
AN OPTIMISTIC NIETZSCHE: FROM LAYING BLAME TO SAYING YES

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The writings of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche speak in countless voices about innumerable questions of life. In this paper a very tentative perspective is provided on a few phenomena related to human wisdom. After introducing Nietzsche's style, some of his comments on the function of knowledge are explored. The emphasis falls on the usefulness of insights, on intellectual arrangement and on historical consciousness. Moving from this, Nietzsche's critical approach to morality is highlighted, with tentative answers to questions on the nature of moral judgements, the difference between good and evil, modern moralities as being anti-natural, and negative moralistic inclinations to judge, to complain, to find guilt and to lay blame. In contrast to the previous exposition of moralism, the third section deals with Nietzsche's positive approach to rationality, the scientific method and truthfulness and stresses the overcoming of passions and guilt feelings under the influence of increasing insight. It is argued that a genuine philosopher does not judge others indiscriminately, does not blame circumstances, but takes his stand beyond good and evil. He is spiritually strong enough for every kind of understanding, comprehending and approving. It is pointed out that, for Nietzsche, one of the crucial questions is to see whether the human race could transform itself from a moral to wise mankind, from laying blame to saying yes to life.¹

1 INTRODUCTION

Interpreting the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is an extraordinary challenge, as few writers are so full of fascinating ideas. Nietzsche is a remarkably imaginative and original thinker, with a multi-dimensional style of writing (Kaufmann 1971:6). Many of his books are filled with strange poetic aphorisms, expressed in a language that seems neither literal nor figurative, but a puzzling mix of both. He uses terms loosely, even contradictorily. He is often content with ambiguity, even intent on it and, in turn, can be tragic or comic, profound or provokingly one-sided in his

judgement (Pascal 1970:v). He even takes delight in inventing slogans and epigrams for hostile positions (Kaufmann 1971:15).

As Nietzsche expresses his seductive insights figuratively, they lend themselves to creative readings and interpretations. His brilliant epigrams and metaphors, his sparkling polemics and ceaseless stylistic experiments, make it difficult to determine his philosophy (Kaufmann 1971:1). Moreover, he covers a huge number of issues from many different and changing angles. This approach makes him a mirror in which philosophers can often find their own ideas, through selection and emphasis.

Through his productive years Nietzsche's style has developed from artless early notes to essays with brilliant aphorisms. In many of his essays, lyrical tenderness and drastic vigour alternate almost bewilderingly. He is sometimes subtle, sometimes crude. Few authors surpass the mobility of his style (Pascal 1970:v, viii). The continuing tensions between Nietzsche's ideas prevent them from hardening into dogmatic doctrine. Consequently, Nietzsche's philosophy remains to the end, "an experiment in reorientating oneself within a world of total uncertainty" (Hollingdale 1977:11). In spite of inconsistencies and paradoxes, he asks original questions with tremendous intensity. It may be concluded that Nietzsche spoke in many different voices.

The same diversity characterises Nietzsche's influence. When he died in 1900 he was already world-famous and the centre of a growing literature. He was soon linked to figures, such as Darwin, Spengler and Tolstoy, to movements in German poetry, to political ideologies, to schools of psychology and even to the world wars (Kaufmann 1971:14). No single reading seems able to dominate or determine the interpretation of Nietzsche. Who Nietzsche actually is, and what his thought can be construed to mean and imply, are questions that have been addressed in various manners by authors ranging from Lukács and Adorno to Kaufmann and Derrida (Sedgwick 1995:1). Moreover, his words have been interpreted in a variety of popular manners: playwrights and poets, and representative of diverse intellectual movements, anarchists and fascists, existentialists and post-modernists have all described themselves as "Nietzschean". There sometimes seems to be a different Nietzsche for every age! (Robinson 1999:4) The list of intellectuals, from all walks of life, who have been influenced and affected by Nietzsche, is thus almost infinite.

The aim of this paper is to explore some links between Nietzsche's views on knowledge, on moralism and on wisdom. This

exploration will be undertaken as follows: to be able contrast his critical attitude towards moralism with his positive attitude towards intellectual endeavours, his approach to the act of knowing the environment in which human beings find themselves, will first be explored. What is knowledge? Are words "true"? Can statements be trusted? Can knowledge be applied? If knowledge has any value, how can the value be guaranteed and increased? Is credible, scientific analysis at all possible? Are historical perspectives trustworthy? Do they mean anything? These and related questions will be briefly explored, before Nietzsche's perceptions of good and evil, of moral judgement and of laying blame or guilt on circumstances, on others or on the self, are outlined.

The concluding section deals with the evasive but important subject of rationality. Why does Nietzsche proclaim such as tension between moral and rational discourse? Does he value the scientific method at all? Which other values are related to Zarathustra's plea for truthfulness? Why should understanding and comprehending be linked to an affirmative approach to reality?

In the paper a few thoughts from Nietzsche's extensive writings are related to each other, compared and ordered. To ensure a meaningful interpretation, the English and German texts are used simultaneously, and key German terms included - either in the text or in the endnotes. Although Nietzsche's ideas are not applied to current philosophical or social trends, the endnotes do contextualise a few observations of the author.

The implication of Nietzsche's astounding diversity is that one is bound to falsify to some degree when one tries to simplify his perceptions. As no selection of perspectives can do justice to his work as a whole, any selection must, to a greater or lesser extent, be an oversimplification (Hollingdale 1977:7). Students of Nietzsche may nevertheless follow his own anti-dogmatism and, instead of searching for final solutions, experiment in honest, fresh and meaningful ways to interpret his visions (Degenaar 1997:41). As Michel Foucault once remarked: "The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators say that I am being unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is absolutely of no interest" (Foucault 1977:33).

Before exploring his thoughts on moralism and wisdom, it is necessary to try to discover more about how human beings get to know their circumstances, to inquire about inquiring itself.

