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Senses of Scepticism in Nietzsche's Middle Writings

How He Becomes a Sceptic

By

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Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by me and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

This thesis explores the multiple senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings, arguing that starting from *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche becomes a sceptic, albeit of an idiosyncratic kind, for he consistently defines the task of his developing philosophical projects in alliance with various sceptical practices, which he selects, appropriates, and transforms from both ancient and modern traditions for his philosophical ends. There are two major failings in the secondary literature on Nietzsche and scepticism. First, commentators have largely neglected the importance that scepticism assumes in Nietzsche's middle writings. Second, they have frequently overlooked the plurality of senses or forms that scepticism takes in these writings, as well as their roles in Nietzsche's philosophical projects. In contrast, this thesis is intended to show how and why Nietzsche becomes a sceptic in the turn from his early writings to *Human, All Too Human*; to appreciate the multiple senses of scepticism and of sceptical practice, especially in his middle writings; and to illuminate the essential roles that various forms of scepticism play in his middle philosophy. First and foremost, then, this work is an attempt to make sense of Nietzsche as a sceptic and of his multifarious sceptical practice. Its main contention is that appreciating the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings is of key importance for an understanding of Nietzsche's identity - or identities - as a philosopher.

Abbreviations of Nietzsche's Works

- A *The Anti-Christ* (written in 1888 and published in 1895)
- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)
- BT *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)
- D *Dawn* (1881)
- DS *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* (1873) in UO
- EH *Ecce Homo* (written in 1888 and published in 1908)
- GM *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887)
- GS *The Gay Science* (1882, 'Preface' and Book 5 in 1887)
- HH *Human, All Too Human* (1878, 'Preface' in 1886)
- HH II *Human All Too Human II* (published as HH II in 1886)
- MOM *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* (1879)
- WS *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880)
- HL *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life* (1874)
- MOM *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* (1879) in HH II
- SE *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874) in UO

- TI *Twilight of the Idols* (1889)
- TL ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’ (1873, unpublished and unfinished)
- UO *Unfashionable Observations* (1873-1876)
- DS *David Strauss* (1873)
- HL *History for Life* (1874)
- SE *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874)
- WB *Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876)
- WB *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876)
- WS *The Wander and His Shadow* (1880) in HH II
- Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885)

Citations for most works take the form: HH 224 for *Human, All Too Human* aphorism or section 224; or GS ‘Preface’ §3 for *The Gay Science* ‘Preface’, section three. The UO are cited thus: SE §3, p. 189 for *Schopenhauer as Educator*, section 3, page 189. GM is cited thus: GM 3.24 for *On the Genealogy of Morals* 3rd essay, section 24. EH and TI are cited thus: EH ‘Why I am so Clever’ §3, p. 90 for *Ecce Homo* chapter ‘Clever’, section 3, page 90; or EH ‘Z’ §4, p. 128 for *Ecce Homo* chapter ‘*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*’, section 4, page 128; TI ‘Fable’ 3 for *Twilight of the Idols* chapter ‘How the “True World” Finally Became a Fable’, section 3.

Abbreviations of Nietzsche’s Posthumous Fragments

References to the *Nachgelassene Fragmente* take the form: NF-(year),(notebook number)[(fragment number)]. For example, NF-1877,26[6] corresponds to note 6 in notebook 26 in the year of 1877.

Unless otherwise stated, I refer to the unpublished fragments translated in the Stanford University Press edition of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (see bibliography). Other abbreviations for the posthumous fragments include:

- PLI ‘Nietzsche on Integrity: Selected Nachlass Fragments from 1880-1881’
- WEN *Writings from the Early Notebooks* (1868-1979)
- WLN *Writings from the Late Notebooks* (1885-1888)
- WP *The Will to Power* (1883-1888, unpublished and unfinished)

When referring to these, I state the specific edition in a footnote. For example, in-text citation: (NF-1875,6[35]); footnote: ‘in WEN, p. 218’.

Abbreviation of Nietzsche’s Letters

References to the *Briefe von Nietzsche* take the form: BVN-(year),(letter number). For example, BVN-1879,860 corresponds to letter 860 in the year of 1879.

Unless otherwise stated, translations of letters are my own.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the problem of scepticism in Nietzsche's philosophy. The majority of commentators largely agree that scepticism is an important theme in Nietzsche's works. Urs Sommer, for example, recently notes that '[s]cepticism is prevalent in the whole of Nietzsche's writings, from his first years in Basel in the early 1870s to the last months of his conscious life in Torino in 1888'.¹ Although it is not uncommon among specialists and non-specialists alike to refer in very generic terms to Nietzsche as a sceptical thinker,² it is not clear what kind of sceptic Nietzsche is and how we might best construe him as a sceptical thinker. In particular, what is not clear is the precise sense of scepticism we find in Nietzsche's texts. In spite of this generic reference to Nietzsche as a sceptical thinker, as Keith Ansell-Pearson notes, 'it is still not typical or standard practice in interpretations of Nietzsche to regard him as a sceptic'.³ To date, there are surprisingly few studies that directly attempt to make sense of Nietzsche as a sceptic;⁴ and more interpretative work is required to understand and appreciate the sense – indeed, the senses – of scepticism in his writings and determine the role of scepticism in his philosophical projects.

