

# Nietzsche: Christianity and Truth

Nicole Bermel

## I. Introduction

Nietzsche, as a self proclaimed “godless anti-metaphysician,” (GS, 344)<sup>[1]</sup> is one of the most interesting and perplexing philosophers of the nineteenth century. Many modern philosophers believe, however, that Nietzsche’s works are inconsistent. They argue that Nietzsche’s perspectivism is guilty of a self-referential paradox because it seems to assert its own truth while rejecting the existence of objective truth. In her book, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Maudemarie Clark proposes that, despite this seeming inconsistency, one can make sense of how Nietzsche proposes his perspectivism as ‘truth’ by recognizing that Nietzsche redefines truth as that which satisfies our cognitive interests.<sup>[2]</sup> She argues that early in Nietzsche’s works, when he rejects the real world, he inconsistently presupposes a transcendental reality. In his later works, however, Nietzsche reevaluates his own theory and corrects this problem by rejecting the distinction between the real and apparent worlds and recognizing that truth is limited to our experiences. I argue, however, that Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity poses fundamental problems to Clark’s project. Nietzsche’s ethical critique of Christianity charges that Christianity encourages the ascetic ideal and is, thus, life denying. Nietzsche, therefore, appears to attack the ascetic ideal as being life-denying because it is delusional. Clark nonetheless maintains that in his last six published works<sup>[3]</sup>, he has rejected metaphysical claims and contends that the ascetic ideal is merely untrue according to his new definition of truth. I believe, however, that Clark’s explanation of Nietzsche’s new truth does not ultimately overcome a Christian’s objection to it. Clark’s consistent reading of Nietzsche has little textual support, and her explanation of what he means by truth fails to resolve what critics call an incommensurability problem because it is unable to compare two utterly different perspectives.

## II. Clark’s Project

Many of Nietzsche’s critics claim that there is one essential problem understanding him. He appears to embrace a theory, referred to as perspectivism, which initially appears to equally value all different ways of looking at the world. If Nietzsche really thinks, however, that all perspectives are equal, then there is no reason to think that perspectivism is really the best way of looking at the world; it would then be merely one of many equal theories on how we should interpret our experiences. This problematic aspect, referred to as the

self-referential paradox, causes Clark to believe that Nietzsche's perspectivism does not grant equal value to different perspectives. She understands that Nietzsche's perspectivism asserts that an individual's knowledge comes purely through experiences that are innately perspectival. Nonetheless, one can still determine that a particular perspective might be better than another. In *On The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche states,

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, willless, painless, knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowing in itself": they always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more complete will our concept of this thing, our "objectivity," be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we are capable of this- what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (GM, III, 12)<sup>[4]</sup>

Perspectivism, therefore, rejects "knowing in itself" because Nietzsche denies that we have any means of understanding something outside of our own perspective. We can never know transcendental truth; thus, we have no reason to believe that there is a thing-in-itself. Therefore, Nietzsche chooses to reject the thing-in-itself. At this point, Nietzsche's critics explain that Nietzsche is guilty of a metaphysical error. On one hand, Nietzsche seems to assert the truth of his own theory. On the other hand, by rejecting the thing-in-itself, Nietzsche has also rejected that upon which "truth" has traditionally been based. He would therefore be unable to assert the truth of his own theory. Initially, Nietzsche seems to deal with this problem by rejecting transcendental truth on the basis that it exists outside of one's own experience and asserting that one cannot have knowledge of things that are outside of one's own experience. This, however, is problematic because claiming to know what exists or does not exist beyond personal experiences is still, to some extent, a metaphysical claim. If Nietzsche claims to know that an afterlife does not exist, then he still seems to assert that he has knowledge about something that he does not experience. And claiming to know things outside of experience is inconsistent with his perspectivism.

Clark admits that by proposing perspectivism, Nietzsche denies that truth involves an appeal to the thing-in-itself. Once he denies the thing-in-itself, however, he loses the ability to appeal to metaphysical truth in order to assert the truth of his own theory. Clark responds to this seeming self-referential paradox by asserting that Nietzsche later recognizes this error and corrects it in his mature works by no longer asserting metaphysical truth. Instead, he redefines truth in a manner consistent with perspectivism and asserts the truth of his theory based on his new notion of truth. Clark uses the passage "How the 'True World' Finally Became an Error" from the *Twilight of the Idols* as evidence of Nietzsche's development. The last three steps seem to reflect different stages in Nietzsche's own thought. They are:

4. The real world- unattainable? Unattained, at any rate. And if unattained also unknown. Consequently also no consolation, no redemption, no duty: how could we have a duty towards something unknown?

(The grey of dawn. First yawnings of reason. Cock-crow of positivism.)

5. The 'real world' – an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer – an idea grown useless, superfluous, consequently a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Broad daylight; breakfast; return of cheerfulness and *bons sens*; Plato blushes for shame; all free spirits run riot.)

6. We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps?... But no! with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!

(Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; INCIPIIT ZARATHUSTRA)" (TI, 14, 4-5)

Those that claim that Nietzsche is inconsistent argue that it is in the fifth step that Nietzsche is guilty of his metaphysical error. In the fourth step, he asserts that one cannot have knowledge of things that are outside of his own experience. He thus concludes in the fifth step that he can reject the supposed 'real world.' But because the real world is beyond his experience, claiming to know that the 'real world' does not exist still involves access to transcendental truth beyond experience, a claim that seems contradictory to Nietzsche's overall theory of perspectivism. Clark admits that this is a problem in Nietzsche's earlier works. She believes that the presence of the sixth step, however, shows that Nietzsche corrects this error. He abolishes the real world by denying the distinction between the real and apparent worlds. In other words, he chooses to affirm that the world is purely composed of the experiences that we have. To distinguish between our experiences, as the illusory world, and what might be the cause of those experiences, as the real world, is really an illegitimate distinction; all we experience are experiences. We cannot encounter anything that extends beyond what we believe occurs. Clark argues that Nietzsche's move allows him to propound his perspectivism without explicitly denying the real world. Thus, she proposes that in his mature works he no longer makes metaphysical claims. She still contends, however, that despite rejecting the thing-in-itself and embracing perspectivism, Nietzsche's theory is not guilty of any self-referential paradox. She asserts that perspectivism is wholly compatible with claiming that one perspective is superior to another without making any metaphysical assertions.

### III. Nietzsche's Inconsistency on Metaphysics and Atheism

While I believe that Clark thoroughly analyzes Nietzsche's perspectivism, I also believe that Nietzsche is still making metaphysical claims when he critiques Christianity. Nietzsche appears to make the same appeal to transcendental truth that causes the metaphysical errors that Clark acknowledges are found in his early works. The second to the last section in the *Antichrist* is an excellent summary of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. Nietzsche asserts,

With that I have done and pronounced my judgment. I condemn Christianity, I bring against the Christian church, the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered. To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption, it has the will to the ultimate corruption conceivably possible. The Christian Church, has left nothing untouched by its depravity, it has made of every value a disvalue, of every truth a lie, of every kind of integrity a vileness of soul. People still dare to talk to me of its 'humanitarian blessings!'...Equality of souls before God; this falsehood, this pretext for the rancum of all the base minded, this explosive concept which finally became revolution...to cultivate out of humanitas a self-contradiction, an art of self-violation, a well to falsehood at any price, an antipathy, a contempt for every good and honest instinct! I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind..." (A, 62).

In this passage, Nietzsche denounces Christianity in two ways that I believe are fundamental to his critique of Christianity. He believes that Christianity deprives and devalues, and contradicts and falsifies life. All of these assessments are directed towards one main Christian belief: the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal is the act of denying oneself pleasures in this world under the conviction that one will be rewarded in the next world. Nietzsche makes it apparent that much of his hostility towards Christianity is directed towards the ascetic ideal when he states,

The idea we are fighting about here is the valuation of our life on the part of the ascetic priest: he relates our life... to an entirely different kind of existence, which it opposes and excludes, unless, perhaps, it were to turn against itself, to negate itself: in this case, the case of an ascetic life, life is held to be a bridge for that other existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong path that one must finally retrace back to the point where it begins; or as an error that one refutes through deeds- should refute: for he demands that one go along with him; where he can, he forces his revaluation of existence." (GM, III, 11)

By its nature, the ascetic ideal appeals to that which is beyond one's experiences: the afterlife. By even making reference to it, Nietzsche appears to be discussing the character of something beyond his experience. Thus, reference to it may indicate that Nietzsche still seems to be making metaphysical claims.

Several of Nietzsche's later works further explain and support my assertion that Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic ideal as life-denying and delusional. Walter Kaufman, one of the leading Nietzschean scholars, shows how Nietzsche believes that it was the Apostle Paul who ultimately brought about the ascetic ideal in Christianity. Paul substituted faith in Christ for the ethical standard of living a Christ-like life, and in doing so he encouraged the notion of an afterlife. Kaufman explains that by encouraging belief in an afterlife the ascetic ideal is harmful in three ways.<sup>[5]</sup> Firstly, it allows for the deprecation of this life since people are focused solely on the next life. Secondly, faith replaces action, so people no longer try to better themselves because they believe that redemption comes through faith alone. And thirdly, he states, "the conception of the resurrection furnished the setting for a new doctrine of retribution- of revenge and reward" (Kaufman, 1950: 304).

Kaufman's remarks are central to Nietzsche's critique of morality, specifically how he emphasizes that belief in an afterlife leads to a detrimental ethic and as such is life-denying. This criticism is explicitly presented in the third treatise in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Here, Nietzsche discusses the ascetic ideal and the negative implications that it has on the human spirit. Nietzsche believes that the Christian ascetic ideal forces a comparison between this world and another, and he always concludes that it is this world that is deficient. He claims that,

'Sin' - for thus reads the priestly reinterpretation of the animals' 'bad conscience' - has so far been the greatest event in the history of the sick and doom-laden defeat of religious interpretation. Man, suffering from himself in some way or other, physiologically in any case, somewhat like an animal locked in a cage, uncertain why, to what end? (GM,III, 20).

Nietzsche explains that through the notion of sin Christianity discourages man's natural inclinations. The ascetic priest insists that the afterlife is better than this world and that

one's only hope of reaching it is by denying oneself the pleasures that are found here. Thus, Christians choose to keep themselves from appreciating this life because they deny themselves the things which Nietzsche believes are necessary for its enjoyment; the ascetic ideal causes them to have a life-denying existence. He believes that this "practice of the Church is hostile to life" (TW, V, I) because

wherever the influence of the theologian extends value judgment is stood on its head, the concepts of 'true' and 'false' are necessarily reversed: that which is most harmful to life is here called 'true', that which enhances, intensifies, affirms, justifies it and causes it to triumph is called 'false'... (A, 9).

Christianity, thus, encourages people to act against their natural inclinations and affirms an existence that is life-denying.

