

# On Nietzsche, Postmodernism and the New Enlightenment

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In spite of Nietzsche's enormous and apparently ever-increasing influence, it is notoriously difficult to spell out the essence and precise implications of his position.<sup>1</sup> This is evidently due partly to his poetic and rhetorical style; but in my view there is a more important reason than this. I would maintain that his thought, when taken as a whole, is rather like a carpet which cannot be laid straight unless you cut off one or other of two bits. To make Nietzsche consistent, you have to reject or downplay one of two elements in his thought. If you reject one, what you get is cognitive and moral nihilism; if you reject the other, you end up with what I want to call the new enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> In these respects the postmodernists, as represented at any rate by Michel Foucault, are Nietzsche's true successors.

When in nihilistic mood, Nietzsche seems to imply that it is true that there are no truths, that it is really morally good to act as though there were no such thing as moral goodness.<sup>3</sup> In the course of considering this self-destructive tendency of one strand of Nietzsche's thought, Walter Kaufmann remarks that consideration of problems like these was not Nietzsche's strong suit.<sup>4</sup> Now the basis of the new enlightenment is epistemological, and turns on theses and arguments which directly address such problems. These may be summarized as follows: (1) Denial that our judgments are ever true is self-destructive (is it supposed to be true that we never speak the truth?); and so is denial that we ever have good reasons for our judgments (do we have good reasons for *this* particular judgment?). (2) There is an actual world, which exists largely prior to and independently of ourselves, by virtue of correspondence, or failure to correspond, with which, our judgments are true or false; however, this actual world is nothing other than what true judgments *are* about, and judgments for good reason *tend to be* about. (3) We can make reasonable judgments about what tends to promote happiness and self-actualization, consistently with fairness, among human beings (and perhaps other sensitive creatures, as well as other rational creatures if

there are such); and so we can come to know what is really good. (4) Knowing what is true is, all things being equal, an aspect of the good. Obviously I have no space here to drain the philosophical swamp which surrounds each of these theses; but suffice it to say that everyone accepts them in practice even if they do not admit it in so many words. People always assume as a matter of course that one tends to get at the truth about things so far as one has good reasons for what one says; that the truth of the judgment that snow is white depends on snow being white, and not on human attitudes or conventions; that relations between human beings which are unfair, or actions or policies which cause avoidable unhappiness or suffering, are the worse for it; and that it is usually better to know what is true about anything than to believe what is false. (As *The Perfumed Garden* remarks in its wisdom, knowledge is sometimes terrible, but ignorance is always worse.)

'My brothers, break the ancient tables', cries Nietzsche's Zarathustra; meaning that we should repudiate traditionally accepted and authoritatively-imposed moral norms and rules. Sometimes Nietzsche seems to be implying that this is because there is no such thing as a real good and evil independent of what we happen to decide; it is up to us—each of us, the best of us, or humankind as a whole—to *make* good and evil by our free decision. In other contexts, which I believe are more typical of him, he appears to be insisting rather that good and evil have been gravely misrepresented by traditional conceptions of them; that most people have been in fundamental error about what really ought to be aspired to and eschewed by human beings. (Where there is no reality, of course, there can be no misrepresentation.) You can read the title 'Beyond Good and Evil' in two ways. One of them issues in total scepticism as to matters of value, at least of 'value' in any other sense than what is the object of arbitrary choice. The other, which could be expressed more precisely as 'Beyond "Good" and "Evil"', suggests rather that conventional assumptions about value are radically out of kilter, and that real good and evil are very different from what have generally been taken to be such. It did not escape Nietzsche, for all that it was overlooked by the positivists, as well as by those of their successors who would accept Wilfred Sellars's judgment that science is the measure of all things,<sup>6</sup> that the collapse of evaluative norms must logically lead to the collapse of cognitive ones as well. To argue validly, and to attend properly to evidence, are both matters of doing something well rather than badly, and are (virtually) necessary means of coming to believe what is true as opposed to what is false. And 'validly', 'properly' and 'well' are evaluative terms.<sup>7</sup> (Short of employment of these means, one will only believe the truth intermittently and by chance; and have no

adequate reason for believing that it *is* the truth.)