This thesis is intended to show that Nietzsche considers scepticism to be essential to philosophy and that he is committed to a largely sceptical mode of philosophising. It advances three major arguments:

1. Nietzsche truly becomes a sceptic, albeit of an idiosyncratic kind, in the middle writings.

¹ Sommer 2018, p. 443. See also Sommer 2006, p. 258.

² Nietzsche is generically referred to as a sceptical thinker on account of his 'iconoclastic' attack on cherished beliefs, such as those concerning truth, metaphysics, morality, Christianity, and politics. See Bett 2000, p. 70, n.36. Sommer 2018 considers the interpretation that 'Nietzsche might be a sceptic as someone who never has enough reason to believe that something is true' (p. 442). In my view, however, this interpretation is all too generic, failing to capture the specificity of Nietzsche's scepticism. For example, Shaw 2007 argues that Nietzsche is a political sceptic on account of his attack on liberalism. While Shaw's interpretation provides us with an interesting account of Nietzsche's criticism of politics, it does not help us to understand and appreciate the specific sense of scepticism or sceptical practice in Nietzsche's philosophy.

³ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁴ See, especially, Bett 2000; Berry 2011; Mitcheson 2017; Miner 2017; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

2. There are multiple senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings.
3. Nietzsche is not only or fully a sceptic: scepticism does not provide us with a complete and adequate understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical activity. That is to say, there are non-sceptical aspects in his philosophy, especially with respect to its aims. And yet, regarding Nietzsche as a sceptic is of fundamental importance for understanding his identity as a philosopher. Starting from the middle writings, Nietzsche construes scepticism, in its multiple senses, as a tool to achieve the aims of advancing his key philosophical and free-spirited projects.

(In addition to Nietzsche's being a sceptic, the title and subtitle of this thesis are intended to capture two key aspects of his thinking about scepticism – that is, its polysemy and development.)

In the first place, I want to argue that Nietzsche becomes a sceptic in the middle writings. Starting from *Human, All Too Human*, I argue, Nietzsche consistently defines the task of his developing philosophical projects in alliance with scepticism; he depicts his philosophical characters – such as the free spirit, Zarathustra, and the future philosophers – as sceptics; he expressly favours quite specific forms of scepticism; he deploys or recommends various sceptical practices; and at times he even regards himself as a sceptic. It is one of my contentions that to make sense of Nietzsche as a sceptic, we need to take cognizance of his intellectual development. First, we need to notice that Nietzsche does not begin his philosophical activity as a sceptic. Then, we need to pay attention to the fact that, even after he becomes a sceptic, his commitment to scepticism develops in the course of the maturation of his philosophy.

In the early notebooks, Nietzsche defines the task of tragic philosophy *in opposition to* scepticism: 'scepticism is not the aim' of philosophy (NF-1872,19[35]), 'we must get beyond scepticism, we must *forget it*' (NF-1872,19[125]). Similarly, in the *Unfashionable Observations* he assigns the tragic philosopher, as physician of culture, the task of warding off the danger of scepticism for the human mind and human life in order to promote cultural health and flourishing. In particular, in *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche depicts Schopenhauer as the example of the tragic philosopher who 'guides us out of the cave of skeptical disgruntlement' (SE §3, p. 188).

In the middle writings, Nietzsche's thinking takes a sceptical turn. In *Human, All Too Human*, he states that free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, 'needs doubt and mistrust as its closest confederates' (HH 22). In a posthumous fragment, he also associates the figure of the free spirit with a 'light scepticism' (NF-1876,17[93]). In *Dawn*, Nietzsche praises the ancient Greek and Roman sensibility – in contrast to the modern German proclivity for

unconditional trust – on account of their ‘little bit of skepticism for each and every thing, be it god, human, or concept’ (D 207). In *The Gay Science*, he openly favours an experimental scepticism, that is, a courageous practice of truthfulness that permits and promotes experiments with new possibilities of thinking and living (GS 51). Nevertheless, both in D and GS Nietzsche remains in part suspicious about scepticism: in GS 111 he considers ‘every high degree of caution in making inferences and every skeptical tendency a great danger for life’; and in D 477 he seems to suggest that one needs to redeem oneself from scepticism in order to affirm life.

Nietzsche remains ambivalent towards scepticism in the late writings, too. In the 1886 Preface to HH, Nietzsche attributes to himself an unprecedented and ‘deep suspicion’, especially about the notion of God (HH ‘Preface’ §1, p. 5). In *Beyond Good and Evil* 208-209, Nietzsche distinguishes a weak form of scepticism from a strong form of scepticism, characterising weak scepticism as a physiological-psychological-cultural disease. In BGE 210, Nietzsche suggests that the philosophers of the future will be in part sceptics. In the fifth book of GS, he even expresses the proportion ‘[t]he more mistrust, the more philosophy’ (GS 346). Finally, in the *Anti-Christ* Nietzsche claims that ‘great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic’ (A 54).

The ambivalent, ambiguous, and at times conflicting nature of Nietzsche’s statements about scepticism makes it problematic or difficult to put a coherent interpretation on them. In his writings, for example, Nietzsche construes scepticism as a danger to be avoided and combatted (SE §3, pp. 187-190; GS 111; BGE 208), as a need for pursuing free-spirited philosophy (HH 22; GS 110; GS 346), as a luxury that one may or may not permit oneself (D 46, HH ‘Preface’ §1, p. 6; GS 358; TI ‘Skermishes’12), and even as an extravagance typical of poets (MOM 32). To begin to make sense of this, it is imperative that we pay close attention to Nietzsche’s intellectual development and to the specific context in which he discusses scepticism.

