

## **The Experiment of Incorporating Unbounded Truth**

In *The Gay Science*, the third book of what is sometimes referred to as his ‘free spirit trilogy’,<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche poses the question: “To what extent can truth stand to be incorporated?— that is the question; that is the experiment” (GS 110).<sup>2</sup> My claim is that it is the figure of the free spirit who takes up the challenge of the incorporation of truth and that to understand the significance and development of this figure we have to address the problem of what the incorporation of truth involves. I will argue that the particular challenge of the free spirit is the incorporation of a truth without any *fixed* presuppositions- or immovable boundaries and horizons operating as limits to enquiry. This open-ended truth practice, which the free spirit makes part of their very being, stands in contrast to a truth practice where the possible lines of enquiry are already demarcated and certain regions of investigation lie out of bounds. The free spirit undertakes an open investigation that could lead anywhere- setting off into infinite horizons. What it means, however, to incorporate truth in general, and unbounded truth in particular is far from obvious. What could it mean to make the questioning of all presuppositions part of who we are?

Having first presented evidence that Nietzsche associates the free spirit with this task of the incorporation of truth, I will go on to try and clarify what this task involves. Nietzsche poses the task as an experimental one. It is not, therefore, given that such incorporation will be possible. I will address two particular problems that the task of the incorporation of an unbounded truth involves. Firstly, Nietzsche claims that some horizons of meaning, and related boundaries to our sense of self, are necessary for life. Thus the pursuit of truth without any fixed horizons or boundaries has to be reconciled with this need. Further, in his late work Nietzsche is acutely aware that there is no investigation without presuppositions. In particular, to devote

oneself to truth involves the presupposition that truth is itself valuable. So the question arises of how a free spirited investigation with flexible presuppositions can be distinguished from limited investigations with fixed presuppositions, and whether this flexibility can be extended to even the value of truth. Before considering whether these two problems can be overcome the nature of the free spirit's valuation of truth must first be addressed.

### **The Free Spirit's connection to Truth**

The first point to establish is that the figure of the spirit is associated with truth. This connection has been noted before; both Peter Berkowitz and Amy Mullin have drawn attention to the association between the free spirit and a strong intellectual conscience, though Berkowitz sees this as in tension with Nietzsche's statements on truth elsewhere and Mullin takes it as evidence that the free spirit is not Nietzsche's highest ideal, and argues that a free spirited commitment to truth will be surpassed.<sup>3</sup> The assumption, however, of an irresolvable tension between Nietzsche's criticism of truth and praise of free spirits, arises because neither Berkowitz nor Mullin take sufficient account of the different conceptions of truth at play in Nietzsche's work. They thus fail to recognise that the free spirit is associated with a different kind of truth, or different way of pursuing truth, to those who remain fettered by particular 'truths' or by faith in *the* true or real world as a transcendent, or otherworldly ideal. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche considers the free spirit's relationship to truth to be unproblematic or without cost, but I will argue that it is crucial to an understanding of the free spirit that we recognise that they have a different relationship to truth from that of the "last idealists of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]" (GM III 24).

The association between the free spirit and a new kind of truth is present in both the middle and late works. In the middle works, Nietzsche self-consciously moves away from his association with the person of Wagner and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, an association he will look back on as a dangerous liaison with romanticism (HH II Preface 2).<sup>4</sup> Characteristic of this new phase is Nietzsche's critical attack on the value of metaphysical truth and celebration of the more modest and sceptical truths of scientific spirit: "And the pathos of possessing the truth does now in fact count for very little in comparison with that other, admittedly gentler and less noisy pathos of seeking truth that never wearies of learning and examining anew." (HH I 633) Seeking the truth in the right way emerges as a central task in Nietzsche's free spirit trilogy. He comes to formulate this challenge as the question of how we can incorporate the truth (GS 110, KSA 9, 11[141]).<sup>5</sup> In GS, the third of the free spirit trilogy, whether or not the truth can be incorporated is posed as a pressing question. This implies that there is an important sense in which, despite our valuation of the ideal of truth, truth, or the right kind of truth, has not yet been incorporated.

Subsequently to the free spirit trilogy, Nietzsche has Zarathustra declare that, "It is always in deserts that the truthful [*Wahrhaftigen*] have dwelt, the free spirits, as the desert's masters" (Z II Famous Wise Men). In the later work we find that the free spirits of *Beyond Good and Evil* are "investigators to the point of cruelty, with rash fingers for the ungraspable, with teeth and stomach for the most indigestible", hence they are those with the spirit to pursue truth into the darkest reaches of the history of the human animal (BGE 44).