There is a curious ambiguity in Nietzsche's epistemological doctrines and assumptions. Often he seems to be exhorting his readers to insist on truth, and on the human authenticity which will be content with nothing less, at all hazards; and to maintain that what people usually think of as 'the truth' is a cowardly and self-serving evasion or travesty of this. But on other occasions, he appears to be claiming that 'truth' itself is nothing but a falsifying imposition of our subjective theoretical assumptions on a recalcitrant reality, which is terrifying and chaotic rather than orderly, manageable and domesticated, and in constant flux as opposed to stable and enduring. This is what appears to underlie his dislike of system. As is typical of him, he is reacting to a central issue of philosophy in a manner which has come to be characteristic of contemporary discontent with 'modernism' and the old enlightenment; also typical of both, as I shall hope to make clear, is the curious amalgam of brilliant insight and radical confusion. Bland and dogmatic assumptions of a systematic and theoretical nature may indeed be a pretext for keeping oneself insulated from the delight and terror either of raw experience, or of the contemplation of things as they are. (These by no means come to the same thing, as I shall try briefly to show.) But the fact remains, as I would argue, that systematic theory which is constantly tested by experience is the means *par excellence* of coming to believe what is true, and so of apprehending reality.

Phenomenologists are quite correct that there is a sense in which we, as societies and to some extent as individuals, 'constitute' reality by our theoretical constructions. But it is of the utmost importance to grasp the nature and limits of this 'constitution' if we are to have a philosophy which is not absurdly and indeed self-destructively subjectivist. Understood in one way, the view that we 'constitute' reality issues in a self-destructive scepticism or relativism (the 'fact' that all 'reality' is 'constituted' or invented is itself 'constituted' or invented); in another, in a critical realism which in the last analysis, I believe, is the only philosophical position which is at once self-consistent, sane, and capable of resolving the notorious difficulties in this area of inquiry. To attend to the data of experience or feeling is one thing; to judge with sufficient reason on this basis that a state of affairs is the case, independently of one's subjective state of experience or feeling, is another. In between experience of data and judgment of fact, there comes hypothesis, the envisagement of possibility. Judgment of fact, as Nietzsche and Foucault both rightly emphasize, can amount to a disguised means of control, or a concealed evasion of experience, feeling, or reality; instead of an authentic movement towards true and well-founded belief, which (as the

new enlightenment would add) is nothing other than approach to knowledge of the facts as they really are.

In accordance with the principles of the new enlightenment, the relation between human authenticity on the one hand, and knowledge of what is true and good on the other, is as follows. Human authenticity heads towards knowing what is true, and knowing and doing what is good. This happens in the following way. There are four basic human mental capacities constitutive of human authenticity; that is to say, one is authentic to the degree that one exercises them, inauthentic so far as one does not.<sup>8</sup> First, there is *attentiveness* to the data of our sensation and feeling, both of which we tend to gloss over when they go against our assumptions, our prejudices or our self-image. Röntgen notices the faint glow in the corner of his laboratory which led to the discovery of X-rays, Darwin observes the special adaptation to their habitats of the various species of Galapagos finch which played such a crucial role in the development of his theory of evolution. As to feeling, many people have wrecked their own lives, and often those of others, due to unnoticed feelings of anger. Second, there is the *intelligence* that unrestrictedly and vigorously asks questions about the experience, and envisages possible explanations for it. Could the glow be due to a yet unknown form of radiation, the adaptations due to chance variations in inherited characteristics being specially fitted to survival within particular habitats? Could my anger at the reasonable suggestions or remonstrances of my spouse be due to an unresolved conflict with one of my parents?

Third, there is the *reasonableness* which affirms provisionally the explanation best supported by the data, rather than alternatives which pander to laziness, self-esteem, group-hatred, or the wishes of paymasters. (If I am a researcher working for a tobacco-company, it may be that the most reasonable judgment on the basis of the evidence to which I have attended, and the possibilities which I have envisaged, is not the one which is the most gratifying to my employers.) I say 'provisionally', since it is always possible that more experience may come in, more hypotheses be considered, which will make another judgment more reasonable. Judgments may be of fact or value; I may as reasonably judge that some situation is bad, and that something ought to be done about it, as that some other state of affairs is the case. It may also be reiterated here, as a matter of quite central importance for the implications of the new enlightenment, that the real world is nothing other than what true judgments are about, and judgments for good reason tend to be about. (I believe that it is failure to grasp this which has led to most of the confusions and anomalies both in Nietzsche's own work and in that of postmodernists.) The assumption which Nietzsche took over

