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Nietzsche on Logic

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"All philosophers are tyrannized by logic." (*Human, All Too Human* §6)

Nietzsche's criticisms of logic occupy a most peculiar place in the history of philosophy. In the 100-plus years since the onset of his insanity, knowledge of and sensitivity to logic has become for many a *sine qua non* of philosophizing. This fact, coupled with the renaissance in Nietzsche studies, leads one to expect the secondary literature to contain a number of careful evaluations of his criticisms. However, there is not one article devoted to Nietzsche's treatment of logic among the 1912 entries in Hilliard's *Nietzsche Scholarship in English: A Bibliography 1968-1992*, nor is there even anything among the 4566 entries in Reichert and Schlecta's *International Nietzsche Bibliography* of 1968!¹ Even in the standard texts about Nietzsche, there is precious little regarding logic. Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* is silent on the issue, and Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* is nearly so.² In the books by Clark, Danto, and Schacht there are but a few pages each addressing Nietzsche's concerns.³

The paucity of secondary literature is strange enough, but Nietzsche's own knowledge of logic seems a bit quirky. As a classical philologist Nietzsche was certainly aware of traditional Aristotelian logic, at one point explicitly launching a *reductio ad absurdum* against an opponent (*BGE* 15).⁴ And of

¹ *Nietzsche Scholarship in English: A Bibliography 1968-1992 (with supplement)*, ed. B. Bryan Hilliard (Urbana, Illinois: North American Nietzsche Society, revised ed. 1993); *International Nietzsche Bibliography*, ed. Herbert W. Reichert and Karl Schlecta (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, revised ed. 1968).

² Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 4th ed. 1974); Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

³ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

⁴ Abbreviations for Nietzsche's texts are as follows:

HATH= *Human, All Too Human*, ed. and trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; original edition: 1878).

course he read Kant and Hegel, chastising their followers as “philosophical laborers” for shoving the data of the past into rigid logical formulas (*BGE* 211). Yet Nietzsche seems wholly ignorant of the stars of nineteenth-century logic. For example, in 1847 the fathers of modern logic, Augustus De Morgan and George Boole, published *Formal Logic* and *Mathematical Analysis of Logic* respectively. Gottlob Frege, the inventor of quantified predicate logic, published his seminal *Begriffsschrift* in 1879 and *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* in 1884. Despite the availability of these during his productive life, there is no evidence that Nietzsche read, or was even aware of, any of them. Nor does Nietzsche anywhere mention John Venn or C. S. Peirce, and his knowledge of John Stuart Mill appears restricted to Mill’s ethical thought. There are some curious twists as well: Nietzsche refers to the now-forgotten Afrikan Spir—a sort of neo-Kantian phenomenalist who defended the principle of identity as a synthetic a priori truth—as “an excellent logician” (*HATH* 18).⁵

Given his imprecise and idiosyncratic understanding of logic, what exactly is Nietzsche criticizing when he attacks logic? This is the initial question to which this essay is directed. Turning to his texts, we find a muddle of superficially contradictory passages and seeming vacillations regarding logic. As usual, this exemplifies Nietzsche’s favorite rhetorical style—an apparent obliteration of a position, followed by withdrawal to partly embrace it. Examples of this tactic include his denouncing of the will (*BGE* 19) and then an advocacy of the will to power; the rejection of causality (*WP* 551) and then heavy reliance on “power”, an apparently causal notion; his malevolence towards Christianity, followed by an admission that Jesus (qualifiedly) was a free spirit (*AC* 32); and his declaration that there are no moral facts whatsoever (*BGE* 108, *TI* VII 1), coupled with formulas for greatness and recipes for

OTL= “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (London: Humanities Press International, 1979).

GS= *The Gay Science*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974; original edition: 1882).

BGE= *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966; original edition: 1886).

GM= *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967; original edition: 1887).

AC= *The Antichrist*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968; original edition: 1895).

TI= *The Twilight of the Idols*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968; original edition: 1889).

EH= *Ecce Homo*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967; original edition: 1908).

WP= *The Will to Power*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

⁵ Mary-Barbara Zeldin’s entry, “Afrikan Alexandrovich Spir,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967) vol. 7, p. 554, is useful.

virtue (*EH* II 10, *AC* 11).⁶ Nietzsche's language is often powerful, and it is easy to get wrapped up in the first part of his tactics and lose sight of the second part. Thus we must be careful in considering his invective towards logic.