In this thesis, I place my focus on the middle writings because, as we have seen, Nietzsche becomes a sceptic starting from HH. In Chapter 1, I partly focus on the early writings to give a better sense of Nietzsche’s becoming a sceptic and of his radical changing attitude towards scepticism in the middle writings.⁵ In the Conclusion, I show the importance of appreciating Nietzsche’s scepticism in the middle writings to understand his statements about scepticism in the late writings too. Moreover, in Chapter 1 I argue that tracing the development of Nietzsche’s

⁵ The sceptical character of Nietzsche’s middle writings is somehow acknowledged by Brobjer 2008. Thomas Brobjer remarks that in the 1878 turn Nietzsche assumes ‘a position that was skeptical and free-spirited, placed science above art, and praised the Enlightenment’ (p. 61). However, Brobjer does not clarify in what precise sense or senses his position can be described as sceptical.

thinking about scepticism between the early and middle writings help us to better understand and appreciate the nature of his turn in 1878.

Here, I subscribe to the customary tripartite periodisation of Nietzsche's oeuvre, albeit with three caveats. First, I acknowledge that there are continuities between periods.⁶ Second, I agree with Keith Ansell-Pearson that the middle period is not to be approached in terms of an undifferentiated set of writings: 'Nietzsche's philosophical project is not reducible to a single practice',⁷ but there are significant micro developments also within the same macro period.⁸ Third and in relation to second, it is important to notice, the middle period is not a trilogy but comprises five books (HH, MOM, WS, D, GS) each of them with its own specificity.

The significance of Nietzsche's intellectual development for his thinking about scepticism is frequently neglected in the secondary literature. And, even when it is recognised, commentators largely overlook the importance of scepticism in the middle writings – especially in the first two volumes of HH – which, as I endeavour to argue, are especially important because it is here that Nietzsche becomes a sceptic. The majority of studies on Nietzsche and scepticism tend to focus on the late writings, whereas only very few commentators primarily concentrate on the middle writings.⁹

Richard Bett, for example, mainly focuses on the very early and late writings, heavily overlooking the importance of (forms of) scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings.¹⁰ The reason for this, I think, is that Bett, like the majority of commentators, exclusively focuses his attention on Nietzsche's interest in ancient scepticism. Bett notes that if in Nietzsche's very early and late writings there is considerable evidence of an interest in the ancient sceptical tradition, 'Nietzsche

⁶ I agree with Abbey 2014: 'it necessary to acknowledge that the boundaries between Nietzsche's phases are not rigid, that some of the thoughts elaborated in one period were adumbrated in the previous one, that there are differences within any single phase, and that some concerns pervade his oeuvre' (p. 134).

⁷ In my view, Nietzsche's philosophical projects in the middle writings include the following: (1) Search for truth and knowledge, in concert with scientific enquiry (including history, natural science, psychological observation, and philology). (2) Search for truthfulness, honesty, and justice, especially in the context of an ethics of belief and of a virtue epistemology. (4) Search for antidotes to conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. (5) Search for tranquillity, happiness, and joy, in the context of the practice of philosophy as way of life and self-cultivation; (5.1) starting from the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche launches a project of seeking the 'spiritual-physical health and maturity' of individuals and humanity. See Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 8. (6) In *Dawn* and *The Gay Science*, we find a project committed to experimentalism – that is, to the search for and implementation of new modes of thinking and living with respect to both the individual and society.

⁸ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 5. See also p. 8.

⁹ Few exceptions are Mitcheson 2017; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. Berry 2011 partly concentrates on the middle writings but does not fully recognise the significance of Nietzsche's intellectual development for his thinking about scepticism.

¹⁰ Bett 2000, p. 67. Nevertheless, Bett rightly identifies a methodological kinship between Nietzsche's aphoristic style in the middle writings and the ancient sceptical attempts to avoid and reject assertoric modes of utterance (p. 83-84)

has much less to say about skepticism between the beginning and the end of his working life'.¹¹ In contrast, I want to emphasise that not only does Nietzsche have a lot to say about scepticism in the middle writings, but he also becomes a sceptic in this period of his philosophy.

Bett also attempts to tackle the questions of whether Nietzsche is a sceptic, suggesting that Nietzsche's mode of thinking can be described as sceptical because it centres around 'the difficulty or impossibility of determining how the world really, objectively is'.¹² Bett goes on to say that in his 1888 writings, though, Nietzsche 'seems to speak as if knows the objective truth, which no skeptic would ever do'.¹³ So, he concludes, 'the answer to the question "Is Nietzsche a skeptic? Is "yes and no"; both those who claim that he is a skpetic, and those who claim that he is not, say something important and correct'.¹⁴ Like Bett, as I have mentioned, I think there is a sense in which Nietzsche is not a sceptic; but, unlike Bett, it seems to me that – at least in the middle writings – his not being only or fully a sceptic has less to do with theoretical claims about the nature of things and much more with the constructive side of his developing philosophical projects. I shall say more about this in a moment.