Thus, while Nietzsche's characterisation of free spirits is not static their association with the project of truth is a continuous theme. Indeed, I will suggest below that if the later free spirit marks a difference from the free spirit of 1876 to

1882 it concerns, at least in part, a change in Nietzsche's estimation of what is necessary for the incorporation of an unbounded truth. What is continuous is that this is their task- and the free spirit is both the figure with the necessary characteristics to take on this experiment, and the figure who will be further emancipated from existing dogma through the process of an incorporation of this method of truth seeking.

### **The Incorporation of Truth**

What then could the incorporation [*Einverleibung*] of truth mean? That we incorporate the truth means that we in some way take it into ourselves, make it part of us. This is easiest to comprehend in relation to the incorporation of particular beliefs, which are taken to be true. Such so-called truths are incorporated into a way of life and form a precondition for the existence and maintenance of this way of life. This is apparent in Nietzsche's discussion of the origins of truth in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*. Here 'truth' is inherently fixed: "For that which is to count as 'truth' from this point onwards now becomes fixed, i.e. a way of designating things is invented which has the same validity and force everywhere". It is that which is established as a common standard, or convention, as a pre-requisite for language and society. Man as the tame social animal, the animal, as it is elaborated in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, who can promise (GM II 1), depends on truth as fixity to communicate, for instance in the making of promises. In this sense, particular truths are incorporated as a condition of our modern existence. The particular truths that were established and agreed upon provided the shared horizons that we needed to live a social life, and allowed us to carve out a definite shape or boundary to our existence. Nietzsche observes, "How arbitrarily these boundaries are drawn [*Abgrenzungen*], how one sided the preference for this or that property of a thing!" (TL I, 144)<sup>6</sup> What

mattered, then, is that we had agreed terms and concepts, not that they corresponded to the way things were. Nietzsche takes the horizons of these established truths to be fundamental to our existence, suggesting if man “could escape for just a moment from the prison walls of this faith, it would mean the end of his ‘consciousness of self’ [*Selbstbewusstsein*]” (or his self confidence) (TL I, 148). To establish the boundaries of our sense of self there must first be a fixed point in the landscape, a horizon of truth, around which we take our bearings.

Clearly, however, this incorporation of conventions which we take as ‘truths’, is not the truth that Nietzsche is referring to when he asks in GS whether or not truth can stand, or be tolerated, to be incorporated. Indeed if we understood incorporation of truth according to the portrayal of truth in TL, it would be the incorporation of errors. Nietzsche’s discussion in GS of the incorporation of errors, including the error of identical things, resonates with his discussion of the establishment of truth in TL, which he argues requires overlooking what is individual (TL I, 145). Nietzsche now suggests that:

[...] erroneous articles of faith, which were passed on by inheritance further and further, and finally almost became part of the basic endowment of the species, are for example: that there are enduring things; that there are identical things; that there are things, kinds of material, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in and of itself (GS 110).

These articles of faith are “the basic errors that have been incorporated since time immemorial” (GS 110). While, however, in TL ‘truth’ for Nietzsche is reducible to the establishment and incorporation of such errors, here there is the notion of a truth that emerges in contrast to such errors: “Only very late did the deniers and doubters of

such propositions emerge; only very late did truth emerge as the weakest form of knowledge” (GS 110). Nietzsche suggests that a “subtler honesty and scepticism arose where two conflicting propositions seemed to be *applicable*” such that in time “not only faith and conviction, but also scrutiny, denial, suspicion and contradiction were a *power*” (GS 110). So a new form of truth that questions that which was previously taken as ‘true’ becomes a concern for us. Indeed, the question of the incorporation of truth, in the sense of questioning the ‘errors’ of our articles of faith, is one that presents itself as an urgency because a drive towards truth in this sense is to some extent already part of us. What could it mean, however, to fully incorporate a truth that serves to question the errors that we have previously incorporated as part of our existence?

As Keith Ansell-Pearson has suggested, we can understand the experiment of the incorporation of truth either in terms of the incorporation of a set of practices, or ways of pursuing truth, or in terms of the incorporation of new and challenging insights which undermine our existing certainties and sense of self.<sup>7</sup> It is the former that I am focusing on here, in terms of the incorporation of the practice of pursuing an unbounded truth that does not take anything to be sacred or beyond question. Though of course, these two ways of viewing incorporation are not unrelated to each other; to pursue truth without limits will allow the corner stones of our belief system to be challenged and thus new insights into our history and nature, which do not respect these sacred cows, to be incorporated. But the incorporation of new and challenging truths first depends on the incorporation of a new approach to truth. What then are the practices that must be taken up in the incorporation of unbounded truth? Firstly, we need to cultivate the habits of scepticism and the suspicion of anything that smacks of dogma. This will require learning to do without the need for certainties. Further, it

will involve actively engaging in exploration and experiments in knowledge that do not have any set limits. Horizons will come to be seen as mutable- open to being rubbed out and redrawn. Thus while life, as I will discuss further below, depends on establishing some boundaries around itself, and relies on some horizons of meaning, to incorporate an unbounded truth one must loosen one's attachments to any particular horizon of meaning, and with this to any fixed boundary to one's sense of self. The free spirit makes this their way of life, establishing these new habits and values as part of themselves, where previously the errors or fixed 'truths' have been the basis for our existence.<sup>8</sup>

