

Nietzsche II

PHIL410

Knowledge and Biology

- Nietzsche rejects any significant distinction between man and world. (§§115, 346) Consequently, knowledge and other epistemological matters must be understood in the context of and as phenomena of the biological world. Note that the biological world itself is “merely a type of what is dead” (§109).
- Nietzsche reckons our metaphysical, logical, and geometrical concepts as so many “errors”. (§§110, 111, 112) Strictly speaking, evidently, he believes these concepts have no objective application to the world we live in.
 - o Metaphysical errors include: persistence, identity, substance (i.e., persisting particulars); the notion that appearance reflects reality; freedom of will; intrinsic goodness; causation.
 - o Logical errors include: identity (one thing being “equal” to another – either numerically or qualitatively?); substance (required for identity over time, which is a setting in which we encounter numerical identity).
 - o Geometrical errors include: lines, planes, infinitely divisible space and time.
- Such errors, however, prove crucial to our survival. The judgments of sameness and persistence are essential to our finding food and avoiding threats. Our geometrical understanding allows us to construct bridges and to bomb our enemies more accurately. Ancestral relatives too careful with their logic would not perform as well as those who “pass judgment rather than be just” and “make up things” (§111).
- In this context, explaining the realization that these are errors becomes itself a curiosity. Nietzsche views the “will to truth” or philosophy as a relatively late development, made possible perhaps by these errors themselves. See §110, here and below, where Nietzsche suggests two possible sources of the “room” for philosophical thought:
 - o Where “two contradictory sentences” are both compatible with our experience, as informed by these errors, dispute might ensue as to which view was the more practical. Such a dispute might have no determinable outcome, prompting considerable elaboration of the debate. Here, perhaps Nietzsche has in mind disputes such as that over personal identity: am I the same person over time or not? Either position is compatible with experience, and the laws of logic require that one and only one be correct.
 - o Second, where our erroneous forms of thought allow us to formulate thoughts neither useful nor harmful to life, a kind of “intellectual play” might evolve. Here, perhaps, Nietzsche has in mind problems such as Kant’s antinomies of reason. For example, ‘the world has an origin in time’ and ‘the world has no origin in time.’ Or, somewhat less grandly,
 - o Nietzsche provides no example, but where the basic predicates of logic, metaphysics, and geometry have no proper application, we may readily construct them.

- Because “untruth” is an early condition of survival, it is older and stronger than “truth”. Compare Parmenides and Zeno (the “Eleatics”), who maintained that the world was a single, unchanging, homogeneous whole. Views such as these have little staying power, and depend for their existence upon their very irrelevance to life, and upon the willingness of those who hold them to deceive themselves into thinking that they have some special access to Truth. (Cf. Plato.) A “subtler honesty and skepticism” rejects the pretensions of Parmenides – and this Nietzsche seems to regard the proper attitude of the philosopher.
- In any case, philosophy emerges out of the “space” between reality and falsehood. Here, Nietzsche appears to give early expression to his doctrine of Will to Power. Where there is a possible development of power, power will develop. Given the tools to develop itself, intellectual, logical tools, philosophy emerges as yet another form of life. “A thinker is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight, after the impulse for truth has proved to be also a life-preserving power.” (110)
- Nietzsche concludes the section asking whether such truth “can endure incorporation” – i.e., can constitute a form of life. Note that this seems to be the question whether a form of life can exist independent of the order imposed by logic, metaphysics, etc. His reference to an “experiment” suggests perhaps that he considers his own case such a one.

Bodily interpretation

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- interpretation, ideas, and sensation - §§57, 58, 59, 355, 374

Connections

- to Kant
 - o §110 appearance and reality error
- to Descartes and Hume
- to Plato