The most important contribution on Nietzsche's becoming a sceptic in the middle writings is perhaps found in Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford's forthcoming book on Nietzsche's *Dawn*. They propose the hypothesis that Nietzsche becomes a sceptic in the break from his early intellectual project with respect to the problem of culture. In the early writings, they suggest, Nietzsche operates in an essentially German context and – conceiving of philosophy as cultural therapy and self-cultivation, rather than as the search for truth – he identifies scepticism as a debilitating danger for the culture of the newly born German state. In contrast, according to their hypothesis, in the middle writings Nietzsche places himself in a wider context, addressing European culture and becoming severely critical of the German, nationalistic spirit.¹⁵ This fundamental change of intellectual context, Ansell-Pearson and Bamford suggest, leads Nietzsche to embrace and promote scepticism as a philosophical tool to combat forms of fanaticism. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's proposal has the merit to show that Nietzsche's motivation for becoming a sceptic is not theoretical but practical-cultural. In Chapter 1, I draw

¹¹ Bett 2000, p. 75. Similarly, Busellato 2012 notes that in Nietzsche's middle writings the theme of scepticism, albeit not unimportant, is less central than at other stages of his intellectual development (pp. 230-231).

¹² Bett 2000, p. 70. See also Tongeren 1999, pp. 148-153. Paul van Tongeren, too, exclusively focuses on the late writings.

¹³ Bett 2000, p. 82.

¹⁴ Bett 2000, p. 83.

¹⁵ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

on and delve into their hypothesis, tracing the reversal of Nietzsche's attitude towards scepticism between his early and middle writings.

The second main argument I want to advance in my thesis is that there is not a single sense of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings – but rather multiple senses. 'Scepticism' is a polysemic term, carrying a multiplicity of senses or meanings throughout the history of philosophy. Different – and at times radically different – philosophical positions, sceptical practices, and ways of life are subsumed under the concept of 'scepticism'. In this thesis, I want to draw attention to the fact that the polysemy of the term 'scepticism' is reflected in Nietzsche, too. The senses or meanings Nietzsche attaches to scepticism vary, at times dramatically, in his texts. Hence, it is imperative to pay close attention to the context in order to understand and appreciate the specific sense of scepticism he is addressing each time. The polysemy of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings is due to the fact that in the course of his philosophy he engages with various sceptical traditions and sceptics, discussing a variety of forms or uses of scepticism, both ancient and modern.

Along with Bett, the majority of commentators tend to bring Nietzsche in report with the ancient sceptical tradition, particularly with Pyrrhonian scepticism – either in contrast or in affinity with it.¹⁶ The only book-length study on Nietzsche and scepticism in the Anglo-American scholarship is an attempt to compare Nietzsche with the Pyrrhonists.¹⁷ Its author, Jessica Berry, 'aims to settle the question of whether and in what sense Nietzsche is a skeptic by taking Pyrrhonism [...] as a model for understanding his philosophical project'.¹⁸ In this thesis, I take issue with Berry at various times. Although Berry makes it clear that 'it is not [her] intention to argue for the claim that "Nietzsche is a Pyrrhonist"',¹⁹ in her attempt to highlight the affinities with Pyrrhonian scepticism she often overlooks a number of fundamental differences. I agree with Berry that there are some affinities and that the Pyrrhonian tradition is an important influence on Nietzsche's philosophy and scepticism. In contrast to Berry, however, I contend that it is not the only sceptical tradition influencing Nietzsche, and that his philosophical projects – in the

¹⁶ In addition to Bett 2000, see also Conway & Ward 1992; Berry 2004a; Berry 2004b; Wilkerson 2006; Berry 2011; Busellato 2012; Santini 2013; Mitcheson 2017; Miner 2017; Sommer 2018; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. As Sommer 2018 observes, 'Nietzsche was well aware of the ancient skeptical traditions [including the Pyrrhonian one]. A major part of his early philological work was devoted to the prominent doxographer of Greek philosophy, Diogenes Laertius' (p. 443). Busellato 2012 even argues that, in the context of this work, Nietzsche must have read Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Scepticism*, the major source of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Moreover, it is well known, in 1888 Nietzsche's interest in Pyrrhonism is reawakened by his reading of Victor Brochard's study of Greek scepticism (EH 'Wise' §3, p. 90).

¹⁷ Berry 2011.

¹⁸ Berry 2011, p. 5.

¹⁹ Berry 2011, p. 24.

middle writings as well as at other stages of his intellectual development – are in many ways incompatible with Pyrrhonism, especially with its bringing about suspension of judgment in all matters under investigation and with its way of life.

In particular, I think, Nietzsche’s attitude towards ancient scepticism is not merely antiquarian: he selects from ancient sceptical practices – such as a sceptical, zetetic (or continuous) mode of investigation, suspension of judgment (*epoché* or *ephexis*), self-refutation (*peritrope*), and silence (*aphasia*) – for his philosophical aims. That is to say, Nietzsche appropriates these practices from ancient sceptical traditions, transforming them in the process of incorporating them into his philosophy. This, I want to argue, is also the case of other, modern sceptical practices – such as doubt and critique – which Nietzsche also incorporates in his philosophical projects. (At times, I suggest in Section 2.3, Nietzsche even attempts to combine different traditions, integrating the ancient continuous mode of investigation with the modern practice of scepticism as a truth-producing or discovering methodology.)