The ascetic ideal, however, is not merely life denying because it encourages people to act against their natural inclinations. Nietzsche must also assert that the ascetic ideal is a delusion. If it were not a delusion, if people really were rewarded for acting against their natural inclinations, then the ascetic ideal would not be life-denying; life would be affirmed because Christians would find a world of pure happiness in the afterlife. Clark contends that none of Nietzsche's works after *Beyond Good and Evil* proclaim that truth is an illusion. I believe, however, that in *On the Genealogy of Morality* there is evidence that Nietzsche specifically proclaims the falsity of an afterlife by proclaiming that the ascetic ideal is merely delusional. He states,

One simply cannot conceal from oneself what all the willing that has received its direction from the ascetic ideal actually expresses: this hatred of the human... this abhorrence of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and of beauty, this longing away from all appearances, change, becoming, death, wish, longing itself- all this means- let us dare to grasp this- a will to nothingness. (GM, III, 28)

Everything that the ascetic ideal encourages, denying the senses, denying reason, and the wish to change- Nietzsche states that all this leads to nothingness. But the ascetic ideal only leads to nothingness if one specifically rejects the possibility of an afterlife. The ascetic ideal is life-denying only if it makes sense to reject the afterlife to which it appeals. In the *AntiChrist*, Nietzsche asserts, "If one considers that the philosopher is, in virtually, all nations, only the further development of the priestly type, one is no longer surprised to discover this heirloom of the priest, self deceptive fraudulence" (A, 12). The ascetic life is essentially a "will to nothingness," a "deception," a "fraud" and as such is life-denying. The ascetic ideal encourages people to deny the pleasures of this world without any hope of being rewarded, and it discourages people from living their lives to their fullest capacity of happiness. To live such a denying life is unethical; the ascetic ideal encourages this detrimental behaviour.

While it may appear that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is based upon ethical grounds, Nietzsche does so only by declaring the afterlife to be a delusion. I believe that this claim, like his rejection of the real world in his earlier philosophy, makes an implicit appeal to transcendental truth. Nietzsche is claiming to know for certain that there is no afterlife, although such knowledge could only exist outside of his experience. This appeal to

transcendental truth is inconsistent with Clark's claim that Nietzsche's mature perspectivism does not appeal to the thing-in-itself. In criticizing Christianity, Nietzsche rejects the afterlife on grounds that imply that he has transcendental knowledge about the non-existence of an afterlife.

If my assertion is correct and Nietzsche does make metaphysical claims during his critique of Christianity, then Clark's belief that Nietzsche no longer makes metaphysical errors in his mature works is misguided. This would have detrimental effects to what Clark believes is a consistent interpretation of Nietzsche. Clark's purpose in settling the self-referential paradox is to resolve any contradictions within Nietzsche's work. Making metaphysical claims, however, would be inconsistent with Nietzsche's perspectivism, and would hinder Clark's goal of exonerating Nietzsche of inconsistency.

## IV. Defending Clark: Nietzsche's Revaluation of Truth

In resolving the self-referential paradox, however, Clark does not merely assert that Nietzsche no longer makes metaphysical claims. She also asserts that Nietzsche redefines truth in a manner consistent with perspectivism. By rejecting the thing-in-itself, Nietzsche appears to reject all forms of what Clark calls the "will to truth," which are those fundamental beliefs that remain committed to transcendental truth "as faith in the overriding value of truth" (Clark, 1991:183). Nietzsche believes that man has put so much faith in transcendental truth that he can no longer question it; the ascetic ideal is merely one manifestation of this problem. Rejecting the "will to truth," however, does not necessarily indicate that Nietzsche no longer values truth. Clark states,

The only alternative that I can find is that [Nietzsche] hopes the will to truth will lead these idealists<sup>[6]</sup> to see the need for a new ideal, an ideal that requires the service of a commitment to truth. Unthinking faith in truth would be abandoned, but not the commitment to truth. (Clark, 1991: 199)

Clark, therefore, maintains that Nietzsche is creating a new ideal, an ideal that replaces Platonic truth with a form of truth that requires deliberation and questioning, where every different perspective is considered and scrutinized before deciding upon its truth. Such unquestioned notions as the ascetic ideal seem to be a form of "unthinking faith in truth" which Clark believes that Nietzsche abandons. Therefore, when Nietzsche refers to the afterlife as "a falsehood," "a will to nothingness," and "self-deceptive fraudulence" he is not making any transcendental statements that imply that an afterlife does not exist. Clark categorizes claims that seem to require metaphysical truth as "concepts of reason" and claims that these "concepts of reason... are quite dispensable. They show up not in common sense beliefs or the sciences, but rather in the a priori philosophical disciplines that Nietzsche rejects as 'miscarriage' (TI, III, 3)" (Clark, 1991: 108). The ascetic ideal, like any other notion that requires transcendental claims, is simply a misconception. And as such, the ascetic ideal is disposable, although not for the metaphysically erroneous reason that one claims to transcendently know that the after life does not exist. Rather,

as Clark reasons, Nietzsche rejects the thing-in-itself, embraces perspectivism, and redefines truth in a manner consistent with both.

The “new truth” which Clark ascribes to Nietzsche is based upon her understanding of Nietzsche’s perspectivism. She believes that in order to be consistent with perspectivism, Nietzsche’s truth must, firstly, be knowledge obtained purely through a person’s experiences. This definition alone, however, begs the self-referential question of whether Nietzsche can consistently assert the truth of his own theory. Therefore, Clark maintains that different perspectives can be judged superior because one can engage in a process, which I will call dialectic dialogue, in which one gains objectivity by comparing a variety of different perspectives with one’s own perspective. Once one has gained objectivity, one can apply the standard of judgment based upon satisfying one’s cognitive aims and rational acceptability to determine Nietzsche’s new truth. This leads Clark to believe that Nietzsche adheres to what she calls the minimal correspondence theory. By adhering to a correspondence theory of truth without necessitating metaphysical realism, she believes Nietzsche’s philosophy overcomes the self-referential paradox between even the most different of perspectives. This entire process will be discussed in more elaborate detail in the following sections.