from Humean empiricism, and which is still quite influential, to the effect that reality is or might be a chaotic flux, on which we impose or try to impose order by means of our concepts, is due to a confusion between what appears to the attentive senses or feelings on the one hand, and the reality which is the actual or potential object of reasonable judgment on the other. Fourth and last, I may be more or less *responsible* in deciding or failing to decide to act in accordance with the value-judgment at which I have arrived. It is one thing to think I ought to protest against crime and injustice, or contribute money or time to a cause; it is another thing to bring myself to act accordingly. Responsible decision tends not only to be costly in energy or resources, but to provoke reprisals at the hands of those who benefit from the *status quo*. 'The interest of General Motors,' as they say, 'is the interest of the U.S.A. '; and if you are an employee of that august institution, and point out some discrepancy, you may have some reason to fear for your job, or at least for the next expected increment to your salary.

Someone might say: 'Is not this statement about the nature of authenticity, and the means of coming to know what is true and to know and do what is good, merely arbitrary? On what principles is it founded? And even if one could find such principles, would not the question inevitably arise of on what *they* were founded, and so on to infinity? Does not every form of foundationalism founder upon the rock of infinite regress?' The principles which I have sketched need no further foundation; they establish themselves by virtue of the fact that any attempt to argue against them is self-defeating. Let us say that one is 'rational' so far as one is attentive, intelligent and reasonable in the senses that I have given. Suppose someone denies that one comes to know what is true and what is good, by these means. Is her claim a rational and responsible one? If it is, she is exercising the capacities in question in the very act of justifying the claim that they are *not* to be exercised in justification of claims. But if her claim is *not* advanced as rational and responsible, as the possibility which is best supported by the relevant evidence, there is no point in taking any notice of it.

What relation do the views of Nietzsche and the postmodernists have to authenticity in the sense at issue here? I think it is useful to see the new enlightenment as playing synthesis to the thesis and antithesis constituted respectively by the old enlightenment on the one hand, and the views of Nietzsche and postmodernism on the other. From the viewpoint of the new enlightenment, the trouble with the old enlightenment is not that it was too rational, but that it does not take rationality quite far enough; not that it was obsessed with truth, but that for all its virtues it tended to get hung up on the kind of travesty of truth

which is represented by scientism or the more vulgar versions of utilitarianism. To move towards the real truth, to come to know things as they really are and as they ought to be, we constantly need to test the supposed truth at the bar of rationality; have we overlooked some relevant evidence have some possible explanations of it not occurred to us? Are our judgments rather lazy, conventional or provocative than strictly reasonable? Is the supposed truth, for instance (to take Foucault's examples) in matters of criminology, psychiatry, or human sexuality, rather due to the interests of a powerful group or institution than to genuinely rational considerations? A very good way of finding this out is to attend, in the manner of Foucault's genealogies, to judgments which are characteristic of submerged, marginalized, or downtrodden persons or groups. One might say that a consequence of the new enlightenment is that insights of Nietzsche may be combined with those of Karl Popper, and both generalized, disambiguated, and clarified. According to Popper, our theories about the world have verisimilitude, tend to approach the truth, so far as they may in principle be falsified by experience, and in fact survive rigorous attempts so to falsify them.<sup>9</sup> Rather similarly, the 'undergoing' demanded by Nietzsche's Zarathustra is largely a matter of attending to and questioning the dark side of our own characters and those of our societies, and being disposed stringently to criticize our convenient, comfortable and evasive views of ourselves on the basis of this. A theist might argue that such an attitude is a necessary condition of genuine sanctity.

In fact, it is only when supplemented by the epistemological principles of the new enlightenment that Foucault's genealogies can answer the charge of being arbitrary or pointless, which they certainly are not. For the whole force of his accounts of the histories of punishment, sexual theory, and the treatment of the insane, depends in the last analysis on the assumption that there is a greater verisimilitude in them, that they are more likely to be true or at least close to the truth, than the official accounts that they oppose. This in turn is based on the assumption that they are the fruit of a more intelligent and reasonable assessment of the relevant evidence.<sup>10</sup> If they are just one more collection of fantasies based on the lust for power, why take them with the seriousness that they undoubtedly deserve? Paradoxically, to take Foucault quite seriously is incompatible with taking him quite seriously.