My contention, then, is that it is too imprecise or limited to regard Nietzsche as a Pyrrhonian-like sceptic or to only compare his scepticism with the Pyrrhonian tradition. Although Pyrrhonism is one of the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche’s writings, it is not the only one and does not help us to fully or adequately make sense of Nietzsche a sceptic. Nietzsche’s engagement with scepticism, I suggest, is made up of multiple encounters with various sceptical traditions, specific sceptics, and forms of scepticism. Indeed, commentators demonstrate that the sources of Nietzsche’s scepticism are much wider than Pyrrhonism. Nietzsche was well aware of other important sceptical traditions in the history of philosophy, both ancient and modern – including Cicero’s academic scepticism,²⁰ Montaigne’s revival of Pyrrhonian scepticism,²¹ the French moralists’ suspicion about morality,²² Pascal’s fideism, Descartes’s doubt,²³ French Enlightenment scepticism,²⁴ and even Emerson’s appropriation of Montaigne’s scepticism.²⁵ We need an appreciation of the multiple sources and senses of scepticism in Nietzsche’s writings to fully understand him a sceptic.

²⁰ Busellato 2012.

²¹ See, especially, Berry 2004b; Berry 2011; Miner 2017; Jessica Berry tends to interpret Montaigne as a Pyrrhonist, whereas Robert Miner highlights an important difference between Montaigne’s scepticism and Pyrrhonism. I address this contention in Section 4.2. See Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

²² Pippin 2010.

²³ Sommer 2018.

²⁴ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. See also Sommer 2018, p. 444.

²⁵ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. Keith Ansell-Pearson includes Hume’s use of scepticism as a tool to curtail human imagination as a potential source of Nietzsche’s scepticism. For a comparison with Hume’s scepticism see Parush 1976; Mabile 2011, pp. 72-94.

An important contribution of my thesis lies in an appreciation of the various sources and senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings. In contrast to the majority of the studies, I bring to light the influence of Enlightenment scepticism, particularly of Diderot's, in the middle Nietzsche. According to two forthcoming publications, it is plausible to suppose that, in the context of the largely positive reception and appropriation of the French Enlightenment in his middle writings, Nietzsche would have been aware of the sceptical dimension of the French *philosophes* such as Diderot.²⁶ In this thesis, I take up this suggestion and delve into Nietzsche's encounter with Enlightenment scepticism. In Section 2.4, I invite a close comparison with Diderot; Chapters 3 and 4 show that, unlike the Pyrrhonists and Montaigne, Nietzsche uses scepticism as a tool to criticise beliefs merely held on the basis of faith and the authority of tradition; and, in Chapter 5, I consider Nietzsche's Enlightenment-inspired account of scepticism as a weapon to combat fanaticism in HH.

Katrina Mitcheson focuses on the experimental scepticism Nietzsche favours in D and GS.²⁷ Mitcheson interprets Nietzsche's scepticism as a practice of radical transformation of the self in relation to his commitment to the creation of new values, highlighting the disadvantages of a comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism. The transformative and creative dimensions of Nietzsche's experimental scepticism, she argues, are heavily incompatible with the practical conservatism inherent in the Pyrrhonian way of living in conformity with customs and laws.

In contrast to Mitcheson, my thesis brings to greater focus Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism in the first two volumes of HH, too - where he becomes a sceptic and his experimentalism is not fully matured. Experimental scepticism, I argue, is not the only sense or form of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle period: not only does he favour an experimental scepticism, but he also experiments with various scepticisms and sceptical practices in the opening writings of the middle writings. Moreover, like Mitcheson, in Section 4.2 I highlight the limits of a comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism; but, unlike her, I also show that Nietzsche deploys and recommends a number of Pyrrhonian practices for his philosophical ends, including a Pyrrhonian-like form of suspension of judgment.

Nietzsche's experimental scepticism is often regarded as his most original and innovative contribution: 'Nietzsche's singular type of skepticism significantly deviates from ancient and modern approaches: in the late 1880's, he argues in favor of an experimental form of skepticism

²⁶ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. See also Sommer 2018, p. 444.

²⁷ Mitcheson 2017.

that is heroic, active, and after all judgment-friendly'.²⁸ This is in part true, but Nietzsche's experimental scepticism, too, can be traced back to sceptical practices in the history of philosophy. As Robert Miner suggests, it can be interpreted as Nietzsche's appropriation of Montaigne's sceptical essays;²⁹ and, according to Keith Ansell-Pearson's hypothesis, it could even be interpreted as Nietzsche's appropriation of Emerson's scepticism and of Emerson's own peculiar reappropriation of Montaigne.³⁰ I deal with Nietzsche's appropriation of Montaigne's scepticism in Sections 2.2 and 4.2, and with Nietzsche's potential appropriation of Emerson's scepticism in the Conclusion.

Moreover, in Section 2.2 I compare Nietzsche's methodical use of scepticism with Descartes's method of radical doubt; in Sections 1.1 and 3.4 I draw attention to the fact that Nietzsche also associates Kant with two forms of scepticism; and in Chapter 4 I show that Nietzsche also associates Epicurus, too, with two forms of scepticism.