2 KNOWING FROM DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS (*Perspektivismus*)

According to August Comte, mankind began by explaining phenomena theologically (in terms of the operation of gods and spirits), moved on to metaphysical explanations (in terms of impersonal essences and faculties), and finally arrived at factual knowledge and phenomenism (explanation as the description of the relations between phenomena). Whether or not this course represents a valid account of human intellectual evolution, Hollingdale maintains that it describes Nietzsche's intellectual development and argues that he might be called a classic case of the progression from theology to metaphysics to phenomenism and that even his backsliding into metaphysics cannot obscure it (Hollingdale 1995:121-122). As a non-metaphysical, also strongly anti-metaphysical, thinker, Nietzsche developed views on knowledge, which he himself called "perspectivism" (Nietzsche 1882:354). Before exploring his perceptions on moralism and wisdom, it is necessary to briefly outline a few of his pivotal views in this field, with reference to the nature and value of knowledge, and the need for multi-dimensional perspectives and historical consciousness.

2.1 Knowledge as usefulness (*Nutz*)

One of Nietzsche's distinctive contributions to European thought may lie in his view that Western man was facing a radical transformation in his perception of knowledge. Since modern man is acquiring the image of "becoming" as his ruling idea, the implication is that truth also evolves, and that no insight can be absolutely true for all time and for everybody. According to Nietzsche "knowledge and becoming" (*Erkenntnis und Werden*) are irreconcilable (Nietzsche 1968:517). "Everything evolves" means that nothing is eternally true.² He is convinced that existing human knowledge is before all else an instrument limited to the satisfaction of pressing human needs (Hollingdale 1995:114). The human intellect has really no mission that would lead beyond human life (Nietzsche 1873:Intro). Final truths are not possible. Human beings "know" (*wissen*) precisely as much as may be "useful" (*nützlich*) in the interest of the human species (Nietzsche 1882:354).

The function of knowledge is to "schematize" (*schematisieren*) - to impose upon chaos as much regularity and form as suffices for practical requirements. The evolution of reason is "arrangement" (*das Zurechtmachen*) in order to produce some kind of similarity

amongst dissimilar phenomena (Nietzsche 1968:515).³ Knowledge of facts is the "introduction of meaning - not explanation" (*Sinn-hineinlegen - nicht Erklärung*) (Nietzsche 1968:604). The phenomena of "knowledge" and "truth" lie within language and add nothing new to the world.⁴ "To know" means something like, "to impose categories upon chaotic processes that make the world useful to us and give us a sense of control" (Robinson 1999:15). The whole apparatus of knowledge is focused on "abstraction" (*Abstraktion*) and "simplification" (*Simplifikation*) - directed at obtaining a "possession of things" (*Bemächtigung der Dinge*) (Nietzsche 1968:503).

2.2 Knowledge as generalisation (*Generalisation*)

The simplification, which takes place through using words often, implies superficial communication. The general and social nature of consciousness and language makes it difficult to describe anything individual. Human actions are fundamentally, one and all, in an incomparable way "personal, unique, boundlessly individual" (*persönlich, einzig, unbegrenzt-individuell*). However, as soon as they are translated into consciousness and words they no longer seem to be (Nietzsche 1882:354). In his explanation of "phenomenalism" (*Phänomenalismus*) and "perspectivism" (*Perspectivismus*) Nietzsche asserts that the world of which human beings can become conscious, is only a sign-world, a world made universal and common.⁵ It means that everything that becomes conscious thereby necessarily becomes shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, "characteristic of the herd", and that with all becoming conscious there is united, "a great fundamental corruption, falsification, superficializing and generalisation" (*eine grosse gründliche Verderbnis, Fälschung, Veroberflächlichung und Generalisation*) (Nietzsche 1882:354). The high level of generalisation produced through language often conceals non-existent metaphysical fantasies and "philosophical mythology" (*philophische Mythologie*) (Nietzsche 1880:11).

In addition to the way in which words make experience superficial and general, the human mind also contributes, in several subconscious ways, to the subjective construction of "knowledge". Although often critical of Immanuel Kant, Nietzsche agreed with him that our minds are constructed to think about reality in specific and limited human ways (Robinson 1999:70). This is also true of philosophical ideas, which irresistibly follow certain patterns, however much individual thinkers regard themselves as independent and original. Nietzsche maintains that individual philosophical

concepts are not something arbitrary, something growing up autonomously, but on the contrary grow up connected and related to one another. However, suddenly and arbitrarily they appear to emerge in the history of thought, they nonetheless belong just as much to a system as do the members of the fauna of a continent. Ultimately, even the most diverse philosophers unfailingly fill out again and again a certain basic scheme of possible philosophies. Under an invisible spell they always, "trace once more the identical orbit". However independent of one another they may feel, with their will to criticise or systematise, something in them leads them, something drives them, "in a definite order one after another" (Nietzsche 1886:20). The subconscious inclination to structure thoughts about experiences according to certain patterns, is not independent of, but directly related to, the type of language used. Where a linguistic affinity exists, a common philosophy of grammar and similar grammatical functions – a "similar evolution and succession of philosophical systems" is inevitable, just as "the road seems to be barred to certain other possibilities of world interpretation". According to Nietzsche these similarities explains the singular "family resemblance" between Indian, Greek and German philosophising (Nietzsche 1886:20; Nietzsche 1968:550). Even formal systems of reasoning are typically human products, created to make the world logical and calculable to control it more easily (Nietzsche 1968:507, 511).

2.3 Knowledge as "seeing with more eyes"

These notions of knowledge as being valuable but irrevocably determined by subjective human interests, leads to Nietzsche's view that the "truth" in statements of knowledge is inevitably a matter of "perspective". Since knowledge claims will always be determined by where our interests lie, any absolute statement is false. It does not mean that there can be no truth at all about one situation or that different interpretations are either all unjustified or all equally valid. On the contrary, some interpretations will be less accurate and more distorted, while others will be more accurate. But there will not be the one true account that invalidates all the others (Robinson 1999:58-59). Interpretations from a greater height will be more accurate and useful. The perception that no "truths" are valid is just as unacceptable as the perception that "truths" are possible. Both scepticism and absolutism are, in the end, says Nietzsche, "equally childish" (Robinson 1999:71-72).