In *HATH* 11 he declares, "Logic...rests on assumptions that do not correspond to anything in the real world, e.g., on the assumption of the equality of things, the identity of the same thing at different points in time." In *TI* III 3 we find "...science of formulæ, sign-systems: such as logic and that applied logic, mathematics. In these reality does not appear at all, not even as a problem; just as little as does the question what value a system of conventional signs such as constitutes logic can possibly possess." *The Will to Power* contains much of his criticism, e.g. §512: "The will to logical truth can be carried through only after a fundamental *falsification* of all events is assumed...logic does *not* spring from will to truth." *WP* 516: "Logic (like geometry and arithmetic) applies only to fictitious entities that we have created. Logic is the attempt to comprehend the actual world by means of a scheme of being posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulatable and calculable for us." *WP* 521: "The world seems logical to us because we have made it logical." Finally, a note from the early 1870's: "logic is merely slavery within the fetters of language."⁷

To be sure, his language is strong, and it is no surprise that Ofelia Schutte concludes from such passages that Nietzsche viewed logic more as an enemy than a friend (p. 28), contemplated silencing logic (p. 29), tended to erase the need for logic (p. 31), set up logic and life as adversaries (p. 36), and meant his teachings to go beyond logic (p. 34).⁸ Nor is it shocking that Michel Haar infers that Nietzsche encourages disbelief in the laws of logic (p. 6), aims at destroying logic (pp. 6-7), repudiates logical principles (p. 34), and offers a philosophy that eludes conceptual logic (p. 6).⁹ In the same camp, Alan Schrift holds that Nietzsche considers logic to be an intellectual miscarriage from which we can draw only illusory conclusions, and that logic is at odds with Nietzsche's most basic tenets.¹⁰ Yet these philosophers are

⁶ For more on his positive moral theory, see Steven D. Hales, "Was Nietzsche a Consequentialist?," *International Studies in Philosophy* (vol. 27, no. 3, Summer 1995), pp. 25-34.

⁷ This is an excerpt from "Drafts" §177 in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (London: Humanities Press International, 1979).

⁸ The cited page numbers are all from Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche Without Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁹ The cited page numbers are all from Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," in D. B. Allison, ed. *The New Nietzsche* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), pp. 5-36.

¹⁰ Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 134.

profoundly mistaken about Nietzsche's final views, and perilously ignore many crucial passages.

Despite his obvious reservations about aspects of logic, Nietzsche is certainly aware of its strengths as well. In *HATH* 265 he writes, "Schooling has no more important task than to teach rigorous thinking, careful judgment, logical conclusions," and in *HATH* 271, "The greatest progress men have made lies in their learning to *draw correct conclusions*." (Nietzsche's italics). This is echoed in *TI* VIII 7, where he denigrates German universities on the grounds that "even among students of philosophy themselves, the theory, the practice, the *vocation* of logic is beginning to die out." In *GS* 191, he plainly recognizes a difference between good and bad arguments, and vehemently critiques the latter, and at *GS* 348 he lavishly praises the Jews for arguing logically, saying that Europe owes the Jews thanks for their promotion of "cleaner intellectual habits." In *BGE* 21 he slams the idea of *causa sui* for the reason that it is a "rape and perversion of logic." These are hardly the claims of someone who sets out to engage in the wholesale destruction of logic. As for Schutte's claim that Nietzsche intended to set up life and logic as adversaries—free-flowing Dionysian oneness vs. rigid logocentric reason—Nietzsche often claims just the opposite! For example, in an early note he wrote that "No one can *live* within such a denial of reason... This demonstrates that belief in logic and belief as such is necessary for life" ("Drafts" 177). Thirteen years later he was still prepared to affirm much the same: "Without accepting the fictions of logic... man could not live" (*BGE* 4). Compare his claim at *WP* 522 that "*Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off*" (Nietzsche's italics). So not only is logic not opposed to life, but in fact logic and logical thinking is a necessary condition to live at all.

I do not mean to suggest that Nietzsche is unequivocal on this score. In the passages just cited he claims logic and rationality to be necessary for life, and this seems to be his usual position. Sometimes, notably in his early unpublished essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," he weakens this to claiming that they are merely necessary for *thinking*, and that *life* might be possible without them (cf. *TI* VIII 7). In *OTL* p. 84, Nietzsche writes that "everything which distinguishes man from the animals depends upon this ability to volatilize perceptual metaphors in a schema, and thus dissolve an image into a concept." So, humans engage in a process of abstraction from sensory impressions to form concepts and demarcate objects. In Magnus's happy phrase, "kronophobic reason ossifies the untrammelled flux."¹¹ Ultimately, this conceptualizing gives rise to "the great edifice of concepts" (*OTL* p. 85) which "exhales...logic." In §2 of *OTL* Nietzsche discusses the "man of

¹¹ Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 196.

intuition" who shatters the existing conceptual edifice with new metaphors, myths, and art. While the man of intuition seems to *live* illogically, he may not really *think* at all. Nietzsche claims that when the "web of concepts is torn by art" (*OTL* p. 89), man is just dreaming. He goes on to characterize mythically inspired people, such as the ancient Greeks, as living in a dream. Thus the argument of *OTL* seems to be that thinking proper essentially relies on conceptual structure, and so acceptance of logical law. Even if life is possible without rational thought or logical categories, thought is not. Compare his remark at *WP* 522 that "we cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language." As will be seen later, Nietzsche regards logic as nothing other than the deep structure of language. Given this, the constraint of language is no more than the constraint of its underlying logic, and again we see that giving up logic means ceasing to think.