The third main argument of this thesis is that, although Nietzsche becomes a sceptic, he is a rather idiosyncratic sceptic. (1) Nietzsche can be regarded as an eclectic sceptic in that he does not belong or conform to any school of scepticism but largely selects, appropriates, and transforms sceptical practices from various traditions, both ancient and modern, for his philosophical ends. (2) Nietzsche only favours specific kinds of scepticism: he is a selective sceptic. Although Nietzsche, as an eclectic sceptic, is sympathetic to a variety of sceptical practices, he is critical of some forms or uses of scepticisms. First, Nietzsche is critical of a merely epistemological, academic approach to scepticism, which, in his view, heavily undervalues the practical significance of sceptical problems, particularly their implications for individual and collective ways of life. (I shall say more about this in a moment.) Second, Nietzsche is critical of any scepticism that is not motivated by a full commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience. In particular, he criticises a fideistic use of scepticism for obscurantist ends which he attributes to Kantian philosophy; and he criticises an excessive use of mistrust which, he worries, might fail to acknowledge at least some grounds for credibility and even degenerate into a form of fanaticism.³¹ Third, it is important to bear in mind, in his selective eclecticism Nietzsche does not fully adhere to the schools of scepticism he seeks to integrate into his philosophy. At times, Nietzsche is critical even of the sceptical traditions from which he draws on. This is the case, for example, of

²⁸ Sommer 2018, p. 443.

²⁹ Miner 2017.

³⁰ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

³¹ See Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

the Pyrrhonian tradition: while he selects, appropriates, and transforms a number of Pyrrhonian practices, he criticises other aspects of Pyrrhonian scepticism.

(3) If Nietzsche is an eclectic, selective sceptic, he is also not only or fully a sceptic. That is to say, scepticism, in its multiple senses, does not provide us with a complete and adequate understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical activity. Although starting from the middle writings he considers scepticism to be essential to philosophy, at each and every stage of his intellectual development, Nietzsche does not consider scepticism to be the ultimate goal or end of philosophy. Scepticism, in its various forms and practices, is considered by Nietzsche to be an essential tool to achieve other philosophical aims. In the course of his intellectual development, and time after time, Nietzsche seeks to link forms of scepticism to the constructive aims of his philosophical projects: the search for and discovery of empirical truths, certainty, and probability in *HH*; the attachment to and affirmation of the small, nearest things of earthly life in *WS*; experimentalism in *D* and *GS*; and the creation of new values in the late writings.³²

Although he is not only or fully a sceptic, starting from the middle writings Nietzsche consistently attributes an essential role to scepticism in his developing philosophical projects. Hence, I want to argue, appreciating the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings is of key importance for an understanding of Nietzsche's identity – or identities – as a philosopher as well as of the nature and development of his philosophical practice. Moreover, I argue, appreciating the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings is of key importance for an understanding of his statements about scepticism in the late writings and, especially, his characterisations of the philosophers of the future and of Zarathustra as sceptics.

Let me make a final introductory remark about the nature of the problem of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings and about my methodology for studying it. This will help me to manage the expectation of the reader and to clarify my practice in this work. In contemporary epistemological and metaphysical debates, it is fashionable to regard Nietzsche as a sceptic on account of his advancing sceptical arguments about truth and knowledge.³³ This approach has the

³² The majority of the commentators suggest that Nietzsche – especially in the late writings – is not a sceptic on account of his cultural programme of transforming or revaluating the modern way of life. For example, Wilkerson 2006 notes that 'Nietzsche is, ultimately, no skeptic, whatever the advantages of skepticism for life and however much he prescribes the skeptical purge. Nietzsche's politics of human potential, a politics of the forever approaching, never actualized future is not awash in a bed of doubt "Those who refuse to envision a better life", Nietzsche seems to say, "are doomed to live a worse one" (p. 56). See also Bett 2000 and Mitcheson 2017.

³³ See, for example, Poellner 1995, pp. 29-136. Poellner proposes to call 'sceptical' Nietzsche's various 'objections against the claim that we possess knowledge, either probable or certain, of a metaphysical kind – knowledge about that which exists in itself in some ultimate sense' (1995, p. 29): 'The sceptical line of thought in Nietzsche might be characterized as consisting in the attempt to show that we cannot in fact justify, or at least not rationally justify, many of the beliefs that commonly have been regarded as true by major philosophical traditions and by many non-philosophers. But we shall also subsume under this heading his assertions to the effect that certain widespread beliefs

merit to analyse and assess the theoretical framework of Nietzsche's philosophy, but it largely overlooks an array of questions concerning scepticism that Nietzsche himself directly poses in his texts – questions other than those epistemological and metaphysical.

In particular, I take issue with the so-called 'thematic studies' – those who look at Nietzsche's texts from the standpoint of preformulated issues in contemporary philosophy. In my view, these studies end up addressing how a number of Nietzsche's claims fit the way sceptical problems are formulated today, rather than Nietzsche's own way to formulate the problem of scepticism. In this thesis, I suggest, Nietzsche's idiosyncratic way to deal with scepticism is interesting on its own account.