The experimentally verifiable statements of empirical science have replaced, and are still replacing, previously held religious and

metaphysical beliefs. However, these scientific "truths" are not, as they often pretend to be, objective discoveries about the world, but are (as was suggested in the previous section) a human "arrangement" (*Zurechtmachung*) and an interpretation of an essentially irrational universe so that it can be "comprehended" and lived in. Moreover, scientific statements are statements only of fact - or alleged fact - and never judgmental, as human value and universal meaning fall outside the sphere of science (Hollingdale 1977:10). "Perspectivism" (*Perspectivismus*) (Nietzsche 1882:354) means to see something from more than one angle, position, standpoint or viewpoint, since more angles, positions, standpoints or viewpoints mean greater knowledge and insight. As Nietzsche argues eloquently: "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity', be" (Nietzsche 1887: III, 12).

The longer human beings observe the world with different eyes, the more they will become conscious of the inevitability of change over time.

2.4 Knowledge as historical philosophising (*das historische Philosophieren*)

It has been correctly pointed out that Nietzsche's perspective on time seems to have been unusually huge. He was continually aware of the presence of the distant past, and he wrote for the future (Robinson 1999:31-32). In Nietzsche's work historical trends are continuously identified and interpreted. One overriding proposition is that history determines who human beings are and the values they believe in, usually in ways of which they are utterly unaware. Although human beings like to think of themselves as autonomous, ahistorical beings, they are always the products of a complex past (Robinson 1999:24). The power of the whole is always more decisive than that of individual choice. With reference to the individual, Nietzsche states: "One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole; there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or sentence our being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole" (Nietzsche 1888a:VI, 8). Seeing with different eyes implies eventually seeing holistically and seeing the inevitability in historical trends.

However, mankind likes to put questions of "origin and beginnings" (*Herkunft und Anfänge*) out of its mind (Nietzsche 1878:1). This inclination is also obvious in philosophers, as Nietzsche formulates one of his key propositions in his work as young philosopher, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* (1878): Lack of historical sense is the "family failing" of all philosophers (Nietzsche 1878:2)⁶. A decade later, in his most productive year, Nietzsche is still underlining value of insight in historical change. In *Götzendämmerung* (1888) he maintains that the traits of philosophers often include their lack of historical sense, their rejection of the very idea of becoming, their "Egypticism" (Nietzsche 1888a:III, 1). Philosophers often think that they show their respect for a subject when they "de-historicise" (*enthistorisieren*) it, *sub specie aeterni* - when they turn it into a mummy. In fact, much of what philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been nothing more than "concept-mummies" (*Begriffs-Mumien*) (Nietzsche 1888a:III, 1).

Origin out of something more primitive is often considered an objection (Nietzsche 1888a:III, 4). Concerning the history of the human race itself, Nietzsche asks: "Must one not be almost inhuman to detect in oneself a contrary inclination?" (Nietzsche 1878:1). However, everything is changing, and death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, belong to the primary nature of life (Nietzsche 1888a:III, 1). Historical consciousness, in particular of the human past, forms an indispensable root for understanding anything.⁷ When thinking people are sensitive to the past, present and future of a permanently changing universe, they may grasp that "everything essential" (*alles Wesentliche*) in the development of mankind took place "in primeval times" (*in Urzeiten*), long before the four thousand years we more or less know about; during these years mankind may well not have altered very much (Nietzsche 1878:2)⁸. Consequently, what is needed from now on in those who want to "know" their environment with deeper comprehension, is first and foremost "historical philosophising" (*das historische Philosophieren*), and with it the intellectual "virtue of modesty" (*die Tugend der Bescheidenheit*) (Nietzsche 1878:2).

Historical philosophising may be of particular value in opening human eyes for the origin and nature of moral judgement and moralism.

3 THE OBSTACLE OF MORALISM (*Moralismus*)

To make some sense out of moralism, the roots of the moral judgement of good and evil, and the core temperament of modern moralities, will be explored.

3.1 The problem of moral judgement

Breaking the ground for twentieth century psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Nietzsche suggested that our conscious self is determined by forces of which we are often entirely oblivious, so that we may not be quite who we think we are. This observation is especially true for the ways in which human beings judge one another individually and collectively. These judgements are virtually always motivated by self-interest, which is out of sight and subconscious. Most moral beliefs that human beings quote to justify their judgements have a dubious historical pedigree, and hide their less attractive motives and purposes (Robinson 1999:73). When we analyse moral judgements, it is found that they convey only personal preferences, but no credible information or truths about the world. Different interests evaluate differently. "Judgements of value" (*Werturteile*) concerning life - for it or against it - can, in the end, never be "true": they have value only as symptoms (Nietzsche 1888a:II, 2).

Meaningful moral judgement on what is "good" is further complicated if it is realised that a later generation often condemns previous practices as evil without grasping the fact that their own existence depended on it. "The most savage forces" (*die wildesten Kräfte*) often beat a path and are mainly destructive; but their work was nonetheless necessary in order that later, "a gentler civilization" (*eine mildere Gesittung*) may raise its house (Nietzsche 1878:246)⁹. It becomes impossible to consistently denigrate "evil" means, if it is understood that good actions are, in fact, "sublimated evil ones", and evil actions are "coarsened, brutalised good ones" (Nietzsche 1878:107).

Empirical observations are normally distinguished from moral evaluations, and it is maintained that it is logically difficult, if not impossible, to move from informative statements (A is linked to B) to normative statements (We should change A into C). Consequently scientific investigations cannot create a coherent set of values (Robinson 1999:27). According to Nietzsche's perception, empirical methods can discover why moralities exist, that is, what cause it, and can thus demonstrate that "moral truths" are true only from a particular perspective and that "there are many moralities".

However, science cannot establish moral values. There can be no universal "moral law" or "moral world-order" or "moral meaning". Owing to his view that everything is permitted, Nietzsche is often regarded as a herald of a consciousness of purposelessness and the collapse of morale (Hollingdale 1977:10). He does however differentiate between two significant clusters of moral choice.