It seems to me implicit throughout Foucault's work that freedom is the greatest of goods, and oppression and frustration the greatest of evils; in his very last writings, he seems to imply too that such freedom ought to be shared as widely as possible.<sup>11</sup> Why does he not spell this conviction out clearly and distinctly? The reason seems to be that he

associates all explicit sets of factual and value judgments, especially when these form a system, with oppression and the imposition of power. He is right to do so, so far as such systems are either not *based* on rationality in the sense that I have outlined; or are not constantly *exposed* to it. What is required to prevent Nietzsche's and Foucault's ways of thinking from issuing in nihilism is to make explicit the principles and values which they implicitly assume, and to make clear that the resulting principles and values are second-order rather than first-order, in a sense which may be set out as follows. What is or ought to be determinative for ethics, politics and the management of institutions, is the maximization of freedom, fulfilment and fairness within the human community. This in turn is to be realized only as a result of the most thoroughgoing possible application of rationality and responsibility; not the particular (first-order) moral conventions and political aims that are established at any one time and place, which are good or bad only so far as they achieve or fail to achieve these ends. I believe that almost everyone agrees, at least implicitly, that freedom, fulfilment and fairness are the basic worthwhile moral and political aims; where they commonly differ is the means by which these ends may best be realized.<sup>12</sup>

There is a passage in Shadia Drury's forthcoming book, which summarizes a view of postmodernism in relation to which it seems convenient to situate my own.<sup>13</sup> Drury suggests that the familiar criticisms of Nietzsche and Foucault, to the effect that their positions are self-destructive, miss the mark in both cases; such criticisms, she writes, aim to 'disqualify and silence the speakers,' but the enormous popularity of Nietzsche and Foucault shows this criticism to be a failure. My own belief is that the criticisms show that the views in question cannot be accepted just as they stand, without qualification or corrective; but that it would by no means follow, from the soundness of the criticisms so far as they go, that there was nothing of importance to be learned from Nietzsche or Foucault. What their popularity strongly suggests is that, however serious the incidental defects in their thought, they are getting at something very important, and so should by no means without further ado be 'disqualified' or 'silenced'. Perhaps their main achievement is, to some extent in spite of themselves, to expose the difference between the real true and good on the one hand, which can be known and achieved only through a strenuous exercise of human authenticity; and on the other hand the merely supposed true and good, which are too often tools used either for the prevention of our self-realization (Nietzsche), or for oppression of some human beings by others (Foucault).

Drury goes on to suggest that the typically postmodernist thesis, that all truths are dependent on our constructions, does not necessarily mean

that the reality of the external world is denied, but only that it is uninteresting to us; what is at issue here is that 'the human world, the world in which we live, is always a world of our own making.' As I have said above, it follows from the central principles of the new enlightenment that the natural as well as the human world is intimately related to our intellectual constructions; since it is nothing other than what we tend to get to know by means of these constructions, so far as we strenuously criticize them in the light of our experience. (This does *not* imply the subjective idealist or social relativist position, that it does not exist, and that it is not largely as it is, prior to and independently of these intellectual constructions of ours. It is probably misapprehension on this point which has, more than anything else, hindered the general acceptance of the new enlightenment.<sup>14</sup>) Evidently the human world is made by us in a way more radical than this; what ways of life we pursue, what moral or political aims we espouse, what laws we impose upon ourselves, are largely up to us, in a way that whether the earth's moon is larger than the planet Venus, or whether sodium is more chemically active than xenon, are not. However, if we are to promote flourishing and avoid disaster in the human sphere, we have to exercise rationality in finding out the real potentialities and liabilities of the human condition. While it is up to ourselves what we are to make of ourselves, it not only stupid but dangerous to fail to take into account the human raw material on which we have to work. We can be as wrong about this as about matters of science or history, and the effects of our being wrong may be even more disastrous. Nietzsche and Foucault both remind us how easy it is to deceive ourselves on these matters, through sloth, cowardice, selfishness, or reluctance to stand out against the crowd. When one understands the matter rightly, the free play of experience and understanding (as emphasized by postmodernists), so far from being in opposition to reason, are necessary for reason to function properly. *Pace Drury*, I think that a consistent denial of truth does amount to a denial of the external world, since that world is nothing other than what true judgments are or would be about.

One of the most dismal and debilitating aspects of the old enlightenment is the so-called 'fact-value dichotomy' in which it has seemed to issue.<sup>15</sup> However, the new enlightenment defends a close association between fact and value, maintaining as it does, in accordance with common sense, that consideration of the nature of reality, and of the human beings who form a part of it, has implications for what it is good for us to do and to strive for. For example, if the most conscientious research does not support the once almost universal view that young humans are apt to improve their behaviour in the long run when



subjected to severe corporal punishment, a policy based on the assumption that they do will tend to lead to a large amount of suffering without much to compensate for it, and consequently will be bad. Just the same would apply to institutional arrangements for the care and upbringing of human orphans, which took no account of the need of children for stable relationships with particular adults.