### **Open Horizons**

The concerns for a freedom from convictions and certainties and a love of open horizons, which are the free spirited requirements of the incorporation of unbounded truth, are reflected in the language of all the free spirit books. In the first of these, *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche is seeking examples of methodology that show the way for free spirited inquiry. He finds inspiration in both science and art. Artistic presentation allows us to appreciate uncompleted thoughts in comparison to a brute statement of facts, and hence "one must not torment a poet with subtle exegesis but content oneself with the uncertainty of his horizon as though the way to many thoughts still lay open" (HH I 207).

The art of Nietzsche's own writing itself contributes to the exploration of a new method of truth.<sup>9</sup> The aphoristic style, which he introduces to his work in HH, is one that supports the openness of thoughts that Nietzsche attributes to the poet.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the closed structure of the essay, which introduces and elaborates a thesis, coming to a firm conclusion, aphorisms encourage the ongoing exploration of

different perspectives, without working to the horizon of a fully determined conclusion according to the expected essayistic form. The experimentation with style continues in GS with Nietzsche's attempts at poetry. Rohit Sharma has argued that poetry, and the movement that its rhythms can evoke, is employed by Nietzsche precisely in order to work against the tendency of language to fix concepts. Sharma argues further that this tendency is not one that poetry, also confined to operate within language, can ever fully escape, and this tension is expressed in the tone of irony and parody that Nietzsche often employs.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding science, in the broad sense of *Wissenschaft*, we can see that Nietzsche associates it with the capacity to endure doubt claiming that “science [*Wissenschaft*] needs doubt and distrust for its closest allies” (HH I 22), and “the scientific spirit [*wissenschaftlichen Geist*] will bring to maturity that virtue of *cautious reserve*” (HH I 631). Nietzsche considers this caution and modesty exemplified by science as an advance over the need for absolute truth that is exhibited by metaphysics and claims that: “It is the mark of a higher culture to value the little unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous method more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men” (HH I 3). Thus, the spirit of scientific enquiry is admired for its capacity to keep open horizons and to be contented with fewer beliefs, in contrast to the religious or metaphysical spirit. This is expressed in Nietzsche's discussion of influential books.

All influential books try to leave behind this kind of impression: the impression that the widest spiritual and physical horizon has here been circumscribed and that every star visible now or in the future will have to revolve around the sun that shines here. – Must it therefore not be the case that



the causes which make such books influential will render every *purely scientific* [*wissenschaftliche*] book poor in influence? (HH II AOM 98)

Science, as Nietzsche understands it here, not only questions the horizons which religion has enclosed us in, it does not attempt to re-establish fixed and absolute horizons of a metaphysical or religious nature. Thus, it refuses to fulfil a long established need for these horizons.

In the aphorism ‘*Where Indifference is Needed*’, Nietzsche warns against thinking we can cling to our moral and religious certainties, without confronting their character as all too human projections. We are not entitled to think that science, having put into question our religious way of thinking will replace it, and is working away to establish the certainty of our origins and destiny. Rather these ‘first and last things’ concern what can never be known and are always, therefore, fantasies and fabrications when we attempt to give them any content:

Nothing could be more wrongheaded than to want to wait and see what science [*Wissenschaft*] will one day determine once and for all concerning the first and last things and until then to continue to think (and especially to believe!) in the *customary* fashion as we are so often advised to do. The impulse to desire in this domain *nothing but certainties* is a *religious after-shoot*, no more – a hidden and only apparently sceptical species of the ‘metaphysical need’, coupled with the consideration that there is no prospect of these ultimate certainties being to hand for a long time to come and that until then the ‘believer’ is right not to trouble his head about anything in this domain. We have absolutely no *need* of these certainties regarding the furthest horizon to live a full and excellent human life [...] what is needed now in

regard to these last things is not knowledge against faith but *indifference against faith and supposed knowledge* in those domains! (HH II WS 16)<sup>12</sup>

There is, then, an established habit to cling to beliefs in the domains of religion and morality, where we can have no absolute knowledge – habits that would have to be broken if we were to incorporate an unbounded truth which refused to respect any beliefs as sacrosanct, or to establish new idols as unquestionable. Free spirits will be those who have a strong enough will to truth and taste for freedom to break the habits of metaphysical need and who will become freer spirits through this process of emancipation from fixed truths. In place of the incorporation of these customary ways of thinking there is an incorporation of an awareness that our horizon is not closed, that we could live differently, without recourse to any certainties, and thus even the boundaries that define us could shift.