3.2 Natural versus herd morality, complaining and guilt

Nietzsche distinguishes good and bad ethical systems by referring to the practices of affirmation and negation as regards the question of life (Sedgwick 1995:4-5). What he refers to as the Dionysian principle, which in his later work becomes synonymous with life affirmation, is related to a positive attitude to natural moralities and a negative attitude to anti-natural mores.¹⁰ Moral judgements are signs to be read semiotically within the conflicting frame of "natural" versus "anti-natural", affirmative versus negative, culture versus civilization, ascent versus decline (Nietzsche 1888a:VII, 1). Nietzsche argues for a "healthy morality", a "return to nature" which is an affirmation of life in all its aspects. Such an affirmation subsumes the most negative forces within itself and transfigures them into "the eternal joy of becoming" (Nietzsche 1888a:X, 5). The natural and joyful Dionysian dimension is nevertheless not a stable one, and requires the frenzied instinct of the ordering and intellectual Apollinian dimension as its means of expression. While it can enter "into any skin", its form relies upon the prerequisite of the formal and form-based, Apollinian type (Sedgwick 1995:6-7).¹¹

The problem is that almost every morality that has thus far been taught, revered, and preached, is "anti-natural morality", with the emphasis on slavish servility. Such moralities turn against the instincts of life and condemn these instincts (Nietzsche 1888a:V, 4). It reflects a degenerated type of instinct, that of the unthinking majority. It happens normally that an individual brings to bear upon himself, by means of his morality, the "tyranny of the majority" (Nietzsche AOM:89). With morality the individual is, in fact, led into being a "function of the herd" (*Funktion der Herde*) and to ascribing value to himself only as a function. As the conditions for the preservation of one community have been very different from those of another community, there have been very different moralities: considering the "fundamental transformations" (*wesentliche Umgestaltungen*) of herds and communities, states and societies still to come, one can prophesy (*prophezeien*) that there will be "more very divergent moralities" (*noch sehr abweichende Moralen*) in the future (Nietzsche 1882:116). The basic nature of all these

morality were, are and will be the same: Morality is the "herd instinct" in the individual (Nietzsche 1882:116).¹²

Modern herd morality, as a "symptom of decadence" (*Décadence-Symptom*) (Nietzsche 1888c:Tragedy 2), is reflected in mass movements, such as Christianity and socialism (Pascal 1970:xiv). Moralisation means, *inter alia*, moaning and groaning about what is inevitable. "Complaining" (*Das Sich-Beklagen*) stems from weakness. Whether one charges one's misfortune to others or to oneself - the socialist does the former; the Christian, for example, the latter - in reality there is no difference. The common and "the unworthy thing" (*das Unwürdige*) is that one blames someone (Nietzsche 1888a:IX, 34). Wherever there is "failure" (*ein Misserfolg*), moralisers search for guilt (*Die Schuld*) in others or in themselves. "To condemn oneself" (*sich selber verurteilen*) can be a means of restoring the feeling of power after a defeat (Nietzsche 1881:140). Complaining about circumstances and blaming others or oneself instead of saying yes to life, is typical of "moralism" (*der Moralismus*), which is often, even amongst philosophers, "pathologically conditioned" (Nietzsche 1888a:II, 10).

However, over thousands of years, the human need to become more conscious of experiences and to gain some kind of rational insight, control and prediction, has been struggling, in man, with the more primitive "decadent" societal need to judge experiences in terms of traditional and moral assumptions. It is time to explore this opposite need.

4 THE GROWTH OF WISDOM

To form a perspective on some of Nietzsche's view on the long-term growth (or lack of it) of wisdom, the focus will be on the struggle for rationality; on overcoming passions, guilt feelings, moral narrowness and irrationalities; on taking a stand beyond good and evil; and on being strong enough to say yes to all circumstances and to life.

4.1 Struggling for rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*)

Since reason took its first steps to understand more than immediate observations, it was confronted by the joint force of tribal law, group tradition and social morality. If we think back to, "rude, primitive conditions of peoples" (*rohe, frühe Zustände von Völkern*), or if we look closely at, "present-day savages" (*die jetzigen Wilden*), we find them determined in the strongest way by "tradition" (*das Herkommen*) and by "the law" (*das Gesetz*). The individual is tied to them almost automatically and moves with the regularity of a

pendulum (Nietzsche 1878:111). Any individual questions about existing habits threaten immediate collective securities. For Nietzsche, rational individual questions and suggestions to challenge accepted formulas is his first concern: his focus is not on political movements (Kaufmann 1971:15). He mentions that, in the entire course of history, the "more original spirits" (*ursprüngliche Geister*) had to suffer through being felt as "evil and dangerous" (*bösen und gefährlich*), indeed through "feeling themselves" to be so (Nietzsche 1881:9).

To ensure the survival of longer-term insights, individuals were forced to turn against tradition, law and morality. This was and is inevitable. The free human being is immoral¹³, because in all things he is determined to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition. In all the original conditions of mankind, "evil" signifies the same as "individual", "free", "capricious", "unusual", "unforeseen" and "incalculable" (Nietzsche 1881:9). However primitive and irrational its behaviour and codes, human society sees itself as morally just. Its perspective is determined by its level of cognitive development, since morality is linked to irrationality. Socrates and Plato are correct: whatever man does he always does the good, that is to say: that which seems to him good (useful) "according to the relative degree of his intellect, the measure of his rationality" (*nach dem Grade seines Intellectes, dem jedesmaligen Masse seiner Vernünftigkeit*) (Nietzsche 1878:102).¹⁴

The growth of rationality implied scientific analysis. Although often obstructed or retarded by the prejudices in societal tradition, law and morality, the rational, empirical and experimental study of human experience advanced over many years, especially since the European Enlightenment.¹⁵ While Nietzsche is hostile towards human arrogance and contemptuous of naivety and maintains that scientific knowledge cannot be a panacea for all human problems, he welcomes genuine scientific progress, especially in his later works, and is quite full of admiration for scientific achievements (Robinson 1999:28, 60, 67-68). However, a central problem is the constant inclination in human beings to find devious paths to the reconciliation of scientific truthfulness and moral idealism. A "scientific way of thinking" (*eine wissenschaftliche Denkweise*) is never easy and has often been attained only, "with tremendous fortitude and self-overcoming" (*mit ungeheurer Tapferkeit und Selbstüberwindung*) (Nietzsche 1888c:Wagner 2).