It is plain that Nietzsche makes quite substantial claims on behalf of logic and reason: he wavers between holding them to be essential for life itself and considering them to be merely essential for thought. Either way, he is very far from encouraging the destruction of logic, or repudiating logical principles, as Haar claims. But perhaps Haar, Schutte and Schrift could respond this way. In his critical passages (*TI* III 3, e.g.), Nietzsche's focus seems to be on logic as a "science of formulæ" or a "sign-system". In other words, it is properly *formal* logic that Nietzsche attacks. In the apparently pro-logic passages, Nietzsche is not plumping for formal logic, but endorsing clear argumentation, rationality, and thinking unpolluted by superstition. So if we drive a wedge between logic as a formal science on the one hand and rational thinking on the other, Nietzsche can be interpreted as critical of the former and respectful of the latter. Haar et al. then turn out to be right about Nietzsche's critical side, if somewhat insensitive to his positive remarks.

While a possible interpretative stance, this proposal is not ultimately a tenable one. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is that Nietzsche does not clearly separate the issues of formal logic and rational thought. While it is true that sometimes he seems to have formal logic in mind (e.g. *TI* III 3) and sometimes he seems to be focusing on rationality (e.g. *WP* 522), most of the time the two are conflated. Look at *HATH* 265 and 271 where he sings the praises of drawing logical conclusions. Is this process of drawing logical conclusions just the result of rigorous and non-dogmatic thinking, or is there a connection to logic as a science of correct reasoning? It is hard to say. What about *TI* VIII 7 where he mourns the passing of logic as a vocation in German universities? Perhaps Nietzsche's complaint here is only that university students are mentally soft and unthinking. Yet this is a difficult interpretation to maintain, considering that in the same passage he specifically refers to the *theory* of logic as one of the things he fears is dying. Moreover, he seems to tar reason with the same brush as logic, devoting an

entire chapter in *TI* —“‘Reason’ in Philosophy”—to such a critique. Of course, Nietzsche’s own unclarity is not by itself enough to prevent a commentator from imposing an interpretive scheme that disambiguates the texts. The second reason against the rational thought/formal logic dichotomy is more fundamental. We have already seen that Nietzsche considers the constraint of language to be essential for thinking and hence for rational thinking. It will be argued later that he also regards logic as the infrastructure of language. Thus logic as the formal semantics of natural language and thinking are inextricably tied together for Nietzsche. Whatever his ultimate views on formal logic and rational thought are, they are in the same boat together.

What exactly is his complaint against logic, then? We need to examine his claims more precisely to determine just what features of logic he promotes, and which he finds troubling. Two key features of logic that Nietzsche calls into question are a supposed dependence on identity, and a misguided positing of objects. In the previously cited *HATH* 11, he claims that logic rests on the assumption of the persisting identity of things through time, and in *BGE* 4, he says that the self-identical is part of a “purely invented world.” At *GS* 111 and *WP* 510 he suggests that the origin of logic itself is rooted in a desire to posit different things as being identical. Moreover, he declares that all concepts (*OTL* p. 83), including the concept of substance (*GS* 111) arise through the equation of unequal things. This he considers an “erroneous article of faith” (*GS* 110). Consider also his attack on thinghood—“our belief in things is the precondition of our belief in logic” (*WP* 516). *WP* 558 echoes this in saying that “thingness has only been invented by us owing to the requirements of logic.” Yet there are no things, not really anyway, and so logic only applies “to fictitious entities” (*WP* 516).

There is a great deal going on in these passages, and things must be carefully sorted out. Here are some claims Nietzsche appears to be making: (1) logic presupposes the existence of things; (2) things are only fictions invented by humans; (3) logic presupposes the persisting identity of things through time; (4) logic presupposes the identity of things at an instant; (5) there is no identity through time; and (6) nothing is self-identical either, or only “fictions” are.

Let us examine his first claim. Is it true that logic presupposes the existence of things? An adequate answer to this question requires importing some of the tools acquired in the past century of logical development. Given Nietzsche’s imprecise and rudimentary understanding of logic, this might be considered an inappropriate methodology. There are two good reasons why this is not so. First, we are interested in whether the positions Nietzsche stakes out are true ones, or barring that, at least meaningful and consistent ones. Ignoring what has been learned about logic since Nietzsche’s time is simply a Luddite approach to a technical issue. Secondly, the concepts and clarity of

modern vocabulary may help illuminate problems that Nietzsche could indicate only dimly.