## **i. Truth Within Experience**

Nietzsche’s new truth is significantly different from the Platonic conception of truth. In embracing perspectivism, Nietzsche rejects the thing-in-itself and no longer wishes to distinguish between the real and apparent worlds. What Nietzsche considers truth must, therefore, be found within one’s experiences and not as something that extends beyond them. Clark believes that in the Twilight of the Idols passage, “How the Real World Became an Error,” Nietzsche also rejects the falsification thesis, which is the thesis that human knowledge distorts reality. Nietzsche no longer wishes to accept the Schopenhauerian notion that our experiences are in any way false interpretations of reality simply because he does not think that we can discuss a reality beyond our experiences. Our experiences are all that we have for determining truth. Clark criticizes her predecessor, Richard Schacht, for retaining the falsification thesis, believing that it is the fundamental problem that leads to the self-referential paradox. If our experiences can falsify reality, then any perspective could be false, and we have no means of ascertaining truth. Clark believes that this problem forces Schacht to accept either some form of metaphysical realism in order to assert the truth of Nietzsche’s ideas, or else to claim that Nietzsche is a subjective idealist who places no importance on truth. Clark specifically wishes to resolve the self-referential problem in a way that allows Nietzsche’s perspectivism to assert its own truth. Thus, she rejects Schacht’s construal of Nietzsche as still embracing the falsification thesis. Rather, she believes that Nietzsche concludes that we have no reason to doubt our empirical experiences or to ascribe truth to a “reality” that extends beyond those experiences. According to Nietzsche, truth is not found through speculation of what exists in a beyond. Rather, truth is found within our experiences.

## ii. Truth Found in the Objective Nature of Dialectic Dialogue

That Nietzsche's truth appears to be based solely upon personal experiences causes many to believe that it lacks any objective means of determining that one belief is more true than another. If each person must determine truth purely through the perspective of their experiences, then it would seem that there is both a self-referential problem and an incommensurability problem. The basic dilemma is that there seems to be no means through which different perspectives can be compared. Bernd Magnus offers one means of comparison when he interprets Nietzsche's perspectivism to assert that there is no perspective that encompasses all viewpoints.<sup>[7]</sup> Magnus claims that one can, nonetheless, dismiss perspectives that are self-contradictory. If a particular perspective adheres to a standard of judgment that is incoherent or internally inconsistent, then one can logically judge that perspective to be false. According to Magnus, however, as long as a position is not inconsistent, then it is just as true as any other non-contradictory position. Clark believes, however, that Nietzsche's truth does not merely dismiss inconsistent positions. Rather, it has a standard of judgment that is strong enough to determine truthfulness between a variety of different perspectives, not just those that are inconsistent. In critiquing Magnus, Clark discusses several factors that she believes can guide an individual to ascertain truth. The first factor is that Clark interprets Nietzsche to advocate "objectivity as an openness to perspectives other than [one's] own" (Clark, 1991: 148). In other words, Nietzsche is encouraging us to consider things from multiple perspectives. We do not necessarily find knowledge simply by engaging in all perspectives, but we can gain an objectivity that will help us determine truth through different judgmental standards which I plan to thoroughly discuss in section iii Judging Truth through Cognition. Clark believes that by recognizing knowledge as perspectival, Nietzsche is encouraging us to be open to investigating other perspectives, and in doing so, Nietzsche sets the stage for individuals to compare perspectives based on cognitive aims and rational acceptability. This does not require transcending perspectives and trying to consider all perspectives with a God-like eye. Rather, objectivity merely requires assuming a variety of different perspectives for a moment. Clark describes,

Objectivity would thus involve the ability and practice of stepping back from one's original perspective, to see how things look without some of its assumptions... The objective person does not thereby transcend the perspectival character of knowledge, but only assumes for the moment a different perspective, one that does not take a stand on the points at issue between her usual perspective and a competing one. (Clark, 1991: 149)

Thus, it appears that there is a means of interpreting objectively without transcend one's experiences. The objectivity that Clark describes is compatible with Nietzsche's rejection of the thing-in-itself. And yet, this objectivity is necessary for finding the "thinking truth" which Clark proposes as Nietzsche's new ideal. By objectively considering multiple perspectives, one gains the first characteristic necessary to compare and judge different perspectives.

Clark acknowledges that objectivity comes as a result of engaging oneself in a process which I will call dialectic dialogue. Dialectic dialogue begins with an objective attitude, a willingness to consider the possibility of finding truth in other perspectives. Clark supposes that Nietzsche wishes for individuals to become engaged in a process of determining truth by weighing different perspectives by the standards of cognitive aims and rational acceptability. The objective person is, thus, able to engage in dialectic dialogue by considering perspectives different from his own and then comparing them to his own beliefs. This process of comparison requires him to essentially determine the positives and negatives of each perspective before becoming committed to a particular stance. Even when he or she embraces a particular position, the truly objective person would still reconsider each alternative opinion that arises. In other words, an objective person would remain committed to a “thinking truth” that can only be found by engaging in a dialectic dialogue with his opponents. Dialectic dialogue is distinct from objectivity because it is not merely being open-minded to different perspectives. It requires that individual to become engaged in conversation with proponents of alternate perspectives. By forcing a person to question their own beliefs, they are forced to either defend the truthfulness of their prior beliefs or accept a different perspective.

