

Gemes, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth”
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

First, what is “perspectivism,” for N?

1. GM III.12

- “disinterested contemplation” is “a non-concept and absurdity”
- impossible to have a “pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge,” or “knowledge in itself”
- we need “active interpretive forces” to even “see” anything; can’t have an “eye” with these shut off
- “the more affects we allow to speak about a matter,” the more “eyes,” perspectives we bring to bear, the more complete our “objectivity”

2. Owen’s discussion

- a. getting rid of all affects in knowing would require eliminating even “the desire to know... and the desire to produce rationally acceptable explanations of the phenomena we know about” (125, quoting Ridley 2000).
- b. what counts as knowledge depends on interests we have within our system of purposes (125)

3. Reginster article for Thursday

- according to N’s perspectivism: “the sorts of considerations which count as reasons or justifications for holding beliefs depend on principles, or ‘verification procedures,’ which are susceptible to perspectival variation” (40).

Gemes’ argument in “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth”

1. Overall argument here:

- a. N’s criticisms of truth are largely aimed at pointing out problems with belief in truth as beyond perspectives
- b. He himself does not offer a theory of truth (48), no “definition of truth” (64)
 - rather, he criticizes transcendent views of truth for their “contingent life-destroying capabilities” (64).

2. belief in truth beyond perspectives and interpretations is a way to try to escape responsibility for our beliefs

- we claim that our belief is just how the world really *is* (50)
- instead, we should take responsibility for accepting our beliefs, even if we know they’re causally determined (and this acceptance is too) (51)

3. truth is not always pragmatically beneficial for all

- a. sometimes falsehoods may be more pragmatically useful than truth, more “life preserving, species-preserving” (53)
- b. the ascetic, transcendent view of truth may be beneficial for some (“the herd”), because it provides them “with a perspective whereby they can tolerate their lives” (56)
- c. but it should not be accepted by those “capable of greater life” (56)

4. N’s critique of transcendent truth aimed at promoting some forms of life over others

- a. problem with transcendent view of truth: belief in it can “retard greatness in certain individuals” who are capable of it (58)
 - it “enfeebles strong wills” (58)
- b. N is mostly just speaking to those who are capable of being liberated from Christian morality and truthfulness
 - those enmeshed in it need these things, probably won’t listen to him anyway (58)
- c. “his work was intended as a tool for liberation. As for the liberated it is up to them to create their own individuality” (59)
 - N is not going to say exactly how they should think, act, live