Wisdom can be nurtured only if metaphysical errors are challenged with scientific discipline. Nietzsche points out that it is the

mark of a higher culture to value "the little unpretentious truths" (*die kleinen unscheinbaren Wahrheiten*), which have been discovered "by means of rigorous method" (*mit strenger Methode*), more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical ages and men, which blind society and make them happy (Nietzsche 1878:3).

Nietzsche's prophetic character, Zarathustra, forms one of numerous angles from which he highlights the struggle in which rational "truthfulness" outgrows irrational "morality". The real meaning of Zarathustra is that of "annihilator of morality" (*Vernichter der Moral*) (Nietzsche 1888c:Good Books 1). Why? Because his doctrine holds "truthfulness" to be the highest virtue.¹⁶ This means the opposite of the cowardice of the idealist who flees from reality (Nietzsche 1888c:Destiny 3). Nietzsche is adamant about the interpretation of Zarathustra. His name means the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite and "the self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness"¹⁷ (1888c: Destiny 3).

The gradual growth of truthfulness requires the subjugation of irrational impulses, specifically of unrestrained passions.

4.2 Overcoming of passions (*Überwindung der Leidenschaften*)

One of the predicaments of the human mind, is the unrelenting way in which feelings of moral judgement undermine rational insight. What others do is very seldom "understood" (*verstanden*): it is normally merely "praised and blamed" (*gelobt und getadelt*) (Nietzsche 1882:264). Moreover, when a conflict arises in us between our pride and what our memory recalls of real unwanted experiences, we easily suppress these (Nietzsche 1886:68)¹⁸.

Truthfulness is continually in conflict with feelings. Truth has had to fight every step of the way, and almost everything else "dear to our hearts", on which our love and our trust in life depend, has had to be sacrificed to it. Greatness of the soul is needed for it: the service of truth is the "hardest of service".¹⁹ To be honest in intellectual things, one must be "stern towards one's heart" (*streng gegen sein Herz*). It implies that one despises fine feelings (Nietzsche 1888b:50)²⁰. Spiritual achievements depend on "subdued passions" (*bezwungene Leidenschaften*), even on "overcoming of the passions" (*Überwindung der Leidenschaften*) (Nietzsche 1880:53). "A free spirit" (*Ein freier Geist*) cannot survive in the fetters of love and hatred (Nietzsche 1878:Preface 4)²¹.

In several of his perspectives Nietzsche conveys the faith that a long-term increase in knowledge will weaken erroneous judgement and promote understanding. He argues that in the domain of

emotions and moral judgement, as in life in general, everything is changeable, unsteady and is "in flux", although it is "flooding forward". Even if the inherited habit of "erroneous evaluation, loving, hating"²² does continue to rule in us for a while, it is also true that, under the influence of "increasing knowledge" (*wachsende Erkenntnis*), it will grow weaker. A new habit, "that of comprehending, not-loving, not-hating" (*die des Begreifens, Nicht-Liebens, Nicht-Hassens*) is gradually implanting itself in us on the same soil. According to Nietzsche this habit of comprehending will, "in thousands of years' time" (*in Tausenden von Jahren*), perhaps be strong enough to bestow on mankind the power of bringing forth the wise, innocent (conscious of innocence) man²³ as regularly as it now brings forth - not his antithesis but necessary preliminary - the unwise, unjust, guilt-conscious man²⁴ (Nietzsche 1878:107).

It is possible that, in the long run, morality, like passions, may find it increasingly difficult to resist the growth of wisdom and the teeth of time.

4.3 Standing beyond good and evil (*jenseits von Gut und Böse*)

Like passions, the related irrationalities of "moral narrowness" (*moralische Beschränktheit*) have by and large undermined a magnanimous understanding of life (Nietzsche 1881:547). Both belong to the past and to previous ignorance of the causes of human behaviour. Moral judgements, like religious ones, "belong to a stage of ignorance" (*gehört einer Stufe der Unwissenheit*) at which the very concept of the real and the distinction between what is real and imaginary, are still lacking; thus, at this stage, 'truth' designates all sorts of things, which we today call 'imagination' (*'Einbildungen'*)." Moral judgements are realities of cultures which did not know enough to 'understand' themselves²⁵ (Nietzsche 1888a:VII, 1). In the course of time it would not even be necessary to attack morality. Morality would merely no longer feature (Nietzsche 1888c:Dawn:1).

The growth of intelligence marginalises the inclination to preach and to moralise. Many actions are called "evil" (*böse*), but are only "stupid" (*dumm*), because the degree of intelligence that decided for them was very low. Indeed, in a certain sense all present actions are stupid, for the highest degree of human intelligence that is attained presently will certainly be exceeded in the future. At that time all our actions and judgements will seem in retrospect as "circumscribed and precipitate" (*beschränkt und übereilt*) as the actions and judgements of still "existing primitive wild peoples"

(*zurückgebliebener wilde Völkerschaften*) now appear to us (Nietzsche 1878:107).

In the light of the inevitable dawn of wisdom, thinking people with dignity will liberate themselves from the deceptions in moral judgements which, like religious ones, can never be more than "a misinterpretation" (*eine Missdeutung*) of phenomena (Nietzsche 1888c:VII, 1). Moralism flows from a misunderstanding of the necessities in, and thus the innocence of, human behaviour.²⁶ To judge is the same thing as to be unjust.²⁷ This also applies when the individual judges himself (Nietzsche 1878:39). In fact, the philosopher has to say, as Christ did: "Judge not!" (*Richtet nicht!*) (Nietzsche 1879:33). According to Nietzsche, his demand upon the philosopher is known, namely that he "take his stand beyond good and evil" (*sich jenseits von Gut und Böse zu stellen*) and leave the illusion of moral judgement²⁸ beneath himself (Nietzsche 1888a:VII, 1).

Those few in every age who are able to stand beyond good and evil, have stopped moralising about others and themselves, and have accepted the challenges of life in a spirit of affirmation.