As Drury says in defense of postmodernism, philosophy must be applied to itself; but if the principles of the new enlightenment are in order, this will not lead to scepticism or relativism. On the contrary, one may set out and vindicate principles by means of which what is really true and really good may progressively be known and implemented. Torture for fun, genocide, and clitoridectomy are not just things from which some people happen to have a revulsion of feeling, while others may as justifiably have an aesthetic or moral preference for them. For all that the contradictory seems to be implied both by postmodernism, and by the 'scientism' which is so characteristic of the old enlightenment (though it is seldom admitted by either party), such practices, in accordance both with common sense and the new enlightenment, are really bad and objectively wrong. They are wrong and bad because they are grossly unfair, and cause intense unhappiness without any substantial compensating happiness being achieved by means of them.<sup>16</sup>

In what sense, and to what degree, can one properly say, to quote Drury once again, that genealogies of the type provided by Foucault 'unmask the triumph of reason and reveal it as an arbitrary construction and a manifestation of the will to power'? Either the 'unmasking' and 'revealing' are themselves the result of and in the interests of rationality, or they are not. If they are, they have employed and thus presupposed rationality in the very act of purporting to subvert it. If they are not, they are mere bad-mouthing which can have no pretensions to describing things as they really are, and hence cannot 'unmask' or 'reveal' anything. If the point is rather exposure of those elements of old-enlightenment 'rationality' which were falsely so-called, it is very well taken; but in that case it illustrates how postmodernism may be fruitfully envisaged as just one aspect or moment of the new enlightenment. Beliefs and attitudes which are less than wholly rational or moral need to be constantly subverted so that what is really rational and moral can appear clearly and distinctly for what it is.

As to the 'will to power', this may be conceived and deployed in various ways which are never clearly set out and distinguished, so far as I can tell, by Nietzsche or his postmodernist followers. It may be thought of, in the manner of Callicles or the Nazis, as a means of dominating or suppressing other persons, or of getting enough of or more than one's

share of material goods or influence. It may, at the other extreme, be conceived in the manner of Aristotle or Jung, to be exercised in the interests of one's own authenticity; this, as I have already argued, heads towards knowledge of what is true and knowledge and implementation of what is good. No-one ever commended authenticity with such force and passion as Nietzsche; but he seems to conceive truth and goodness in an ambiguous way, sometimes as hindrances to authenticity rather than as ends which are to be realized by means of it. And there is no doubt that systems of thought, which only tend to move towards truth and goodness so far as they are constantly open to correction by rationality and responsibility, are real obstructions to their attainment when they are not so.

A very important aspect of the good is to be achieved by 'sublimation'—Nietzsche actually invented the use of this term in the modern sense popularized by Freud and his disciples.<sup>17</sup> Evidently our passions, if just let rip, are unsuited to the business of fulfilled and harmonious human living; so we have the alternative of setting ourselves either to destroy them, or to canalize and transmute them, in ways more conducive to long-term satisfaction in our own lives or in those of others. It is Nietzsche's principal complaint against religion that it meets the problem by attempting to destroy our desires rather than sublimating them, as he himself proposes. I should remark here that I disagree with MacIntyre and Drury in their view that (to quote Drury) 'the Nietzschean idea of freedom as self-transcendence has nothing to do with the classical idea of freedom as self-restraint and self-mastery.' Nietzsche's insistence, just as strong as that of Christianity, on the need for suffering and 'undergoing' if we are to come to full self-realization,<sup>18</sup> shows that self-making as he conceives it includes self-restraint and self-mastery. But self-restraint and self-mastery as mere amputation of the so-called 'lower passions' is very different indeed from self-mastery as their sublimation; and no-one has set out the contrast more forcefully and vividly than Nietzsche. True sublimation, as he sees it, has been achieved by a few artists and philosophers, who (to quote Kaufmann) have been 'able to give style to their characters, to organize the chaos of their passions, and to create a world of beauty.'<sup>19</sup> The classical tradition, as represented for example by Aristotle, has in common with Nietzsche the conviction that the fundamental task for each human being is to realize her potentialities; the self to be restrained or mastered is the self as it is at present, while what is to be 'made' is the ideal self (the self in Jung's sense) which is latent in the present self as a yet unrealized possibility. Nietzsche by no means counsels us to divide our time between letting our hair down and kicking other people into submission; a large amount of

undergoing awaits us, of conflict both within ourselves and with other people, if we are to attain to the superhuman. In fact Nietzsche seems to argue that the urge to bully or control others, rather than the effort to transmute into precious metal the ore of our own passions and desires, is an expression of the will to power which is characteristic of the weak rather than the strong.<sup>20</sup> The parallel with the Christian ideal of sanctity (or at least with one such ideal), however much Nietzsche would have hated it, is obvious; as St. Paul says, we have to share the sufferings of Christ if we are to share his glory.