The theme of an ability to separate oneself from one's prior convictions and customary beliefs continues in *Dawn*. Nietzsche describes the free spirit as someone who has the "rare and preeminent distinction, especially if continued into old age, of *being able* to alter his opinions!" (D 56). He also suggests a free spirit is someone who breaks the hearts of others because "Sorrow breaks the heart of those who live to see the one they love the most turn their back on their opinion, their faith – this belongs to the tragedy which free spirits *create* – of which they are sometimes aware" (D 562). This later description comes in the aphorism of '*the settled and the free*' and takes the wandering of Odysseus to be not just his travels but to involve being unsettled in opinion. So free spiritedness lies in contrast to remaining fixed within the horizon of a faith, and involves the ability to alter one's convictions and thus to redraw the boundaries of belief that give us our identity.

There is also a strong theme of open horizons, in *The Gay Science*, the last of the trilogy. Here Nietzsche engages the metaphor of explorers. In ‘*In the Horizon of the infinite*’ he declares: “We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have destroyed the land behind us!” (GS 124) When the mad man tells us that we have killed God, he asks “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?” and “Aren’t we straying through an infinite nothing?” (GS 125). Thus having destroyed our certainty in the first and last things, in God and morality, we have rubbed out the horizons that demarcated our existence for us, and we are confronted with the dizziness of an open existence. Despite the threatening tenor of this notion of voyaging into the open it is clear from GS 110, discussed above, that this is a voyage there is no turning back from. We have after all destroyed the land behind us. Further, Nietzsche considers holding fast to fixed beliefs to show a lack of ‘intellectual conscience’, which is a failure to ask ourselves why we take certain things to be right or true. Nietzsche urges on the knowledge seekers who rub out our existing horizons and venture into the horizon of the infinite, not knowing where knowledge will lead them and not circumventing it within a field that is compatible with accepted morality and certainties. The motivation to incorporate unbounded truth is bound up with the need for transformation in response to his critical insights into the problems of contemporary morality, so-called culture and the modern human being.

The theme of open horizons is revisited in 1887 with the fifth book of *The Gay Science*. The opening aphorism makes a clear reference to our being at sea without the land of firm beliefs, and to the scrubbing out of horizons implied by the death of God, which appear earlier in aphorisms 124 and 125 respectively. In Book Five, the sense of danger is again invoked but the tone is more explicitly celebratory:

Indeed, at hearing the news that ‘the old god is dead’, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation – finally the horizon seems, clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an ‘open sea’.

(GS 343)

Nietzsche’s positive valuation of being able to embrace such open horizons and its association with the free spirit is now evident:

[...] one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination, a *freedom* of the will, in which the spirit takes leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, practised as it is in maintaining itself on tight ropes and possibilities and dancing even beside abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence. (GS 347)

Here it is clear that this kind of free spiritedness is not to be found in Nietzsche’s contemporaries but is something yet to come. Not all will be capable of it. The notion that the task of such investigation requires a particular, strong kind of spirit, the potential free spirit, is apparent in the *Antichrist*, where Nietzsche writes:

One should not let oneself be misled: great spirits [*Geister*] are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic. The vigour of a spirit [*Geist*], its *freedom* through strength and superior strength, is *proved* by scepticism [...] Freedom from convictions of any kind, the *capacity* for an unconstrained view *pertains* to strength (AC 54).

Thus, both in the free spirit trilogy and in later discussions of what it is for a spirit to be free we find the notion of freedom from convictions. It is this freedom that allows

the free spirit to incorporate into their way of living an attitude to the pursuit of truth that is not constrained by any boundaries or horizons that are taken as unquestionable and fixed. This incorporation will however require a great deal of strength and health, to begin with, even if it also serves as a form of recuperation and convalescence.

There are, however, serious, perhaps insurmountable obstacles that the free spirit faces, in the attempt to incorporate an unbounded truth.