### iii. Judging Truth through Cognition

While dialectic dialogue describes the process through which individuals find truth, it is paramount that we determine what precisely Clark believes is Nietzsche’s standard for judging truth. In other words, we must determine what characteristics make a particular perspective truer than another. Clark asserts that one can judge truth according to one’s cognitive aims and standards of rational acceptability:

[Nietzsche’s] emphasis on different perspectives is useful for making the point that if there is something wrong with our perspectives, it is not because it is a perspective, but because it is the wrong perspective, because some other perspective would satisfy our cognitive aims better than our present one if we would give it a chance. (Clark, 1991, 149)

There are two essential features to this statement. The first is that Clark unquestionably deems Nietzsche to distinguish between right and wrong perspectives. Secondly, she defines Nietzsche’s notion of a right perspective as one that “satisfies our cognitive aims.” Nietzsche wishes to acknowledge that truth is based upon rational acceptability as determined through our experiences. According to Clark, for example, Nietzsche subscribes to the equivalence principle<sup>[8]</sup> which would allow me to state that “It is true that it is raining” if and only if it is the case that I see, feel, and hear rain. I must also, however, be unaware of any other experiences that might indicate that it was not raining. For instance, if I saw a water sprinkler running in the yard and realized that it was the cause of the water that I felt, it would be false for me to state “It is raining.” Clark calls this explanation of truth the minimal correspondence theory (MICT). It differs from what she believes is a metaphysical correspondence theory of truth in that the minimal correspondence theory is merely a combination of the equivalence principle and common-

sense realism. The metaphysical correspondence theory (MECT), on the other hand, combines the equivalence principle with metaphysical realism, asserting that our experiences correspond to a reality existing beyond our experience. It appears that Clark distinguishes MICT from MECT because the minimal correspondence theory merely appeals to an external empirical world, whereas a metaphysical correspondence theory appeals to an external transcendental world. It is unclear to me, however, precisely how Clark accepts an external, yet empirical, world. Nonetheless, in order to ascribe MICT to Nietzsche's work, Clark asserts that under MICT we are able to discover the common-sense world of facts purely through our experiences and determine whether our experiences correspond to such common-sense facts.

I am doubtful, however, that Clark's description of Nietzsche's truth is in all actuality a correspondence theory. Rather, Clark appears to describe a coherence theory of truth. I agree with Christoph Cox, in opposition to Clark, that perspectives can be understood to be interpretations. Therefore,

Taking what has been called the 'interpretive turn,' 'Continental' and 'analytic' philosophers have come to argue that our knowledge is not an edifice built upon a foundation of indubitable beliefs, but rather an interpretive web of mutually supporting beliefs and desires that is constantly being rewoven." (Cox, 1997: 272)

As Cox describes it, Nietzsche's use of interpretations implies that he adheres to a form of coherentism rather than foundationalism.<sup>[9]</sup> MICT is based strictly on one's experiences, relies upon cognitive aims and rational acceptability, and seems to involve a system in which one's beliefs can relate only to one another, i.e. cohere together. The nature of a correspondence theory, however, would seem to implicitly require that our experiences correspond to something outside of our experience. I find it difficult, therefore, to understand how a correspondence theory could not be metaphysical. Nonetheless, in order to prove that Nietzsche is coherent, Clark deduces that

Nietzsche would therefore have reason to reject an understanding of truth as correspondence in favor of the coherence theory only if he embraced subjective idealism. But Nietzsche scholars agree almost unanimously that he rejects all forms of idealism...If he is consistent, then Nietzsche must accept a correspondence conception of truth. (Clark, 1991, 40)

For the sake of making Nietzsche consistently conform to common-sense, Clark believes that Nietzsche must adopt a correspondence theory. Otherwise, she would consider Nietzsche to be a subjective idealist who advocated that every perspective is equal and that there is no objective truth. Nietzsche would, thus, be guilty of the self-referential paradox and Clark's project would be vitiated. Clark, therefore, asserts that Nietzsche must adopt a correspondence theory of truth. In explaining Nietzsche's perspectivism, however, she has already asserted that he rejects the thing-in-itself.<sup>[10]</sup> It seems that she is, therefore, forced to impose a minimal correspondence theory upon Nietzsche in order to continue her project.

#### iv. How Nietzsche Overcomes the Incommensurability Problem

Clark's belief that Nietzsche adopts a correspondence theory of truth is not her only disputed move. Many of Clark's critics still protest that there exist such different standards of rational acceptability among different perspectives that it is impossible to compare radically different perspectives. This dilemma is referred to as the incommensurability problem. Clark insists, however, that Nietzsche's new truth can, nonetheless, satisfy different standards of rational acceptability among different perspectives. Clark thinks that there is always a neutral third perspective to which individuals can appeal in order to impartially investigate their perspective. Through this neutral perspective

We have a basis for conceiving of a theory or perspective as cognitively superior, in the sense that it attains more truth than one it replaces, when the later theory satisfies more fully than the earlier theory the cognitive interests of the perspective constituted by all of the relevant beliefs the two perspectives agree on. (Clark, 1991: 141).

In other words, Clark believes that there must be some neutral perspective which encompasses "all of the relevant beliefs the two perspectives agree on." From this neutral perspective, an individual can objectively compare the different perspectives. One can determine that his or her perspective is superior based solely upon the beliefs that the two perspectives have in common. Thus, even seeming incommensurable perspectives can be compared based upon one's cognitive abilities. One can determine which perspective is true depending upon which of the two competing perspectives most consistently corresponds to our common-sense view of how the world is arranged. For instance, if I see a purple dragon in my professor's office, such a cognitive experience would strike me as odd because it was inconsistent with every other belief that I might have that dragons do not exist and that my professor would never invite a dragon into his office. If I step back and try to evaluate the situation by looking at it from different perspectives, I might conclude that I am hallucinating because my experience of seeing a dragon is not consistent with most of my other beliefs about the world. It is through this dialectical process and incorporation of a neutral perspective that one can cognitively formulate rights and wrongs, truths and untruths, even within a perspectival theory such as Nietzsche's.