4.4 Understanding through saying yes without reservation (*Jasagen ohne Vorbehalt*)

Nietzsche is the champion of the instinctive energies in man and the opponent of all traditions, institutions and moralities that shackle and enfeeble them.²⁹ Self-becoming, related to a deeper insight in the world and in the self, is nevertheless an arduous creative task and full of risk, and can be achieved only by rich, joyous and thoughtful personalities. It takes courage to be yourself. Nietzsche conveys his positive perspective on human existence in his epic *So Sprach Zarathustra* where he stepped from the role of critic into that of prophet, with the central message of saying yes to life (Pascal 1970:vii, x, xi, xvi). In addition to understanding the world, human beings can practice art to redeem their superficial selves and intensify life.³⁰ Although the Dionysian qualities of strength and courage and the Apollonian disciplined intellect are both necessary aspects of the human psyche, modern man has often undervalued the first.³¹ Ironically, a more profound comprehension, of what is irrational and what is inevitable, is required to strengthen the rational heritage of the Enlightenment (Kaufmann 1971:16 Intro). A formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*, the love of fate (Nietzsche 1888c:Clever 10).³²

Like the pre-Socratic Greek thinkers Thales, Heraclitus and Empedocles, the harshness and arbitrary suffering that life can dole out, should be accepted, saying exuberantly, yes to life (Robinson 1999:8). Nietzsche depicted the nature of the supreme affirmative being with the character of Zarathustra, whose life and message symbolise the nature of "the superman" (*der Übermensch*).³³ On the question about what it is that allows us to recognise "who has turned out well" (*die Wohlgeratenheit*), Nietzsche answers, amongst others: He exploits bad accidents to his advantage and he believes neither in "misfortune" (*Unglück*) nor in "guilt" (*Schuld*). He comes to terms with himself and with others and knows how to forget, because "he is strong enough" (*er ist stark genug*); hence everything must turn out for his best (Nietzsche 1888c:Wise 2).³⁴

This perspective highlights his disapproval of complaining about circumstances and of blaming others. When somebody can come to grips with the world without irrational emotions, even without loving, without hating, and without resentment, he is strong enough not to judge but to try and comprehend his environment. His own immediate passions and needs are under control. On the door of the thinker of the future, stands the principle: "What do I matter!" (*Was liegt an mir!*) (Nietzsche 1881:547). He is strong enough to be open to the world and to be open-minded. "Knowledge, saying yes to reality" (*Die Erkenntnis, das Ja sagen zur Realität*), argues Nietzsche, is just as necessary for the strong, as cowardice and flight from reality is for the weak, who are inspired by weakness. Emotional, moralising and reactive members of a mass society, can never be free enough "to know" (*zu erkennen*) (Nietzsche 1888c:Tragedy 2).

What is needed for a deeper understanding of every experience and of life in general is, amongst others, not to react at once to a stimulus, but to accustoming the eye to "calmness" (*die Ruhe*), to "patience" (*die Geduld*) and to "postponing judgement" (*das Urteil hinauschieben*). The demand is to go around and grasp each individual case "from all sides"³⁵ and to be able to "suspend decision"³⁶ (Nietzsche 1888a:VIII, 6). This enables one to the mature freedom of spirit (*Freiheit des Geistes*), which permits access to many and contradictory modes of thought³⁷ (Nietzsche 1878:Preface:4). The free spirits, the "immoralists", do not condemn but appreciate the world. They make room in their hearts for every kind of "understanding, comprehending and approving" (*Verstehn, Begreifen, Gutheissen*). They do not easily negate, but make it a point of honour to be "affirmers" (*Bejahende*) (Nietzsche 1888a:V, 6).

Nietzsche attempted to harness romanticism by substituting an understanding of the passions for a blind cult and by extolling the individual whose reason is a match for his passions. All his heroes were men of superior reason: passionate men but who were masters of their passion (Kaufmann 1971:16 Intro). One of these was Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, who according to Nietzsche, visualised and conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being who, amongst others, is a man "of tolerance" (*der Toleranz*) - not out of weakness, but out of strength (Nietzsche 1888a:IX, 49). And of his own approach, Nietzsche says: "I do not want to accuse, I do not want even to accuse the accusers. May looking away (*Wegsehen*) be my only form of negation! And, all in all: I want to be at all times hereafter only an affirmer (*ein Jasagender*)!" (Nietzsche 1882:276) What is also needed, is: "A formula for the highest affirmation (*der höchsten Bejahung*), born of fullness, of overfullness, "a yes-saying without reservation" (*ein Jasagen ohne Vorbehalt*) (Nietzsche 1888c:Tragedy 2). It is possible, even probable, that moralisation may be overcome by wisdom. In fact, a crucial question in future will be to see, "whether mankind could transform itself from a moral to a wise mankind" (*ob die Menschheit aus einer moralischen sich in eine weise Menschheit umwandeln könne*) (Nietzsche 1978:107).

5 CONCLUDING VIEWPOINT

As the provokingly fascinating Nietzsche speaks in a hundred different voices, this paper is only one among many interpretations. In the essay a few relationships between Nietzsche's perceptions of knowledge, moralism and wisdom are tentatively explored.

The function of knowledge is to order observations and to introduce meaning into experiences, so that they can be controlled more efficiently. On the one hand, one final truth is never possible, while, on the other hand, all interpretations are not equally valid. Some are more accurate and useful. In this respect thorough analysis is essential. Previously-held religious and metaphysical beliefs are continually being replaced by verifiable statements of empirical science. However, even these are not unchangeable truths, but an intellectual arrangement (*Zurechtmachung*) for human benefit. "Truth" in statements of knowledge is always a matter of perspective, called "perspectivism". Perspectivism implies that the key to credible knowledge is "seeing with more and different eyes".

An indispensable perspective is the one on time. Nietzsche's view is that historical inevitabilities determine the human environment, behaviour and thinking in ways of which human beings

are utterly unaware. He argues that everything essential in the development of mankind took place in primeval times. Contrary to the strong human inclination to de-historicise experiences, comprehensive insight demands the opposite, namely "historical philosophising" (*historische Philosophieren*).