### **Life's need for boundaries and horizons**

The first problem I want to consider is that it is the very condition of a form of life that it have some boundary to its sense of self, which relies upon an established horizon of meaning: "A living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon." (UM II 1)<sup>13</sup> This is what underscores Nietzsche's concern in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', that critical history be balanced by antiquarian and monumental history, the latter respectively providing us with a sense of having roots and offering inspiring models for us to emulate. The antiquarian and monumental both operate at the cost of a great deal of falsification. "A certain excess of history," however, by "continually shifting horizons" deprives youth of a protective atmosphere, cutting them off from roots and instinctual life, and preventing their flourishing (UM II 9). Neither the "infinite horizon" nor the "smallest egoistic enclosure" are deemed healthy at this point in Nietzsche's thinking. Where later he will embrace the dangerous experiment of clearing our horizons to allow us to redraw even the boundaries of what defines us as human, in the *Untimely Meditations* he is seeking to navigate between this Charybdis and Scylla of closed horizons and narrowness of self on the one hand, and the loss of any horizon of meaning and sense of self on the other. Here the need for boundaries is

keenly felt: “With the word ‘unhistorical’: I designate the art and power of forgetting and of enclosing oneself within a bounded *horizon* [*begrenzten Horizont*].” (UM II 10) Nietzsche expresses his concerns regarding the danger of the scientific attitude which “hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge, and seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind on an infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming.” Of this prospect Nietzsche declares: “If only man could live in it!” (UM II 10) Hence, the scientific spirit that we find in critical history, which exposes the illusions of antiquarian and monumental history for falsifications, has to be countered by the capacity to create new horizons and boundaries. Survival and flourishing requires the ability to draw boundaries around ourselves and make evaluations. Critical history shows the transitory and arbitrary nature of any such boundaries or horizons and the injustice of asserting any value, or position. Hence, Nietzsche considered that in excess it deprives us of the conditions in which life can flourish.

The cautious tone of UM II, which keeps a tight reign on critical history, allowing it to serve the limited function of creating the space for new growth and keeping the other forms of history in check, gives way in the free spirit trilogy to a stronger emphasis on the need to let go of our entrenched beliefs and let truth destroy the illusions which we have previously relied on. The same metaphors of open seas, which eulogise this dangerous but glorious task, were already present in UM. Here, however, the metaphor of the sea journey is employed with more emphasis on our need for land: “At last a coast appears in sight: we must land on it whatever it may be like, and the worst of harbours is better than to go reeling back into a hopeless sea of scepticism” (UM II 10). By GS we hear only of the destruction of the land and the openness of the future voyage, not of the necessity to find a dock, and by its fifth

book the tone is increasingly joyous in response to this openness of the seas and absence of any land filling our horizons.

Despite the change in emphasis and tone, however, that life needs horizons of meanings and boundaries of self cannot be dismissed as Nietzsche's early position. In *Twilight of the Idols* we find Nietzsche claiming that Goethe, a figure who is often presented as exemplary, "surrounded himself with nothing but closed horizons; he did not sever himself from life." (TI Expeditions 49) Also in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the figure who claims to have "feared no prohibition" and "overthrew all boundary stones and images", suffers from being a homeless shadow (Z IV The Shadow). As Zarathustra's shadow, this figure represents the danger Zarathustra has faced in his journey of self transformation.

Nietzsche does not think that we can ultimately do without horizons to our world and boundaries to our sense of self. If we rub out our horizons we will have to re-draw them, if we step beyond our boundaries we will have to reform them. This does mean that Nietzsche does not advocate the incorporation of unbounded truth. Firstly, this imperative is in the context of a need for transformation. The incorporation of unbounded truth involves the destruction of the horizons that modern man operates within, and thus the boundaries of what it means to be human, and clears the way to going beyond modern man. So unbounded truth is a prerequisite to the formation of new horizons and with them new boundaries to our sense of self, it brings about the going under of modern humanity to allow the going over to something else. Secondly, these new horizons and boundaries need not be taken as absolute and immutable, we need not, having opened up our vista, be tied to the idea of one fixed horizon or one idea of what we can be. Rather, if we incorporate unbounded truth we learn to treat horizons as movable and boundaries as mutable,

something that we need to act and live, but something, which can be expanded as life demands.

The pursuit of unbounded truth, keeps alive the possibility of shifting horizons and thus avoids the ‘premature stagnation’ of the absolute horizon that is established by monotheism. Nietzsche suggests that:

In polytheism the free-spiritedness and many-spiritedness of humanity received preliminary form- the power to create for ourselves our own new eyes and ever again new eyes that are ever more our own – so that for humans alone among the animals there are no eternal horizons and perspectives (GS 143).

Here Nietzsche is reminding us that while we need horizons, they are not fixed, and we are able to question them and re-create them, and with them the boundaries of a life form that has depended on them. Faith tries to solidify our horizons, to trap us within one outlook:

*Holiness* —perhaps the last, higher value that the people or woman still encounter, the horizon of the ideal for all those who are naturally short-sighted. With philosophers, however, as with every horizon, it is a mere misunderstanding, a kind of slamming of the door, where their world begins, —their danger, their ideal, their desirability (CW 3).