Clark's interpretation of Nietzsche, for example, suffers from a failure to subscribe completely to this methodology. She argues that in Nietzsche's early works he maintains that logic falsifies reality (logic assumes that there are real things "out there" when there are only fictions, that there are identical things, etc.) whereas in his later works he treats logic as a formal science that makes no claims about reality.¹² In support of this last she references the previously cited *TI* III 3, in which Nietzsche states that in sign-systems such as logic, reality does not even appear as a problem. Thus Clark attributes a change in Nietzsche's thinking about logic. However, there is a competing explanation of the data. Modern logic is divided into syntax and semantics, and once Nietzsche's claims are embedded into this framework, Clark's account is not needed. It is the syntactical aspect of logic that is formally aloof from the world; it provides the rules for the manipulation of the operators, connectives, quantifiers, predicate letters, variables, and constants of the formal system, how the symbols can be moved around, and how theorems are to be proven from the axioms. Syntax and proof theory tell us nothing about the world and make no assumptions about the applicability of the symbols of our formal language to anything at all. With respect to syntax, *TI* III 3 is quite right—reality does not appear even as a problem. However, since it is not the business of syntax to worry about reality, or care whether logic and mathematics can be applied to anything, this should come as no surprise.

The interpretation of the formulas of logic is the business of semantics. Semantics specifies non-empty domains of entities, or universes of discourse, along with an interpretation function that leads us from the symbols supplied by the syntax to the entities in the domain. That is, semantics is concerned with the meaning of our logical symbols. The interpretation function assigns a unique object in the domain to each constant, tells us which things the variables can stand for, and provides an extension in the domain for each predicate letter. With respect to semantics, *WP* 516 and 558 are quite right—thingness is a requirement of logic. That is to say, for the symbols and formulas of logic to mean anything or have any applicability, we need sets of things for them to refer to. The nature of these things is a further question, one that is strictly speaking beyond the purview of logic and more properly the subject of metaphysics or ontology. In any case, it is quite consistent for Nietzsche to simultaneously hold that logic presupposes the existence of things, and that logic says nothing about reality. The former is true if interpreted as a claim about semantics, and the latter true if interpreted as a claim about syntax. Thus we are not forced to conclude, along with Clark, that over time Nietzsche changed his mind about logic. Nor are we even forced to con-

¹² Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 105.

clude that Nietzsche had a good grasp of the syntax/semantics distinction drawn out here. I merely suggest that it is plausible that in his thinking about symbol systems, Nietzsche was attracted to both of the superficially conflicting ideas that logic does and does not make commitments about reality. By applying the syntax/semantics distinction of modern logic, we can consistently explain both of these impulses in a way that they come out true.

So, Nietzsche's first claim about logic, that it presupposes the existence of things, is qualifiedly true. The main qualification is that it is only interpreted logical formulas that assume the existence of things. Uninterpreted formulas make no assumptions about things, and are, as Nietzsche puts it in *OTL* p. 81, "empty husks" that tell us nothing about reality. As matters stand, Nietzsche has not yet offered much of a criticism of logic, and his first claim is happily assimilated into contemporary logical theory. But what of the second claim, that things are only fictions invented by humans? This is an example of his thoroughgoing antirealism. Realism and antirealism are the focus of much current debate, and are notoriously slippery terms.¹³ Putnam gives a good characterization of the sort of realism that Nietzsche opposes. He writes,

On this perspective, the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of the 'the way the world is'....I shall call this perspective the *externalist* perspective, because its favorite point of view is a God's Eye point of view.¹⁴

That Nietzsche rejects a God's Eye point of view is hardly news. Indeed, he considers the idea of such a perspective to be one of the still-to-be-vanquished "shadows of God" that continues to linger after God's death (*GS* 108).¹⁵ This fact serves to explain his remark at *TI* III 5: "'Reason' in language: oh what a deceitful old woman! I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar..." One of the legacies of the deification of nature is the idea that there are real, well-individuated objects and truths out in the world that can be known by God. Even now that God is dead, we are left with this realist ontology and the God's Eye perspective we invented to suit our religion. Nietzsche's claim above (and compare his comments at *BGE* 34) is that the logic embedded in our language makes the same kind of ontologi-

¹³ For some discussion of how Nietzsche antedates contemporary antirealism, see Cornel West, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy," in *Why Nietzsche Now?*, ed. Daniel O'Hara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 241–69.

¹⁴ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 49. See also Putnam's *Realism With a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) and *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: Realism and Antirealism* (vol. 12, 1988).

¹⁵ For a drawing-out of this theme, see Christoph Cox, "Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Interpretation," *International Studies in Philosophy* (vol. 27, no. 3, 1995), pp. 3–18.

cal commitments that our religion did. Our faith in grammar generates a faith in logic, which is not too much better than the faith in the old God—both lead us into the same metaphysical errors. Thus we are not getting rid of God, or more accurately his shadow, by continuing to place our faith in grammar.¹⁶

Nietzsche's contention then is that the structure of our language encodes a mistaken metaphysics. Therefore the methodology of linguistic analysis is not likely to provide us with an acceptable interpretation of the world. Since Nietzsche regards logic as the deep structure of language, and we have already seen that logic does make a commitment to entities, it follows that we have reason to suspect these entities. What is needed is an investigation into the semantics of natural language and the sort of entities semantics requires, therefore initially an investigation into language itself. There is an interesting intersection between Nietzsche's position on language and the semiotic of Rudolf Carnap. A brief look at Carnap's position will serve to bring Nietzsche's critique of semantics into sharp relief and show how Carnap suffers from a failure to consider Nietzsche's concerns.¹⁷

Carnap offers the following as examples of meaningless sentences (cf. pp. 67–68).