Clark believes that this new understanding of truth within Nietzsche's perspectivism avoids any self-referential paradox without any metaphysical claims. If people can believe that their experiences of a purple dragon are wrong because they are inconsistent with their other beliefs, then they can engage in the same process to determine that Christianity is a delusion. Thus, Clark's overall project would require Nietzsche's claims about Christian "delusion" to be referring to Nietzsche's new "truth" that her explanation proposes. However, many Nietzschean scholars disagree with Clark. They claim that her interpretation is not textually supported and that, even if it is, Nietzsche's position remains incoherent.

## V. Objection: Clark's Unjustified Assumptions

Reviewers Steven Hales and Robert Welshon believe that it is essential to Clark's project that Nietzsche promote a notion of truth that at least satisfies the minimal correspondence theory and that MICT must be consistent with perspectivism. In their review, they criticize Clark for failing to defend both of these presuppositions, and indeed believe that MICT and perspectivism are "straightforwardly paradoxical" (Hales, 1994: 231). John Coker concurs with Hales and Welshon's assertion that Clark fails to justify her claim that Nietzsche adopts the minimal correspondence theory. John Coker asserts that Clark's uncharitable reading of Schacht forces her to reject the falsification thesis and embrace MICT in order to deal with the self-referential paradox. Coker believes, however, that "this is a false dilemma generated by Clark's framing of the FT [falsification thesis]," (Coker, 2002: 5). It seems that Clark follows Hilary Putnam in asserting that "However puzzling the nature of the 'correspondence' may be, the naturalness of the idea is undeniable. There is a world out there; and what we say or think is 'true,' when it gets it the way it is and 'false' when it doesn't correspond to the way it is," (qtd. in Clark, 1991: 39). In other words, Clark believes that only a correspondence theory is capable of asserting truth in a manner consistent with our common sense. Clark has already established that Nietzsche rejects the thing-in-itself, and even Hales and Welshon believe that Clark supports this. Clark, therefore, believes that Nietzsche could not possibly subscribe to a metaphysical correspondence theory (MECT). On the other hand, she believes that "perspectivism is perfectly compatible with the minimal correspondence account of truth," (Clark, 1991: 135). Clark claims, therefore, that Nietzsche maintains the truth of his own theory based upon truth gained through the minimal correspondence theory. But if Nietzsche accepts MICT, he must also reject the falsification thesis. If human knowledge really distorts reality, then knowledge does not correspond to our experiences, and there is still no guarantee that one can determine truth. Clark, therefore, believes that Nietzsche rejects the falsification thesis and supports the MICT because she believes that it is the only way for Nietzsche to overcome the self-referential problem without contradicting himself.

Although Hales and Welshon would disagree, I find that this move is logical.<sup>[11]</sup> The most problematic aspect of this interpretation, however, is the lack of evidence supporting Clark's assertion. Clark's overall project is to interpret Nietzsche in a manner that avoids contradiction at all costs. That is why she so adamantly searches for a means through which to avoid the self-referential paradox. She believes, without textual support, that Nietzsche rejects the falsification thesis and embraces MICT because she assumes that in order for Nietzsche's works to have substantive value they must be consistent. Clark seems to ignore the textual evidence that Derrida and other deconstructionists pose to indicate that Nietzsche was aware of contradictions in his philosophy, but he did not find such inconsistencies to be problematic. Nietzsche explicitly states that he does not wish to be read in the logical manner that Clark so adamantly pursues. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche states,

It is hard to be understood, especially when one thinks and lives gāngāsrotagati [as the current of the Ganges moves] among men who think and

live differently- namely, kúrmagati [as the tortoise moves] or at best “the way frogs walk,” mandúkagati ( I obviously do everything to be “hard to understand” myself!)- and one should be cordially grateful for the good will to some subtlety of interpretation. (BGE, 26)

It seems, therefore, that Nietzsche wishes, at the very least, to be difficult to understand. It seems, however, in *Twilight of the Idols*, that he wishes to be more paradoxical than simply difficult to understand. He states “How does one compromise oneself today? By being consistent. By going in a straight line. By being less than ambiguous” (TI, IX, 18). These statements alone might support the view that he is purposely contradictory. Moreover, if one looks carefully at the few authors that he praises in *The Twilight of the Idols*, one might be even more inclined to agree that Nietzsche seems to admire inconsistency. Nietzsche holds in high esteem both Emerson and Heraclitus, two writers who focus on the insight that their work contains rather than the consistency within it. Nietzsche states that he “set apart with high reverence the name of Heraclitus” (TI, III, 2) and describes Emerson as “much more enlightened, adventurous, multifarious, refined than [Thomas Carlyle]; above all, happier...” (TI, IX, 13). His admiration for Emerson and Heraclitus, coupled with his praise for inconsistency, seems to indicate that Nietzsche does not value truth and logic as adamantly as Clark. And although it was never a published work, Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* confirms our suspicions. In this work Nietzsche is quoted as stating,

Logical certainty, transparency, as criterion of truth (“omne illud verum est, quod clare et distincte percipitur.”<sup>[12]</sup> Descartes): with that, the mechanical hypothesis concerning the world is desired and credible. But this is a crude confusion: like simplex sigillum veri.<sup>[13]</sup>(WP, 533)