One important error common to Nietzsche and postmodernists is their hostility to 'system' as such. As the work of great theoretical scientists like Newton, Darwin and Einstein shows, you need system to apprehend what is really true of the world beyond a certain level of sophistication; and you also have to have system to envisage or implement any good which goes beyond the satisfaction of immediate impulses of desire or aversion—witness economic systems which ensure a reasonable standard of living for a high proportion of a country's population. The real enemy, to oppose which the new enlightenment joins forces with Nietzsche and postmodernism, is the ossified sort of system which suppresses or evades experience rather than being open to correction by it; and which very often rather expresses the special interest of privileged groups than what is really likely to be true or good. The distressingly self-destructive quality of the moral impulse which seems to underlie Foucault's genealogies is mitigated, if one corrects his principles by adding to them the thoroughgoing and explicit rationality (of which 'rationalism' as often understood is a travesty) which is the hallmark of the new enlightenment. If Foucault's accounts of the rise of modern medicine, psychiatry, and conceptions of sexuality, have no more verisimilitude than those put about by the conventional wisdom which he attacks; if they are no more than the expression of Foucault's own will to power clashing with the will to power of those who sponsor these accounts; what is the point of paying any attention to them? Of course, we rightly judge that they are very well worth attending to; but this can be so only on the assumption that Foucault's account is more reasonable, and so closer to the actual facts, than those of his opponents.

Given Nietzsche's notorious hostility to religion, an attitude which he himself regarded as quite central to his work, it is worth at least briefly addressing the question of what the new enlightenment has to say on this subject. Where theistic religion at least is concerned, there appear to be two outstanding questions to be tackled; whether there is good reason to suppose that there is a God, and whether belief in God is such as to promote or inhibit human authenticity. As to the first, very briefly, the

world which is intrinsically knowable is by that very fact intelligible—a realization of one of an infinite set of intelligible possibilities; and it is at least arguable that such a world is ultimately to be fully explained only as due to an intelligent will such as all have called God. As to the second, Nietzsche, like Marx before him, assumed, not without substantial evidence, that the main effect of religion is to inhibit or destroy human authenticity and fulfilment. But I am not sure that this *needs* to be so. Could one not conceive of a law of God which demanded nothing less than human authenticity, in accordance with Aquinas's dictum that grace does not take away nature but perfects it? Is not a total repudiation of sensuous passions and delights an expression rather of a Platonist or even Manichean spirituality, than a truly Christian one; and does it not amount to an aspersion on the goodness of a God who is supposed to be Creator of the material as well as of the spiritual world? Christians may care to note also that, according to the gospel of John, Jesus says that he is come to bring more abundant life.<sup>21</sup> In holding up for commendation, to some extent at least, the ruthlessly selfish ambition of people like Cesare Borgia, Nietzsche insisted that he was not trying to abolish all human decency. What irked him was the besetting human tendency, which he thought was encouraged by Christianity, to portray sheer passivity, servility, self-immolation, and extinction of passion as the ideal way for human beings to live.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up the points I have been trying to make, I shall invent two philosophers called Naetzsche and Noetzsche, each consistent with herself but not with the other, and each representing one aspect of Nietzsche's thought. 'But which is the *real* Nietzsche?' is a misleading question, to which there is no right answer, and which furthermore is a distraction from more important matters. Naetzsche says that people have been thoroughly mistaken about what human characters, and what dispositions to action, are good or bad, and in consequence about what people ought to do; this is due to cowardice, self-deception, a covert resentment of genuine human excellence, and other really disreputable motives. Christianity is particularly to blame, as preventing people from self-expression and self-realization by its demands for humility and self-abasement, and as condemning the life of the senses by a punitive asceticism which is backed by false promises of recompense in an afterlife. The net result, to quote R. D. Laing, is an effective equation between goodness and inner deadness.<sup>23</sup> Not that heroic self-discipline is by any means to be discouraged; but the aim of this should be to direct and canalize our passions and desires, to 'sublimate' them, not to tear them up by the roots. True human virtue depends on a relentless honesty which constantly criticizes what merely appears to be true and good, and