The desire for uncertainty, infinite horizons, and new boundaries of definition, carries with it its own dangers, it is a desire that has developed only after our immediate physical existence has become less dangerous (KSA 11, 26[280]). Venturing into an “undiscovered land the boundaries [*Grenzen*] of which no one has yet survived” (GS 382), will require strength, health and a taste for adventure. The free spirit who undertakes this experimental journey is one who has “*great* health, that superfluity



which grants the free spirit the dangerous privilege of living *experimentally* and of being allowed to offer itself to adventure: the master's privilege of the free spirit!" (HH I Preface 4)

So the free spirit takes the risk of destroying its own horizons and boundaries so that it might create new ones. Such a free spirit is not tied down by any faith and is ready to once again break through the horizons it has established for itself, and the boundaries that have defined it. Thus, this spirit pursues a truth without any limit in the form of fixed horizons or in the conditions that form the boundaries of their being. Everything can be questioned and reshaped.

### **The need for presuppositions**

There is a further problem in the notion of an unbounded truth, however, and this is the methodological concern that any enquiry or investigation must operate with some hypothesis. For example in his late work Nietzsche's investigations into the origins of morality operate according to the hypothesis of the will to power. In appealing to the will to power of the priests, he provides an explanation of the development of the ascetic ideal, but also supports the hypothesis of the will to power (GM III 11). That enquiry operates with hypothetical assumptions, however, is unproblematic if we remember the status of any such hypothesis as a principle that allows investigation into our experiences. What is important is that it is not turned into an unquestionable foundation that cannot be revised.

It is not, though, only a question of what preliminary theoretical assumptions are in operation before being put to the test in investigation, there is also a value commitment to the very pursuit of investigation. This is a problem Nietzsche seems increasingly aware of in his later work. Now he draws attention to the fact that science

still rests on the presupposition of the value of truth, in *On the Genealogy* he states that:

Strictly speaking, there is no presuppositionless science [*Wissenschaft*], the thought of such a thing is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a 'faith', always has to be there first, for science [*Wissenschaft*] to win from it a direction, a sense, a boundary [*Grenze*], a method, a *right* to exist (GM III 24).<sup>14</sup>

Again in the additional *Gay Science* book, he raises the problem of the need for an underlying commitment to truth that is itself a presupposition:

Wouldn't the cultivation of the scientific spirit [*wissenschaftlichen Geist*] begin when one permitted oneself no more convictions? That is probably the case; only we need still ask: *in order that the cultivation begin*, must there not be some prior conviction- and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself? We see that science [*Wissenschaft*], too, rests on a faith; there is simply no presuppositionless science [*Wissenschaft*]. The question whether truth is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer 'yes' (GS 344).

Indeed, we might read this section as a rejection of the possibility of the free spirited, unbounded truth that Nietzsche seemed to hope for in the earlier free spirit trilogy. I take it, however, to signal rather a deepening of Nietzsche's understanding of the extent of this challenge.<sup>15</sup> This corresponds to his insistence that he was wrong to think there were as yet any free spirits (HH I Preface). Looking back, while science exhibits the important virtue of a capacity for doubt it does not as it seemed to in *Human all too Human* offer a model of unbounded truth because, as Nietzsche warns, scientific men "still believe in truth" (GM III 24). That is, for them truth has become

an ideal, it is taken to have a particular value and function and its pursuit is framed in these terms.

Thus, we see a development in Nietzsche's understanding of what a free spirited truth practice requires. While Mullin and Paul Franco are correct that in the late work the free spirit is not Nietzsche's highest ideal,<sup>16</sup> it is also the case that the free spirit remains crucial to the transformation of modern man that any higher ideal, such as the *Übermensch*, depends on. Nietzsche is therefore still concerned that free spirits should emerge, as the emergence of yet higher types depends on them. Franco suggests that while Nietzsche continues to value intellectual honesty part of the move beyond the free spirit in *Z* and *BGE*, is his realisation that a quest for knowledge is not sufficient to overcome the crisis of nihilism.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, however, the quest for knowledge remains essential to this overcoming by driving the transformation of modern man. Further, the role of truth can only be understood if we recognise that Nietzsche's understanding of what is required for the pursuit of truth to be free spirited, also undergoes development. It is not just that Nietzsche recognises limits to what the practice of truth can achieve, it is also that he recognises limits in how truth has been practiced. He, therefore, now questions whether there have ever really been free spirits in the sense of those who pursue a genuinely open truth that is not restricted by its own presuppositions. The ideal of the free spirit trilogy, to pursue an unbounded truth, remains central, but the exemplars he earlier turned to are now seen to fall short of this ideal.