- (1) Caesar is and.
- (2) Caesar is a prime number.

It is easy to see what is wrong with the first sentence; it violates the rules of syntax. But the second is different: it just seems false, since it is not the case that Caesar is a prime number. Why is it meaningless and not false? Carnap's answer relies on drawing a distinction between grammatical syntax and logical syntax. The actual syntactic rules of natural language comprise grammatical syntax. Carnap thinks that grammatical syntax is inadequate and misleading because it does not make distinctions between word-types that are finely grained enough. Thus it allows for the grammatically correct construction of sentences that are really nonsense like (2). Grammatical syntax distinguishes between nouns, adjectives, verbs, and so on, but does not (as Carnap thinks it should) make a distinction between nouns that denote physical properties and those that denote numbers. If ordinary syntax did make such a distinction, then (2) would be just as ungrammatical as (1). It is this looseness of grammatical syntax that allows for what Carnap considers the quintessence

¹⁶ Schutte is needlessly literal about *TI* III 5. See *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche Without Masks*, p. 27.

¹⁷ The following is an account of the theory he gives in "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language," in A. J. Ayer, ed. *Logical Positivism* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 60–81. Subsequent page numbers will refer to this article.

of meaningless verbiage (pp. 69–71): Heidegger’s “What about this Nothing?—The Nothing itself nothings.”

Thus ordinary grammatical syntax is logically defective, and the proper cure is an improved syntax that would make all of the finely grained distinctions between “syntactical categories” that Carnap requires. This he calls a “logical syntax.” A perfect language for Carnap would be one with a logical syntax, one in which metaphysics could not even be expressed. Carnap calls the construction of this language the great philosophical task that faces logicians.

Carnap and Nietzsche agree upon much. Both are interested in undermining metaphysics, both think that there is something wrong with ordinary language that leads us into error, both consider metaphysics to be “not yet science” (*TI* III 3), and both prefer historical and empirical analyses to metaphysical speculation. Carnap’s remark that “metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability” (p. 80) sounds almost like a Nietzschean aphorism. Indeed, Carnap had read Nietzsche and praises him (p. 80). Yet Carnap seems unaware of Nietzsche’s criticisms of language, or how they might be applied to his own program. Nietzsche would hardly think that the advent of logical syntax would constitute an improvement over grammatical syntax, and would undoubtedly consider it to be nothing more than the replacement of one set of errors with another. The way language is now may lead us into Heideggerian verbiage, but Carnap’s desired logical syntax would build right into the structure of the language numerous assumptions about the world and the actual nature of things. The fine-grained syntactical categories that would distinguish between thing words, property words, and number words are really no more than ontological categories with a linguistic turn. Of course Carnap is right that metaphysics could not be expressed in a language with a logical syntax, but that is only because metaphysical assumptions and divisions would be antecedently loaded into the language. The metaphysical questions “is there a difference between things and properties?” or “are numbers reducible to properties?” would be rendered incomprehensible once the divisions between things, numbers, and properties is solidified and canonized in syntax.

Nietzsche considers natural language to be flawed in much the same way as Carnap’s “logically perfect” language. It is easy to see how ontological commitments are a part of Carnap’s logical syntax. Less evident, but still present according to Nietzsche, are the ontological commitments of our natural languages. “Are numbers reducible to properties?” is a meaningless question for Carnap’s logically perfect language. In a similar way the question “do things exist?” is a meaningless question for ordinary natural language. To see this, consider a negative answer—no, things do not exist, or at least some things do not exist. That is to say, there is (there exists) an x such that x does not exist! A corollary of this is that everything exists (since it is not the

case that there is an *x* such that *x* does not exist, it follows that for all *x*, *x* exists). As philosophical insight, this is plainly silly. Nietzsche's position is that such silliness is nothing other than the result of certain existential assumptions encoded into our language. Of course, this alone is not a critique. We need reason to think that these existential assumptions are bad ones. This is where Nietzsche's object antirealism comes in.

Nietzsche's contention is that there is not one unique and privileged description of the world, and there are no ready-made objects for us to bump into. This does not mean that there is nothing at all, or that we are left with idealism; rather, we categorize our sensory phenomena in a way that suits our ends and purposes. For example, Roderick Chisholm has referred to a "han", a term coined by the British Army during World War I.¹⁸ A han is the object consisting of a rider and his horse, and hans were counted along with weapons, supplies, and the other accouterments of war. A han is a funny-sounding sort of object, though. It doesn't seem right to say that one day the British Army discovered the existence of hans, and promptly notified Fleet Street. To some extent a han is a wholly invented object, a fabrication, a fiction.¹⁹ Compare Nietzsche's similar remarks in *OTL* (p. 85):

If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal," I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man.