so heads for knowledge and implementation of what is really true and good. What Naetzsche ought to say, and would say if she were not hobbled by Noetzsche, is that what such truth and goodness are is not simply up to you or me or us; and that there are means, which can in principle be spelled out, by which this criticism, which takes us from ignorance or self-deception to knowledge, may be carried out. Systematic thought in philosophy or science, for all its liability to abuse, is a necessary condition for knowledge once it has reached a certain level of sophistication; the abuses may be corrected by constant testing of one's system in the light of experience. Naetzsche will be passionately irreligious and atheistic, so far as she thinks that there is no good reason to believe in God, or that such belief is essentially destructive of human authenticity; but she might just conceivably be religious or theistic, if she thought otherwise.

According to Noetzsche, what is 'good' and what is 'true', and the methods by which they are to be known and implemented, are simply up to you or me or us. Any truth-claim, whether in the realm of fact or value, is an illusion, no more than an expression of the claimant's will to power or aesthetic preference.<sup>24</sup> Alleged 'truth', particularly when expressed within some system of concepts or ideas, is a matter of control, of imposing the soothing stabilities of reason on the terrifying and invigorating flux of reality or experience, or of more or less tacitly subjecting other persons to one's will. What Noetzsche ought also to say, and would say if it were not for the salutary corrective supplied by Naetzsche, is that, since the previous sentences of this paragraph are judgments which are themselves mere expressions of aesthetic preference or will to power, one might just as well state the contradictories if it takes one's fancy or appears to be a means of self-aggrandisement. And the same goes for every other judgment of fact or value; we might as properly opt for cowardice and self-mutilation as for courage and self-enhancement. Alleged 'truth', especially when expressed in terms of a system, is a matter of control, of imposing the stabilities of reason on the constant terrifying and invigorating flux of experience, rather than of reflecting what is actually so. (As a colleague of mine once remarked in this vein, 'All epistemology is essentially fascist.') Since no judgment whatever, whether factual or evaluative, can be made for good reason, and so its contradictory is just as well founded, one must end up, like every thoroughgoing sceptic, in the company of Cratylus, making no statements at all.<sup>25</sup> What is the point of making any statement, if there is just as good reason for stating its contradictory? Since the real world, if there was one, would exist prior to and independently of the worldviews which are expressive of the various wills to power of their purveyors, and

our 'knowledge' can attain to no such thing, we have no reason to suppose that there is any such 'real world'. Whether Noetzsche was religious or not would be a matter of arbitrary fancy.<sup>26</sup>

In fine, Noetzsche's views lead to absolute scepticism and so through to Cratylean aphasia; Naetzsche's to the principles of the New Enlightenment. If we want to move on, as surely we must, from the sophisticated but sterile intellectual and moral bewilderment of postmodernism, we must embrace Naetzsche with all the implications of his work, while rejecting Noetzsche root and branch.

- 1 Cf. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (Cleveland and (New York, 1956), 15.
- 2 The use of the term in this sense is due to Professor Fred Lawrence. The most complete account known to me of the nature and implications of the new enlightenment is to be had in B.J. F. Lonergan, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto, 1992). The crucial ambiguity in Nietzsche's own position is nicely caught in a passage in *The Antichrist* (6, first half), where he at once excoriates human depravity as he conceives it, and denies that he is making any moral judgment in doing so.
- 3 One may compare the delightful remark attributed to T. H. Huxley, to the effect that, if he thought that science showed that there was no such thing as real moral goodness, he would feel it his duty to say so.
- 4 Kaufmann, 177–8. That Nietzsche 'never worked out an entirely satisfactory theory of knowledge' (loc. cit.) appears to me to be a considerable understatement.
- 5 *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Neẓẓawi*. Translated by Richard Burton (London, 1963).
- 6 Cf. *Science, Perception and Reality* (London, 1963).
- 7 The point has been shrewdly made in recent writings of Hilary Putnam; cf. *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, Mass, 1991), and *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). The pretension of scientism to be uniquely representative of rationality is one of the most influential frauds of our time; in fact it is not, for the reasons which I have sketched, even consistent with it.
- 8 For this paragraph and the following, see Lonergan, op. cit., *passim*; *Method in Theology* (London, 1971), chapter 1.
- 9 Cf. K. R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford, 1972), *passim*.
- 10 Cf. R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *The Families of Schizophrenics* (London, 1964).
- 11 I have been told this by Lorraine Williams, in conversation.
- 12 It is notable that both the liberal and the Marxist utopia are envisaged along these lines; but the liberal believes, whereas the Marxist does not, that it can usually be brought about without violent revolution.
- 13 I have been enormously assisted, stimulated and encouraged in my work on this subject by conversations with Dr. Drury.
- 14 The concepts of oxygen, plesiosaur and white dwarf star are social constructions, which need a society of considerable sophistication to develop; but it remains that, if things of these kinds exist at all, they exist independently of human societies and their constructions.
- 15 This may be defended in a relatively sophisticated manner by reference to fallacious arguments in the work of David Hume and G. E. Moore; cf. Hugo Meynell, *Freud, Marx and Morals* (New York, 1981), chapter 6. But usually it has no firmer basis than the prejudice that science and science alone is the measure of what is 'objective'; and that good and bad cannot be isolated in the laboratory, and in consequence must be