Morality differs fundamentally from knowledge. It consists of judgements, often formulated emotionally, add nothing to knowledge of the world and can not be based on scientific study. The motives for judgements are normally related to hidden self-interests. Human beings in general are entirely oblivious of the roots of their moral evaluations. Moreover, present "good" circumstances are virtually always the consequences of previous savage forces, later regarded as "evil". "Good" always presupposes "evil", and these are nothing more than perspectives from different angles of self-interest. Where a healthy ethical vision is based on the affirmation of nature and life, most modern moral codes are inherently unhealthy, since they negate the human need for an energetic and independent life and emphasise the slavish servility of individuals to collective traditions. In reality, most modern moral codes are symptoms of decadence. Judging morally, complaining, laying blame and searching for guilt are forms of the pathologically conditioned moralism of those who cannot say yes to life.

Every time individual reason takes a step to liberate itself from any form of primitive tradition, law and morality it is condemned as evil and dangerous. But wisdom and rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*) grow step by step, *inter alia*, through applying the scientific way of thinking (*eine wissenschaftliche Denkweise*) and attach more value to little unpretentious truths, discovered by rigorous method, than to popular metaphysical beliefs. For Nietzsche the struggle between moralisation and understanding is decisive, and for him, the name of his prophetic character, Zarathustra means: "the self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness".

The continuing struggle of truthfulness, implies the overcoming of passions and guilt feelings. Over thousands of years, under the influence of increasing knowledge (*wachsende Erkenntnis*), a new habit is implanting and will further implant itself in the human mind, namely that of comprehending, not-loving, not-hating (*die des Begreifens, Nicht-Liebens, Nicht-Hassens*). Moreover, since moral judgements, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance in human development, typical of primitive and backward peoples, it is gradually outgrown. Increasing wisdom means decreasing morality. A genuine philosopher, inevitably takes his stand beyond good and

evil (*jenseits von Gut und Böse*), and says, as Christ did: "Judge not!" (*Richtet nicht!*)

Non-emotional, non-moral wisdom is inseparably linked to a positive and healthy attitude towards the world. Nietzsche depicted the nature of the supreme affirmative being with the character of Zarathustra, whose life and message symbolise the nature of "the superman" (*der Übermensch*). A person who has turned out well, is wise, accepts life and is secure enough not to blame circumstances for anything. He is also strong enough to believe neither in misfortune nor in guilt. His wisdom means saying yes to reality (*Jasagen zur Realität*). Such a person makes room in his heart for every kind of understanding, comprehending and approving (*Verstehn, Begreifen, Gutheissen*). He is characterised by tolerance and patience and by a yes-saying without reservation (*ein Jasagen ohne Vorbehalt*).

In future a crucial question will be to establish whether the human race could transform itself from a moral to a wise mankind (*aus einer moralischen sich in eine weise Menschheit umwandeln könne*), from laying blame to saying yes.

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the third international conference of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities at the University of Pretoria, 26-29 June 2000. Although the author accepts responsibility for his interpretation of a few Nietzschean perspectives, he is deeply grateful for the invaluable comments and suggestions which were received and could be incorporated in the substantially revised and expanded article.
2. It is widely maintained that the evolutionism in Charles Darwin's biological discoveries and in Georg Hegel's philosophy of history have contributed significantly to questioning the belief in the absoluteness of truths.
3. The German word "zurechtmachen" often means, "to order", "to arrange", "to get in order" - in Afrikaans "regmaak" - and is related to "zurechlegen" meaning to "to put right" - in Afrikaans "regsit". The emphasis in Nietzsche's concept *das Zurechtmachen* or *die Zurechtmachung* is on creating order in human experiences by placing it, with similar experiences, in a broader framework.
4. This radical view of the relationship between language and the world pre-echoes many of the central ideas of the twentieth century philosophers, such as Wittgenstein and Derrida (Robinson 1999:16-17).
5. Nietzsche's view of "perspectivism", and the implications that science is a limited human activity, influenced many leading twentieth century philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend.
6. "Mangel an historischem Sinn ist der Erbfehler aller Philosophen" (Nietzsche 1878:2).
7. See Nietzsche (1881:18) on "the real and decisive main history" (*die wirkliche und entscheidene Hauptgeschichte*).

8. In addition to Nietzsche's approach to time from the angle of long-term historical events and trends, he is also known for his perspective of the continued repeating of experiences. The doctrine of "eternal return" envisages history working in repetitive cycles. In Nietzsche's ambiguous approach he typically presents this idea sometimes as a literal scientific truth about the cosmos and sometimes as a kind of psychological metaphor. Sometimes the impression is that life is repeating itself literally over and over again while at other times the impression is that a person should live his life in such a way that he would be prepared to repeat it over and over again. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze suggested that the Nietzschean myth of eternal return can be formulated in terms of the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant as follows: "Never perform an action you would not be willing to see endlessly repeated" (Robinson 1999:31-34, 41-44).

The concept, also referred to as "eternal recurrence", may also be applied to the "identical orbit" of thought systems (referred to earlier in this section). For example: Jean-Francois Lyotard (1928-1998), the philosopher who has explored many of the political consequences of postmodernist scepticism, suggests, like Nietzsche, that human history is inevitably and relentlessly cyclical. For Lyotard, the cycles consist of modernist total "grand narratives" being continually repudiated by different forms of postmodernist scepticism.

9. Nietzsche explains the historical relationship between evil and good with the metaphor of glaciers: "*The cyclops of culture*. - When we behold those deeply-furrowed hollows in which glaciers have lain, we think it hardly possible that a time will come when a wooded, grassy valley, watered by streams, will spread itself out upon the same spot. So it is, too, in the history of mankind: the most savage forces (*die wildesten Kräfte*) beat a path, and are mainly destructive; but their work was nonetheless necessary, in order that a gentler civilization (*eine mildere Gesittung*) might raise its house later. The frightful energies (*Die schrecklichen Energien*) - those which are called evil (*das, was man das Böse nennt*) - are the cyclopean architects and road-makers of humanity (*sind die zyklischen Architekten und Wehebauer der Humanität*)" (Nietzsche 1878:246)

10. Kaufmann points out that in Nietzsche's later works the Dionysian no longer signifies the flood of passion, but "passion controlled" as opposed to passion extirpated, the latter being associated with Christianity (1971:10).