Nietzsche makes no distinction between objects that really exist in their own right, and those that we invent like hans. For him, everything is an invention or fiction, and everything is the result of the way we impose categories and form concepts out of sensory chaos. Thus "the 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'real' world has only been *lyingly added*" (*TI* III 2). There are an infinite number of ways that the raw chaos of experience could have been carved up into objects; humans have simply chosen those interpretations that allow them to live and promote their interests. This is how we have made the world logical (*WP* 521), and formulatable and calculable for us (*WP* 516).²⁰

¹⁸ Chisholm has discussed hans in various graduate seminars at Brown University. Also see his discussion of *entia per alio* in his Carus lectures, published as *Person and Object* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976).

¹⁹ Sartre too points up the anthropomorphism of the way we conceptualize. He claims that "man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished." That is, earthquakes and storms do not *destroy* all by themselves, they simply move lumpy stuff around. It is we who classify this as destruction; there is no objective destruction in the world apart from our interests. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), ch. 1, §2.

²⁰ If certain interpretations are necessary for humans to live, then aren't these somehow *real* necessities, *real* human lives, or some kind of absolute truths? How can this square with Nietzsche's radical antirealism and perspectivism? Well-known self-referential

Suppose we grant Nietzsche's broad-brush antirealism. How does this affect logic? We have already established that logic does indeed presuppose the existence of things, as semantics requires non-empty domains of entities. Does semantics require *realist* entities, or could it happily perk along with "fictional" ones invented by humans? There seems to be no reason why logic demands a realist ontology. Variables can range over constructed objects as easily as they can over "real" ones; horse-and-rider pairs can be in the extension of "han" without difficulty, and camels can be in the extension of "mammal". Semantics requires domains, but domains can equally be populated with realist or antirealist things; logic can be laid over whatever metaphysics of things one adopts. One can scarcely imagine a contemporary antirealist such as Goodman counseling the abandonment of logic. So it seems that even if we accept Nietzsche's claims that logic presupposes things, and things are only fictions, this does not the slightest damage to logic.

It could be that Nietzsche thought that it is more than simply a contingent, historical fact that logic has presupposed metaphysical realism. Perhaps he believes that it is a matter of necessity that logic has a realist semantics.²¹ Such a stand would certainly lead to a straightforward *reductio* on logic, if Nietzsche's anti-realism is correct. If his view is that there is a necessary connection, then he is mistaken, as I have argued in the previous paragraph. Of course, it is completely consistent for him to be in error about the relationship between logic and realism and correct in his criticisms of other aspects of logic or realist metaphysics.

Perhaps Nietzsche's real complaint is that logic is *misleading*, that is, even though logic does not formally insist upon realism, reliance on the logic underneath our grammar tends to lead people into accepting realism. This may be what Nietzsche is getting at in *TI* III 5: "we find ourselves in the midst of a rude fetishism when we call to mind the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language—which is to say, of *reason*," and in *WP* 516 where he writes, "[if we] make of logic a criterion of true being, we are on the way to positing as realities all those hypotheses: substance, attribute, object, subject, action, etc.; that is, to conceiving a metaphysical world... a 'real world'." However, the supposed fact that logicians rely on faith (*GS* 110), or that they are "superstitious" (*BGE* 17), is a fact about logicians, and not one about logic itself.

Of course, this does not prevent an easy conflation of the two. A vivid example is *BGE* 34, where Nietzsche declares that "it is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than mere appearance," and goes on to

puzzles are just around the corner. I have addressed these issues previously in Steven D. Hales and Robert C. Welshon, "Truth, Paradox, and Nietzschean Perspectivism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (vol. 11, no. 1, January 1994), pp. 101–19.

²¹ An anonymous referee for this journal suggested that Nietzsche claims this in *HATH* 18.

question various elements of this heretofore unquestioned faith, including the faith in grammar discussed above. One object of his scrutiny is faith in bivalence, the thesis that every proposition has a truth-value, and that this truth-value is either true or false. He examines this by asking, "Indeed, what forces us at all to suppose that there is an essential opposition of "true" and "false"?" It is not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance—different "values," to use the language of painters?" Nietzsche maintains that bivalence is an unproven assumption of logicians, and speculates on various shades of values as an alternative in order to show that bivalence is not the only conceivable option. It is a short (although hasty) step from this critique of the faith of logicians to a genuine rejection of bivalence itself, and from there just a hop (albeit a mistaken one) to the rejection of logic itself. Nietzsche's commentators tend to avail themselves of this latter erroneous move. Clark, for example, seems to take a rejection of bivalence to entail a rejection of all logic, as does Derrida.²² This is quite wrong, however. Rejection of bivalence does not mean a rejection of logic—there are plenty of wholesome multivalent logics that remain.