'subjective'.

- 16 Fortunately scientism is only one strand of the old enlightenment; another strand, represented by Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, has been at least equally influential. For Mill, the greatest happiness of the greatest number provides an objective criterion for ethics; for Kant, the universalizability of the maxim according to which an action is performed. The ethics of the new enlightenment are in effect based on a blend of both criteria (see Lonergan, *Insight*, chapters 6, 7, and 18; *Method*, chapter 2). A less reputable offshoot of the old enlightenment is what might be labelled 'crass utilitarianism', which maintains that for good to be real it must be measurable, typically in terms of economic production or consumption. This tends to make 'standard of living' the only effective criterion of 'quality of life', of which of course it is in fact only one aspect. The net result is not only a restless accumulation of gadgets which cannot satisfy, but a corruption and despoliation of the natural environment which bids fair to destroy the very conditions of life on earth.
- 17 See Kaufmann, chapters 7 and 8.
- 18 Thus Ludwig Klages alluded disparagingly to what he called 'the Christian in Nietzsche' (Kaufmann, 186).
- 19 Kaufmann, 222.
- 20 See Kaufmann, loc. cit.: 'The weak, lacking the power for creation, would fain shroud their slave souls in a royal cloak and, unable to gain mastery of themselves, seek to conquer others.' That both barbaric force and political clout are for Nietzsche inferior forms of power is made clear by such an aphorism as no. 548 of *Dawn* (Kaufmann, 170).
- 21 John x 10.
- 22 Kaufmann, 193–4. Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 197; *The Twilight of the Idols*, ix, 37. 23 Cf. Laing and Esterson, 47, 52; Laing, *The Divided Self* (Hammondsworth, 1965), 181, 183.
- 24 Cf. Zarathustra's harangue as quoted by Kaufmann: "'Will to truth" you call it ... ? A will to the thinkability of all being: this I call your will. All being you want to *make* thinkable: for you doubt, with well-founded suspicion, whether it is thinkable. Yet it shall yield and bend for you... That is your entire will ... a will to power—also when you speak of good and evil and valuations' (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, ii, 12). The same applies to philosophy, including, presumably, Nietzsche's own: 'Philosophy is this tyrannic urge itself, the most spiritual will to power' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 9; Kaufmann, 176). According to the new enlightenment, of course, there is excellent reason for believing that 'being' is intrinsically 'thinkable', since it is nothing other than what true judgment is actually or potentially about, and well-founded judgment tends to be about. It should be added that the vast bulk of both *Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, as indeed of Nietzsche's work as a whole, belongs unequivocally to Nietzsche.
- 25 One can, of course, mouth phonemes, syllables and even words; what are definitely ruled out are ordinary indicative sentences, to the effect that something is the case. Questions also appear impossible, so far as they are about *whether* something is the case; and commands and requests, so far as they are attempts to get someone to make something to be the case. Even doubts, as Augustine pointed out, seem to be put out of court, since they only make sense as concerned with whether something is the case (*Contra academicos*, in *Writings of St. Augustine*, vol. I, ed. L. Schopp (New York: Cima Publishing House, 1948), 154).
- 26 If Nietzsche is an outstanding prophet of the new enlightenment, the contemporary influence of Nietzsche is to be found especially in Jacques Derrida and his deconstructionist disciples. For a devastating critique of this preposterous movement, see John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).