Nietzsche calls “logical certainty” a “crude confusion,” which indicates that the logical certainty that Clark is searching for might merely be a “crude confusion” of Nietzsche’s aims. One might conclude, therefore, that Clark’s assumption that Nietzsche should be read consistently is challenged within Nietzsche’s text. If there was actually any textual support for Clark’s belief that Nietzsche accepted the MICT and rejected the falsification thesis, then, perhaps, such assumptions would be warranted. But in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche admits that even physics, a highly regarded science, is just a perspective. He also specifically states that his own work should merely be considered as one particular perspective:

[One] might, nevertheless, end by asserting the same about this world as you do, namely, that it has a “necessary” and “calculable” course, not because laws obtain in it, but because they are absolutely lacking, and every power draws its ultimate consequences at every moment. Supposing that this also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better. (BG, 22)

Acknowledging that Nietzsche himself merely views his thoughts as one perspective undermines Clark’s entire project of showing how Nietzsche’s assertion of truth overcomes the self-referential paradox. The quotation above inevitably leads one to conclude that Nietzsche did not wish to accept a correspondence theory of truth. For if he does not even assert his own thoughts as truth and embraces all interpretations, then he does not promote an external empirical world<sup>[14]</sup> to which his philosophy corresponds.

If Clark is unable to respond to this objection, the consequence is that once again Nietzsche is trapped within his self-referential paradox. While the deconstructionists do not find this problematic, it does cause Nietzsche's ideas to have limited applicability. If we cannot refute the self-referential paradox there are two possibilities. We could admit, as Bernd Magnus does, that every perspective that is not self-contradictory is equally true. Or we could simply admit that Nietzsche is contradictory. Both consequences would easily allow us to dismiss Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. If we agree with Magnus, we would simply consider Nietzsche's atheism to be a particular perspective; likewise, Christianity would be an equally true perspective, and we could never determine one to be better than the other. If we admit that Nietzsche is contradictory, then embracing perspectivism does not require framing any of our other beliefs to correspond with it. A Christian could, therefore, embrace perspectivism, despite its inconsistencies with his Christian beliefs, and still adhere to the ascetic ideal.

## V. Objection: Failure to Resolve the Incommensurability Problem

It is not Clark's assumptions, however, that pose the greatest problem to her theory. Even if these assumptions are granted, Linda Williams asserts that Clark's neutral third perspective fails to resolve the incommensurability problem that arises when one compares two different perspectives that hold different standards of rational acceptability. As explained earlier, Clark believes that one can assert truthfulness as a standard of fulfilling cognitive interests and satisfying rational acceptability. One determines whether a perspective satisfies rational acceptability by objectively stepping back, engaging in dialectic dialogue, and finding a neutral third perspective through which to compare the two different perspectives. Williams believes, however, that with this interpretation

What Nietzsche does not avoid is the positing of a value-neutral arbitrator- traditionally thought of as the 'real' or 'noumenal' world for competing perspectives. But, of course, this type of objection plays right into Clark's hands. That all our perspectives are value-laden is the whole point of Nietzsche's perspectivism, according to Clark... This leads her to reinterpret Nietzsche's idea of will to power as value-laden. All this is right on the mark, but what Clark fails to see is that this leads Nietzsche right back to an incommensurability problem only this time it is values which are incommensurable rather than perspectives. (Williams, 1993: 124)

Clark links truth to values when explaining will to power and eternal recurrence. She sees Nietzsche's "Will to Power" as a true empirical statement about how Nietzsche sees the world. In other words, she believes that the Will to Power is opinion, not truth. As such, it is merely an expression of Nietzsche's values. Clark thinks that there is ample evidence to indicate that

Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power is not a doctrine at all. Although Nietzsche says that life is will to power, he also gives us clues that he does not regard this as a truth or a matter of knowledge, but as a construction of the world from the viewpoint of his values. (Clark, 1991: 227)

Thus, it appears that the truth of certain perspectives is determined through the values

which characterize those perspectives. This does not have an important effect merely on the “will to power.” Williams believes that this “also frees eternal recurrence from these same considerations” (Williams, 1993: 126). While Williams agrees with Clark that Nietzsche’s claims about Christianity and the ascetic ideal as “delusional” are not metaphysical statements, she does believe that declaring the ascetic ideal to be life-denying is an expression of Nietzsche’s values. Christoph Cox agrees, stating, “such differences of perspective [as master and slave, Dionysian and Christian, Homeric and Platonic] are not merely differences of opinion; on the contrary, they designate significantly different modes of perception, desire, cognition, evaluation, and action that compose different forms of life” (Cox, 1997: 276). In other words, it is not simply a question of whether or not two perspectives are incommensurable; the question is also whether or not different systems of values can be compared.

Stated in this sense, it seems that Clark’s definition of truth fails to adequately adjudicate on different perspectives because both cognitive interests and standards of rational acceptability depend upon the values which one accepts. Clark would respond that, ideally, one should engage in dialectic dialogue and determine, from a neutral perspective, the truth of such statements based upon the cognitive interests that they have in common. As is the case between Nietzsche and the ascetic priest, Clark maintains that Nietzsche believes that a neutral perspective would find his theory to be more life-affirming. Many scholars, such as Simon May, disagree and argue that “[the ascetic ideal] can also have a life-enhancing function” (May, 1999: 95). Such counter arguments as Mays’ seem to confirm that Clark was right when she admits “this neutral third perspective is not ‘always (or even usually) practically possible’” (Clark, 1991: 141). I believe, in fact, that Clark’s explanation of truth in terms of a neutral third perspective is contradictory to Clark’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s perspectivism. If Clark believes that perspectivism entails that there is no knowledge that does not come from a particular perspective, then it should be impossible to even conceive of a neutral third perspective that is not already value-laden. In this case, atheists would agree with Nietzsche that the ascetic ideal is life-denying, and Christians would agree with May that Christianity is life-affirming. The systems through which each opposing side determines their standards of rational acceptability is dependent upon the principles that they value. Since Clark defines Nietzsche’s “new truth” in terms that are still dependent upon values, she seems unable to overcome Williams’ objection that she has not solved the incommensurability problem.