When, Nietzsche describes those with an unconditional will to truth as "free, very free spirits" he places this description in quotation marks, and goes on to say they are very far from being free spirits. An unconditional attitude to truth is, therefore, contrasted to what it is to be a *genuine* free spirit. We may need the

conviction in the value of truth to begin the process of overturning our other convictions, but in this process Nietzsche still hopes that we can incorporate a truth that will be prepared to question everything, even the value of truth. Thus, for a truly free spirit even the horizon of the value of truth is one that could be rubbed out, and a self defined by its drive to truth is one that may yet be overcome.

What Nietzsche realises to be impossible is the pursuit of truth without the involvement of some evaluative perspective or motivating drive. So the question is, does this initial commitment to, or drive towards, truth have to imply that this truth practice will be limited? All that we can do is learn to recognise the presence of all our perspectives, including our will to truth, and to realise that they serve to distort our horizons. The liberated spirit: “shall learn to grasp the sense of perspective in every value judgement – the displacement, distortion and merely apparent teleology of horizons and whatever else pertains to perspectivism” (HH I Preface 6). Hence, central to pursuing truth without fixed horizons is first establishing an understanding of our horizons of meaning, and how they relate to our boundaries of self. To pursue unbounded truth requires that we understand that there could be other horizons and even other delineations of life forms. This practice of truth has to, however, still be pursued from the perspective of our existing boundaries and horizons. The art the free spirit achieves is to not feel permanently constrained by its existing boundaries or dependent on one horizon, allowing it to explore and expose their very contingency.

This awareness of contingency is exactly what Nietzsche is cultivating in his discussion of the presupposition of truth’s value involved in scientific endeavour. We need to become aware of our horizons and our boundaries, to understand what forces operate to form and sustain them, and explore how they work to limit enquiry and present themselves as absolute, if we are to recognise them as contingent and unstable,

and thus open to question. In particular, we need to become aware of why we pursue truth and why we take it to be valuable, if we are not to find ourselves respecting limits, which we have not even acknowledged the presence of, in our pursuit of truth. For instance, if truth is meant to serve or redeem mankind then we already set a limit on our investigation, shying away from directions that will lead us to question the value and permanence of mankind. Thus, to pursue unbounded truth we must also ask where this desire for truth as uncertainty, in contrast to the old truth as certainty, has come from and allow the possibility that our investigation will un-tether the practice of a truth that doubts and questions all presuppositions from our original motivation for undertaking it.

### **Conclusion**

Given, therefore, that we cannot operate with no boundaries or horizons, such as belief in the value of truth, and we will, therefore, always pursue truth with some such presuppositions, the task of the incorporation of unbounded truth does not involve the removal of all horizons and boundaries, but rather an awareness of them and the cultivation of the capacity for detachment from them that allows for their revision. Thus, it involves a particular kind of scepticism. As Andreas Ur Sommer has detailed there is more than one sense of scepticism at play in Nietzsche's work.<sup>18</sup> I am concerned only to differentiate the scepticism of a free spirited pursuit of unbounded truth from the kind of scepticism Nietzsche criticises in BGE when he writes: "skepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition called in ordinary language nervous debility and sickliness" (BGE 208). I would suggest that the kind of skepticism Nietzsche is rejecting here is one that is incapable of any strength of conviction, which refuses to make evaluations and

retreats into passivity out of weakness. What Nietzsche is suggesting in his mature works through the figure of the free spirit, is that out of a strong commitment to truth, and not an inability to commit, we learn to question even this commitment. He wants the free spirit to fully and completely occupy a variety of different evaluative perspectives such that they learn of the multiplicity of potential boundaries that could be drawn, and are not constrained by any one of them. The free spirit does not refuse to engage with perspectives, nor are they held fast by any of them, rather they learn to dance between them. They are not like Zarathustra's thin shadow, but embodied and in touch with their drives. Genuine Free spirits will possess that quality that Nietzsche declares his contemporary German's lack: "the ability to dance with the feet, with concepts with words" (TI Germans 7). Neither do they give in to the temptation of the "prison" of fixed beliefs, that Zarathustra warns is the free spirit's danger: "Beware that some narrow belief, a harsh severe illusion does not catch you in the end! For you are now seduced and tempted by anything that is narrow and firm." (Z IV The Shadow) Thus, to pursue truth without any limits requires *actively* learning about the limits that we create for ourselves such that they cease to be absolute and eternal. The free spirit can thereby "*maintain* the drives as the foundation of all knowing", and yet still have the capacity "to know at what point they become the enemies of knowing" (KSA 9, 9[41]). They live in the drives in order to understand them, and this understanding allows them to better resist the tendency of these drives to try and establish themselves as dominant and absolute, at the cost of more open horizons. The free spirit explores horizons, boundaries, values and perspectives by simultaneously engaging with them and being able to do without the belief that any are absolute and certain. Thus, the free spirit is the figure who both embraces the adventure of open seas and loves the discovery of new lands. They are neither