None of this is to say that the psychology of logicians is uninteresting or unimportant, but it is pure *ad hominem* to infer that logic is flawed or has problems from the observation that logicians are superstitious and prejudicial (it is rather like dismissing Nietzsche's later work on account of his insanity). If logicians tend to be committed to a realist metaphysics it is not the fault of logic, which is neutral on the matter. If logicians assume bivalence without defense, this is not because of some essential feature of logic, which can be modified to accommodate multivalence, but rather because they assume bivalence for other reasons. These reasons Nietzsche considered psychological ones, and certainly constitute a topic that interested him as part of his general project to uncover the genealogy of ideas. Thus we can grant Nietzsche's first two claims, that logic presupposes the existence of things and that things are merely fictions invented by humans, without thereby being forced to recant or modify any part of contemporary logic.

Let us then consider Nietzsche's third claim, that logic assumes the persisting identity of things through time. On the face of it, this seems straightforwardly false, as logical formulæ make commitments to neither time nor tense. Perhaps tense logic insists on the same thing at different times, but it is highly unlikely that Nietzsche had this esoteric (and in his time non-existent) branch of logic in mind, and ordinary sorts of logic—e.g. Aristotelian, propositional, and predicate logic—say nothing at all about identity

²² Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 66. For some discussion of Derrida's view, see John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), ch. 1.

through time. It is more likely that Nietzsche's real interest is prudential reasoning, which does depend upon such transtemporal persistence. His discussion of the debtor/creditor dichotomy in essay II of the *Genealogy* is an example of this. It is this relationship that Nietzsche thinks responsible for instilling memory in humanity. The debtor must remember that he owes the debt, and the creditor must remember that he is owed the repayment. Not only must the debtor remember that he owes something to someone, but he needs to believe that he himself is a thing that persists through time. The debtor must wake up tomorrow realizing that he is the same person as the one who acquired the debt, is not born anew everyday, and thus is an object that persists through time. It is one of the functions of punishment to encourage this belief in diachronic identity. Fear of punishment subsequently leads to prudential reasoning on the part of the debtor—if I repay the debt (in the future, and I will exist in that future) according to the terms of the loan, then I will avoid punishment; hence I will repay. Thus this kind of reasoning leads to a belief in a continuing ego or self, a belief (Nietzsche asserts at *TI* III 5) that gets displaced onto other objects and so creates the concept “thing”.

Suppose that Nietzsche's analysis is right about this, and that prudential reasoning does depend upon a commitment to diachronic identity; how exactly is this an error? Nietzsche is not interested in undermining logical reasoning, since, as we saw earlier, he considers this to be at least necessary for thinking, and quite likely required for life itself. Moreover, without some sort of means-ends reasoning, it is extremely hard to see how one could intentionally develop one's will to power, or engage in self-overcoming, or any of the other things Nietzsche praises. It is more likely that Nietzsche does not want to get rid of the concept of identity through time, or get people to stop believing in persisting beings, but simply that he is reminding us that, like objects, diachronic identity is also a fabrication. The criticism of identity is another manifestation of his antirealism about things.

Moreover, this aspect of his antirealism is interestingly entailed by the bundle theory of objects he presents in *The Will to Power*.²³ At *WP* 557 he writes, “The properties of a thing are effects on other “things”: if one removes other “things,” then a thing has no properties, i.e., there is no thing without other things, i.e., there is no “thing-in-itself.” Here Nietzsche is providing a definition of “property”; a property is some kind of relation, perhaps a causal one, between “things.” Note of course his use of scare quotes: Nietzsche is careful to avoid commitment to any standard position on things as immutable substances, things-in-themselves, etc. Yet we do interpret the world as containing tables and dogs and trees. What are these objects? Nietzsche owes us some explanation of these “things”; just using scare quotes

²³ Nehamas also interprets Nietzsche as offering a bundle theory in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, ch. 3, although he does not use this terminology.

will not get him completely off the hook. He goes on to tell us: "If I remove all the relationships, all the "properties," all the "activities" of a thing, the thing does not remain over" (WP 558). And in WP 551: "A "thing" is the sum of its effects." That is, ordinary everyday things are bundles of properties, bundled together by us to satisfy the requirements of logic and to facilitate communication (WP 558). What we fail to recognize, claims Nietzsche, is that "the "thing" in which we believe was only invented as a foundation for the various attributes" (WP 561). It is because of this mistake that we wind up with substance realism and believe that there is a hard little kernel under all the properties, a thing-in-itself or a bare particular or something.