11. We must carefully plot our way through the maze of other naturalisms unfitted to Nietzsche's affirmation of nature and his conception of the necessity of hierarchy, one example of which is the thought of Herbert Spencer. The role of *amor fati* (love of fate) is essential (Sedgwick 1995:5).

12. "Moralität ist Herden-Instink im einzelnen" (Nietzsche 1882:116).

13. "Der freie Mensch ist unsittlich" (Nietzsche 1881:9).

14. In Africa at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the link between moral judgement and measure of rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*) is particularly notable, for example when communities in the interior Plateau province in central Nigeria are compared to the more highly literate and prosperous communities in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

15. In this respect, the role of science, since the Enlightenment may be relevant. Although the concept "Enlightenment" usually refers to a specific period of history - especially the past two centuries - it also suggests an attitude of mind that is suspicious of religious explanation, believes in the power of reason and science to solve most human problems, and maintains a faith in the possibilities of social, economic, political and even moral progress.

16. "...hat die Wahrhaftigkeit als oberste Tugend" (Nietzsche 1888c:Destiny 3).
17. "Die Selbstüberwindung der Moral aus Wahrhaftigkeit..." (Nietzsche 1888c Destiny 3).
18. It is with reference to insights such as these, that Sigmund Freud suggested that Nietzsche was unique - precisely because he discovered secluded, concealed and obscure, but decisive, facts about human nature (Robinson 1999 48).
19. "Es bedarf Größe der Seele dazu: der Dienst der Wahrheit ist der harteste Dienst" (Nietzsche 1888b:50).
20. "dass man die 'schönen Gefühle' verachtet..." (Nietzsche 1888b:50).
21. "...in den Fesseln von Liebe und Hass" (Nietzsche 1878 Preface 4).
22. "...die vererbte Gewohnheit des irrtümlichen Schätzens, Liebens, Hassens..." (Nietzsche 1878:107).
23. "...der weise, unschuldige (unschuldbewusste) Mensch)" (Nietzsche 1878:107).
24. "...der unweise, unbillige, schuldbewusste Mensch)" (Nietzsche 1878:107).
25. "...die nicht genug wussten, um sich selbst zu 'verstehn'" (Nietzsche 1888a:VII, 1).
26. Underlying many of his philosophical perspectives on moral tolerance, is Nietzsche's idea of necessity, of which the following is a concise exposition: "Everything is necessity (*Alles ist Notwendigkeit*) - thus says the new knowledge; and this knowledge itself is necessity. Everything is innocence: and knowledge is the path to insight into this innocence (*die Erkenntnis ist der Weg zur Einsicht in diese Unschuld*)" (Nietzsche 1878:107).
27. "Richten ist soviel als ungerecht sein" (Nietzsche 1878:39).
28. "...die Illusion des moralischen Urteils..." (Nietzsche 1888a:VII, 1)
29. As radical opponent of suffocating traditions, institutions and moralities, Nietzsche is often regarded the precursor of the movement of so-called post-modernism. In fact, many twentieth century postmodern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (born 1930) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), adopted Nietzsche as the great-grandfather of postmodernism. Many postmodern philosophers also felt that they were presiding over the final disintegration of the European Enlightenment project, but, unlike him, they do not seem to have a clear programme for the future of civilization (Robinson 1999:34-35).
30. Nietzsche's thought on the role of art in self-becoming have been excitingly explored by the Stellenbosch philosopher Johan Degenaar.
31. Nietzsche emphasised both Apollonian and Dionysian qualities. In fact: "He celebrated reason, like some of the thinkers of the Enlightenment, and passion like some of the Romantics" (Kaufmann 1971:15).
32. Love of necessity is the opposite of moral judgement. "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary (*das Notwendige*), still less conceal it - all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary - but love it" (Nietzsche 1888c:Clever 10).
33. The *Übermensch* symbolises Nietzsche's vision of the creative will. On the one hand, the *Übermensch* is an inward ideal by which the individual may measure his life. On the other hand, this idea also suggests a purpose for society, a higher stage of biological and social evolution of mankind. There is a constant wavering in Nietzsche's mind between an inward personal and an outward historical goal. The idea of such a person, who, in a chaotic world, can create himself, had an immense influence on Existentialist philosophers such as

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) (Robinson 1999:30-34; Pascal 1970:xii Introduction). Kaufmann is of the opinion that, although Nietzsche is in many ways close to modern positivism, "the Existentialists recognize their own pathos in him" (Kaufmann 1971:15).

34. Dionysian strength, and the resultant willingness to accept opposite perceptions rather than judge them morally, promote mutual understanding. One of many recent examples may be the integration, between 1994 and 2000, of formerly hostile armed forces, such as the soldiers of the infantry and airborne divisions of the conservative SADF and the black comrades of revolutionary *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), into the new South African National Defence Force. At the beginning of the process, the convictions and perceptions of the previous enemies differed in virtually all basic aspects: from the nature of military service to the type of defence force needed to the social structure that should be created in the future South Africa. At the end of the five-year process, international observer teams identified several obstacles but nevertheless referred to the integration, restructuring and transformation as exceptionally successful, compared to similar projects elsewhere in the world. Is it notable that the integration was evident not only in the reconciliation of (physical) fighters but of (spiritual) symbols. One reason was that the previously hostile armed forces have refrained from using own moral preferences to judge one another and to lay emotional blame (*Schuld*) on each other.

The following question is relevant: Did this fact promote the acceptance and understanding of a new shared environment? In general, the answer is positive. One reason is related to Nietzsche's eloquent identification of the irreconcilability of moralism (*Moralismus*) and judgement (*Urteil*) on the one side with rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*) and acceptance (*Jasagen*) on the other.

35. "...den Einzelfall von allen Seiten umgehn und umfassen lernen" (Nietzsche 1888a:VIII, 6).

36. "...die Entscheidung aussetzen können" (Nietzsche 1888a:VIII, 6).

37. "...zu vielen und entgegengesetzten Denkweisen" (Nietzsche 1878:Preface 4).

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