endlessly adrift in an open sea nor marooned on a fixed island. Rather they can embrace new horizons and boundaries, understanding, and incorporating into their way of life the truth of their mutability, in order to once again rub them out and re-draw them.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Paul Franco's *Nietzsche's Enlightenment; The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011). Like Franco, I am using 'free spirit trilogy' to refer to *Human all too Human*, *Dawn* and the first four books of *The Gay Science*. It should be noted, however, that *Human all too Human* was originally published in three parts and that Nietzsche returns to the theme of the free spirit in later writings.

<sup>2</sup> I have referred to the following translations: *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Human, all too Human*, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, trans. Brittain Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for Everyone and Nobody*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), *On the Genealogy of*

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*Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Amy Mullin, "Nietzsche's Free Spirit," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 383-405, 385; Peter Berkowitz, *The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. 6, 17, 152.

<sup>4</sup> This shift is emphasised by Richard Schacht, introduction to *Human, All too Human*, by Friedrich Nietzsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xvii and by Paul Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment*; 16, 38.

<sup>5</sup> The importance of this question to Nietzsche's philosophy is emphasized in Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large's *Nietzsche Reader* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) xl, 158.

<sup>6</sup> Translation modified.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Incorporation of Truth: Towards the Overhuman," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Malden, MA; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 237; "The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 30(2005): 1-21, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Other practices can operate to support the practice of an unbounded truth. For example, the practice of solitude, emphasised by Horst Hutter, which is also clearly associated with the free spirit, aids the process of detachment from fixed beliefs by cultivating a distance from the shared convictions that have formed our horizon. See Hutter, *Shaping the Future; Nietzsche's Regime of the Soul and its Ascetic Practices* (Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006). In my *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, I discuss how solitude, a particular kind of scepticism or capacity to

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do without certainty, and a sensualism or awareness of the body, are practices which mutually reinforce each other as part of a practice of truth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Duncan Large for his suggestions in this direction.

<sup>10</sup> Of course Nietzsche was also influenced in his choice of the aphorism by his reading of the French moralists, but his selection of the form can be seen to be more than a reflection of his affinity with their ideas. As Alexander Nehamas argues Nietzsche's employment of the aphorism contributes to his attempt to criticise metaphysics without erecting a new system in its place. See Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 34.

<sup>11</sup> Rohit Sharma, *On the Seventh Solitude; Endless Becoming and the Eternal Return in the Poetry of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Bern; Peter Lang, 2006), 87, 97-98.

<sup>12</sup> As Paul Franco has pointed out this challenge to the idea of a universal metaphysical need involves an attack on Schopenhauer's philosophy, in which he wrote of such a need (*Nietzsche's Enlightenment*, 19).

<sup>13</sup> Translation modified.

<sup>14</sup> Translation modified.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Reginster, who has rightly emphasised the importance in the middle period of the opposition of free spirits to the fanatic's need for certainty, argues that Nietzsche originally defines the free spirit through their genuine unconditional will to truth. After the realisation that this commitment is itself a form of fanaticism, however, it cannot be taken as definitive of the free spirit. Reginster claims that in the later work the commitment to truth is merely an indicator of the real definition of free spiritedness — which is strength ("What is a Free Spirit? Nietzsche on Fanaticism," *Archive fur Geschichte Der Philosophie* 85,1 (2003): 51-85). I maintain, however,

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that Nietzsche consistently understands free spiritedness in terms of a *distinctive* way of pursuing the truth, or taking up a set of truth practices, and not just as a commitment to it. Hence, GM III 24 is an indication of his growing awareness of the problem that a commitment to truth poses for this free spirited truth practice. This does not lead Nietzsche to abandon his belief in the importance of attempting this unbounded practice, not just as an expression of strength but also, more importantly, as the means of transformation which allows a response to Nietzsche's critical concerns and thus serves life. Rather, he explores how potential free spirits might respond to his now more nuanced understanding of the difficulty of incorporating this practice, which is still what characterises free spiritedness.

<sup>16</sup> Mullin, "Nietzsche's Free Spirit," 383-405, 385; Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment*, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment*, 162-163.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Urs Sommer, "Nihilism and Skepticism in Nietzsche," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Malden, MA; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).