This objection is problematic for Clark’s project. In asserting that Nietzsche has a new standard of truth that overcomes the self-referential paradox, Clark certainly means for this standard of truth to be universally acceptable. Otherwise, it could not overcome the self-referential paradox. If Williams is correct, however, and there are incomparable beliefs based upon different values, then Nietzsche’s new truth could not be universally acceptable. It would merely be truthful for claims consistent with Nietzsche’s underlying values. Therefore, there would be no reason for any person with different values, for

instance Christian values, to even consider Nietzsche's criticisms. A Christian would simply claim that her beliefs are based upon a different system of values than Nietzsche's, and, as such, Nietzsche's criticisms would be irrelevant to her convictions.

## VI. Conclusion

While, many might believe that the incommensurability problem restricts the consequence of Nietzsche's theory, I believe that there are still a number of heartening effects stemming from my conclusion. Firstly, despite my objections to Clark's reading of Nietzsche, I believe that Clark does adequately show that Nietzsche was not a relativist. Even if one simply agrees that Nietzsche can only dismiss inconsistent positions, Clark has succeeded in freeing Nietzsche from the relativism that many have condemned him to.

Secondly, Clark has summarized a coherence-like<sup>[15]</sup> standard of truth through which one can satisfy his rational acceptability and cognitive aims. While the incommensurability problem shows that this standard is not as wholly resolute as Clark proposes, it does make it possible for Christians to see Christianity as life-affirming and for atheists to see Nietzsche as life-affirming. Additionally, the two perspectives might agree on many other factors that would not be dependent upon their underlying values. For instance, a Nietzschean and a Christian might agree that they see the same table. Thirdly, the incommensurability problem insinuates that one cannot set up a dialectic dialogue between two radically different perspectives. While this might seem at first to lead to a detrimental close mindedness, I believe that it also has the potential for creating tolerance in our society. If perspectives are so radically different that one cannot necessarily critique another perspective, then one also seems unable to criticize it. While this does not necessarily lead to acceptance, it certainly restrains intolerance.<sup>[16]</sup>

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[\[1\]](#) I will cite all of Nietzsche's original texts using simply the abbreviation for the title and the section in which it is found. See Works Cited for more details

[\[2\]](#) Many of Clark's critics critique her simultaneously with Brian Leiter. Both Clark and Leiter propose that Nietzsche does not endorse relativism as radically as many scholars have believed. For purposes of clarity, I have focused exclusively on Clark's work. I worry, however, that Leiter might also be guilty of assuming that Nietzsche should be read consistently. See Section V. Clark's Unjustified Assumptions.

[\[3\]](#) Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885), Beyond Good and Evil (1886), On the Genealogy of Morals (1887), Antichrist (1888), Ecce homo (1888), Twilight of the Idols (1889)

[\[4\]](#) In the essay "The 'Subject' of Nietzsche's Perspectivism" Christoph Cox expresses some concern that Clark focuses almost exclusively on this particular passage in explaining her interpretation of perspectivism.

[\[5\]](#) For an argument to counter Nietzsche's assertion that the ascetic ideal is life-denying please see Simon May's book "*Nietzsche's Ethics and his War*

on 'Morality'.

[6] This references the "last idealist of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual conscience dwells and is incarnate today" (GM,III, 24).

[7] A summary of Magnus' position is found on pages 146- 150 of Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*.

[8] According to Clark, the equivalence principle entails that "sentence 'S' is true in language L if and only if (iff) S. see Clark p 32.

[9] In this sense, foundationalism can be understood as a synonym for what Clark refers to as a correspondence theory. For a more detailed explanation of the difference between correspondence and coherence theories please see The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy. Note, however, that The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy does not distinguish between a minimal correspondence theory and a metaphysical correspondence theory.

[10] see Section II. Clark's Project

[11] Coker asserts, however, that Clark unnecessarily rejects the falsification thesis. He claims that Clark presents a "negligible discussion of Schacht's 'third-order analysis.'" Coker believes that Schacht's maintains the falsification thesis and describes it in a manner consistent with perspectivism.

[12] Translated as "All that is true which is perceived clearly and distinctly."

[13] Translated as "Simplicity is the seal of truth."

[14] See Section IV iii Judging Truth through Cognition for an explanation of how Clark poses that Nietzsche corresponds to an external empirical world. I do not agree with her assertion and outrightly believe that such a notion as an external empirical world is innately metaphysical and, thus, paradoxical with Nietzsche's rejection of the thing-in-itself.

[15] Clark claims that Nietzsche really advocates a correspondence theory of truth. See IV iii Judging Truth through Cognition.

[16] I would like to thank Prof. Bill Garland and Prof. Andrew Moser for their useful and inspiring comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would additionally like to extend gratitude to Prof. Jim Peterman for engaging in hours of conversation with me on this subject and to Prof. Chris Conn for providing me with the metaphysical and epistemological grounding without which this paper would never have been possible.

[17] This source was first published in 1983. The netlibrary source from which I accessed it, however, cites its electronic version from 2002.