Nietzsche is a member of a fine philosophical tradition with his bundle theory of objects, prefigured by Berkeley and Hume, and postfigured by Russell. Recall this famous passage from Hume's *Treatise*:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, of light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long as I am insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity.²⁴

Compare Berkeley: "A certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple; other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things".²⁵ Consider Russell's remarks as well: "Our purpose is, if possible, to construct out of qualities bundles having the spatio-temporal properties physics requires of 'things'."²⁶ And also "I wish to suggest that "this is red" is not a subject-predicate proposition, but is of the form "redness is here"; that "red" is a name, not a predicate; and that what would commonly be called a "thing" is nothing but a bundle of coexisting qualities such as redness, hardness, etc."²⁷ How much these claims sound like Nietzsche!

If Nietzsche's position is that a "thing" is a bundle of properties at an instant, then it more-or-less follows that there is no such thing as change. That is, given the standard views that sets have their members essentially and mereological sums have their parts essentially, if a thing is identified as a set of properties or a mereological sum of properties, then it could not change even one of these properties without going out of existence. Since things do

²⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 1, §6.

²⁵ George Berkeley, *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, pt. I, §1.

²⁶ Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), p. 100.

²⁷ Russell, *An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth*, p. 97.

change, this is a standing objection to bundle theories.²⁸ However, Nietzsche bites squarely down on this bullet. He is happy to agree that things don't change, or, viewed another way, there is change only and no continuing things under change. Reason: the bundles are formed and individuated originally via perspectives taken on perceptions. As these perspectives revise the bundles, basically disbanding old bundles and assembling new groups of properties together, things are constantly going out of existence and coming into existence. So as interpretations change, the bundles change. Thus there is no genuine diachronic identity to be had; the duration of a bundle (i.e. a thing) is fleeting. Identity through time is a convenient story to tell about successor bundles, but there is no real persistence.

What about these successor bundles, or time-worm-bundles? Why couldn't a perspective group bundles at different instants together into a transtemporal bundle? Such a transtemporal bundle would lay fair claim to constituting a thing that persists through time. Yes, says Nietzsche, such a bundle would for all intents and purposes be a thing with diachronic identity. The thing to note is that a transtemporal bundle is not fundamentally different than one at an instant. Just as a bundle at an instant is only a bunch of properties grouped together to promote the interests of some perspective, and has no intrinsic nature all on its own, no hard little kernel underneath, no emergent hæcceity, so too with transtemporal bundles. We do indeed assemble transtemporal bundles in order to satisfy our interests (and rely on them in prudential reasoning), but these are convenient fictions every bit as bundles at an instant are fictions. "Things" are fictional all the way down and all the way up.

There is a similar tale to tell about Nietzsche's final criticism of logic, that there are no self-identical things, or there is no synchronic identity. Taken by itself, a passage such as *WP* 516:

Supposing there were no self-identical "A", such as is presupposed by every proposition of logic (and of mathematics), and the "A" were already mere appearance, then logic would have a merely apparent world as its condition...the "A" of logic is, like the atom, a reconstruction of the thing.

is hard to swallow, if not downright ludicrous. What could be nuttier than denying that $A=A$? However, once this kind of claim is reinserted in the context of Nietzsche's antirealism about things, it begins to make sense. Once again, Nietzsche's criticism is less one of the concept of synchronic identity than a criticism of the idea that there are real things that could be self-identical. If there are no genuine things, then there are no things that are self-

²⁸ See for example James Van Cleve's excellent article "Three Versions of the Bundle Theory," *Philosophical Studies* (vol. 47, 1985), pp. 95–107. He does not cite Nietzsche as a bundler.

identical. Fictional objects, bundled together via perspectives taken on properties, may be self-identical, but such identity is thus perspectival. Nietzsche's argument is that there is no identity *an sich*, just as there are no things-in-themselves. Again we see that Nietzsche's critique is really about the applicability of logic and object realism than it is about logic per se.

So where are we left? Nietzsche's critique of logic is fundamentally one about semantics, and centers around his equation of extant semantics with realist metaphysics. He argues against realist metaphysics with his claim that objects are convenient fictions, constructed out of properties bundled together to satisfy the interests of some perspective. Objects are in this way perspectival just as he claims truth is perspectival. Similarly Nietzsche claims that logic is the buried structure of language, and just as logic can be misleading because of realist semantics, so too he maintains that language misleads people into accepting object realism. We have seen that logic can accommodate all of these complaints. A realist semantics is not the only one possible, and universes of discourse can just as well be populated with Nietzschean fictions as they can with things-in-themselves. Nietzsche's critique of logic is meant to liberate reason from its Königsbergian fetters. The charge that logic or language is misleading is ultimately a criticism of those who are thereby misled and is not an objection that undermines logic as a science of thought or as a formal representation of natural language. Thus questions apparently about logic become questions about the origins of our metaphysical concepts, an issue tailor-made for Nietzsche's genealogical approach. Nietzsche's root concerns turn out to be metaphysics and the faith of logicians, fair targets that allow him consistently to maintain the crucial thought-and-life-preserving role that he carves out for logic and rationality.²⁹

²⁹ Thanks to Robert Welshon for criticisms of an earlier version, and to three anonymous referees for *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.