I think Robert Pippin is right when he notes that scholars should avoid asking Nietzsche 'questions he himself does not directly address'; 'Nietzsche is much better understood not as a great German metaphysician [...], or as very interested in metaphysics or a new theory of nature at all, but as one of the great "French moralists"'.³⁴ Similarly, on my reading, Nietzsche is much better understood not as an epistemologist, or as primarily interested in a theory of knowledge.³⁵ Nietzsche's focus is rarely on pure epistemology but on the problem of how to live with scepticism. Ruth Abbey calls this the 'epistemological-plus' approach: 'Nietzsche's assessment of knowledge is, moreover, never purely epistemological; he also repeatedly attends to the ethical, experiential and aesthetic dimensions of knowing'.³⁶ In line with Abbey, I maintain, Nietzsche's assessment of scepticism is never purely epistemological; he is also and primarily interested in practical questions³⁷ directly concerning the problem of how to think and live well.

regarding the ultimate constitution of things not only cannot be rationally supported, but are in fact unintelligible' (p. 30). Poellner suggests that Nietzsche is ultimately not a sceptic on account of his rejecting the very notion of metaphysical or absolute truth: 'Nietzsche is not a sceptic and that the role of his sceptical ideas should be understood as part of his endeavour to undermine and discredit the "ascetic ideal" and its adherents. In other words, they can be seen as attempts to show that, even if the concept of absolute truth were intelligible, specific claims to truth in this sense, at least as regards as a putative "external" or objective sphere, are rationally justifies and probably not rationally justifiable' (p. 14).

³⁴ Pippin 2010, pp. xii, 10.

³⁵ Here, I am in agreement with Berry 2011, pp. 13-14.

³⁶ Abbey 2020, p. 14. In other words, '[Nietzsche] worries not just about the truth of certain ideas but also about how those holding such ideas will live, feel and experience these beliefs' (Abbey 2020, p. 14).

³⁷ By 'practical questions', I do not mean the questions asked today in the scholarly debate on what is called 'moral scepticism'. Indeed, Nietzsche is not directly engaged in carrying out a theoretical analysis of arguments for or against forms of moral scepticism, epistemic or ontological-metaphysical – such as scepticism about moral knowledge or moral justification and scepticism about moral reality. On the helpful distinction between theoretical and practical significance of scepticism, albeit in the context of Hume's philosophy, see Castiglione 1998: 'The distinction between theoretical and practical must not be confused with other distinctions, such as philosophical an plain, or epistemological and moral, although there are senses and occasions in which the various dichotomies tend to overlap. By theoretical I mainly refer to the justifications given for skepticism, and by practical I intend the effects following from a sceptical position, particularly in terms of a "way of life"' (p. 224).

Nietzsche does not treat scepticism as an epistemological issue to be discussed in an academic fashion.³⁸ (Of course, this does not mean that Nietzsche's discussion of scepticism entails no epistemological, ontological, and even metaphysical claim. It means that his intellectual and philosophical practice is not centred on epistemology or metaphysics but on something else.) Nietzsche is not primarily interested in analysing theoretical arguments in favour of or against sceptical scenarios concerning the existence of the external reality and the like.³⁹ As we will see, starting from the early writings and throughout his oeuvre Nietzsche attaches a historical-cultural-epochal significance to scepticism. (In *History for Life*, we will see in Section 1.1, Nietzsche even conceives of the tragic philosopher as a physician of culture who is not primarily concerned with the truth-value of doctrines but with their impact on human culture and life – one of their tasks is to find a cultural therapy for doctrines Nietzsche considers 'truth but deadly'.) As Urs Sommer notes, in Nietzsche's writings the problem of scepticism is closely linked to and even anticipates that of nihilism.⁴⁰ Moreover, Nietzsche repeatedly associates scepticism with emotions and moods, such as despair and cheerfulness, as well as with temperaments or other psychological conditions. These dimensions of Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism cannot be subtracted without perverting it. My worry is that epistemological and thematic studies run the risk of neglecting or even obscuring the way Nietzsche formulates the problem of scepticism in his texts.⁴¹

To the disappointment of many readers, then, in a thesis on Nietzsche and scepticism I will not concentrate on Nietzsche's epistemology. My aim, here, is to identify the philosophical questions Nietzsche poses when discussing scepticism in his writings in order to make sense of him as a sceptic. Hence, a large part of my work is devoted to a close reading and comment of Nietzsche's texts. As it is often the case in Nietzsche, his views on scepticism, too, are not

³⁸ As we will see in Sections 1.1 and 3.4, Nietzsche directly criticises a merely academic approach to scepticism.

³⁹ Nietzsche is interested in sceptical modes of investigations and methods as tools to enquire well – to search for and even produce or discover specific forms of truth, certainties, and probabilities. He is interested in cultivating sceptical attitudes of the mind to identify and rid oneself from beliefs engendered by error, wishful thinking, and excessive passions. Nietzsche is interested in scepticism as a tool to criticise beliefs merely justified on the basis of faith or the authority of tradition – rather than on a truthful enquiry into reasons pro and con. He is interested in scepticism as a weapon to combat conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. Nietzsche is interested in sceptical practices for therapeutic purposes – to achieve forms of tranquillity, happiness, and joy with respect to the philosopher and to humanity. He is interested in scepticism in relation to his commitment to experimentalism – that is, to experiment with new possibilities of thinking and living with respect to individuals and society.

⁴⁰ Sommer 2006.

