invested with desire, such forms and contents of consciousness – however rational or understandable they may be in relation to their original social source of emergence – may come to take on a life of their own; what are mistaken understandings of social relations are invested with desire such that that come to appear real.

the material conditions that make possible certain forms of thought, including certain claims to truth and illusion, fact and error. At the same time, we can consider social epistemology from the angle of desire as such – desire that is related but not reducible to particular constellations of material social relations. Finally, and most crucially for the present study, is the recognition that the desire for truth is a phenomenon worthy of study and critique in itself; this, as opposed to an obviously positive or at least neutral taken-for-granted starting assumption against which social epistemologists then describe, explain, and evaluate particular knowledge claims. Processes of wanting and securing truths both consciously and unconsciously can emerge out of and result in life-denying – indeed fatal – conceptual and empirical projects. Such considerations invite a sobering pause before the assumption that truth and its techniques emerge from and remain directed toward self-evidently positive and progressive ends.

The present work provides two central theoretical contributions to the interdisciplinary projects concerned with questions of social epistemology. First, I contend that in its unique combination of elements of Marxist, feminist, and relativist approaches to knowledge, Nietzsche's perspectivalism offers a fruitful alternative to otherwise critical studies of social epistemology. Nietzsche's project, like Marxist and feminist projects, is fundamentally normative in character. Like the projects of social epistemologists who adhere to a relativist framework, Nietzsche's project refuses the reality of universal epistemological foundations absent particular social contexts. Nietzsche's approach to questions of knowledge productively toggles between a materialism that seeks to make justifiable claims about the world in and by reference to their life-affirmative character while rejecting as both impossible and undesirable a reduction – or conflation – of truth to one or another singular vision of reality that can be secured beyond particular individual, society, historical, or cultural perspectives. Relativism and nihilism

are rejected, while slavishly-motivated standpoints and their desires for tidy systematizing schemas are challenged.

Second, the present work contributes to a broader and more radical investigation into the nature and the consequences of the will-to-truth as such. In turning to the thought of Freud and Horkheimer and Adorno, I have sought answers to Nietzsche's questions concerning how, why, and to what ends we cling compulsively to a quest for Truth. At once conscious and unconscious, and at once related to but irreducible to particular material social relations, the desire for truth is an object worthy of study in its own right whose own normative status can ill afford to be taken for granted. Where Marxist and feminist approaches to epistemology seek to uncover or arrive at truths in the interests of better forms of life, and where relativist approaches seek to describe, compare, and explain different claims to truth, we may yet call into question our compulsive focus on seeking truth itself. This shift in focus from descriptions or comparisons of truth to considerations of the will-to-truth as such remains Nietzsche's most radical and radically necessary contribution for scholars of social epistemology.

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