⁴¹ Here, my practice of reading Nietzsche substantially differs from that of scholars such as Brian Leiter. Leiter 2013, for example, attributes to Nietzsche an argument for moral scepticism based on the fact of moral disagreement, that is, the metaphysical thesis that objective moral properties or facts do not exist because there is no consensus, among people and philosophers alike, on the foundations of morality.

presented in a systematic manner. There is no single work in which Nietzsche fully discloses – or at least extensively develops – his thinking about scepticism; his explicit statements are scattered and spread over and throughout his writings, both published and unpublished. The kind of work I carry out in this thesis is to interpret Nietzsche as a sceptic, finding and reconstructing what he calls the ‘chain of thoughts’ underlying his texts, aphorisms, and posthumous fragments (NF-1876,20[3]). For this reason, my thesis can be more fruitfully collocated in the field of the history of philosophy.⁴²

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each chapter comprises a number of sections. The work is organised as follows.

Chapter 1, as I have mentioned, focuses on Nietzsche’s becoming a sceptic in the middle writings. My aim, here, is to explain how and why Nietzsche becomes a sceptic starting from *Human, All Too Human*. In Section 1.1, I show that in the early writings Nietzsche is distinctively not a sceptic, for he defines the task of philosophy in opposition to scepticism. In particular, I explore Nietzsche’s construal of scepticism in the second and third *Unfashionable Observations* as a cultural and psychological danger or sickness. In Sections 1.2, I trace the reversal of Nietzsche’s attitude towards scepticism from his early to his middle writings. Sections 1.3-4 highlight that, while he continues to deal with scepticism from a cultural and psychological standpoint, in 1878 Nietzsche attaches largely positive connotations to it. Now, he comes to embrace the consequences of scepticism for culture and for individuals, accepting them as the unavoidable starting point of his free-spirited philosophy. In Section 1.3, I focus on scepticism and the problem of culture. I suggest that Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of scepticism is largely motivated by his shifting perspective on culture, from a German to a European or even cosmopolitan context. I also explain in what senses Nietzsche characterises present and future modernity as a fundamentally sceptical age. Section 1.4 focuses on scepticism as a psychological problem. I propose that, in concomitance with this shift of perspective on culture, Nietzsche seeks to cultivate a positive intellectual-emotional response to scepticism for himself and for his readers.

⁴² The fact that I primarily focus on Nietzsche’s text does not mean that I do not wish to engage with contemporary philosophical debates at all. In fact, at various times in this thesis refer to I contemporary issues in virtue epistemology and the ethics of belief. In doing so, nevertheless, I am not interested in attributing to Nietzsche theories preformulated in the literature. For example, in Section 4.4 I criticise Alfano 2013’s attempt to saddle Nietzsche with theory of the unity or cardinality of virtue. Rather, I try to use virtue epistemology and the ethics of belief as interpretative lenses to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche’s text – in particular, in Chapter 3 I suggest that Nietzsche construes forms of scepticism as tools to think and enquire well in close connection with the intellectual virtue of honesty.

In Chapter 2, I explore the terms of the alliance Nietzsche forges between scepticism, scientific enquiry, and free-spirited philosophy in *Human, All Too Human*. My major claim here is that Nietzsche attaches a fundamental methodological significance to scepticism, both as truth-searching and truth-producing methodology. In other words, I claim, in HH Nietzsche construes scepticism as a tool to think and enquire well – in a way that can be described as truth-directed – and as a method for producing or discovering specific kinds of truths. Section 2.1 deals with scepticism as a truth-searching methodology. I show that Nietzsche values the sceptical methods (practices, attitudes, and virtues) of scientific enquiry and, especially, of philology – which he selects as a paradigm for all rigorous, methodical investigation. In Section 2.2, I deal with scepticism as a truth-producing methodology. I stress that in HH Nietzsche construes scepticism, in the form of doubt and mistrust, also as a method for producing empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities. I link Nietzsche’s construal of scepticism as a truth-producing methodology to the modern sceptical tradition, contrasting his method of mistrust with Descartes’ method of doubt. Section 2.3 shows that, in the context of his construal of scepticism as a method for his free-spirited philosophy, Nietzsche combines ancient and modern sceptical practices. In particular, combines the ancient sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation typical of the Pyrrhonian tradition and of Montaigne’s revival of it with the modern use of scepticism as a tool to produce or discover truths. To better understand and appreciate this combination, in Section 2.4 I invite a comparison with the French Enlightenment tradition of scepticism, especially with Diderot. Like Diderot, I argue, Nietzsche fruitfully combines the ancient mode of continuous search with modern scepticism as a truth-producing methodology.

Chapter 3 investigates the close link Nietzsche establishes between scepticism, forms of honesty or integrity, and the intellectual conscience. Here, I put forward two major claims. First, scepticism plays an important role in Nietzsche’s commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience starting from the middle writings. More specifically, intellectual honesty and conscience require the use of a number of sceptical practices, attitudes, and virtues as tools to avoid precipitancy, prejudices, and mistakes (Section 3.1-2). Second, Nietzsche favours forms of scepticism only insofar they are motivated by intellectual honesty, whereas he disapproves of uses of scepticism that do not respond to the demands of intellectual conscience (Sections 3.3-4). In Section 3.1, I focus on the link between scepticism and forms of intellectual honesty such as *Redlichkeit* and *Rechtschaffenheit* in the middle and later writings. I show that scepticism is construed as a practice of truthfulness guided by and promoting intellectual honesty – in

opposition to self-deception and to a mode of believing based on faith and tradition rather than on reason. Moreover, I stress the often neglected historical-cultural dimension of both scepticism and honesty in relation to Nietzsche's notion of the self-overcoming of Christianity. Section 3.2 concentrates on the close link between scepticism and the intellectual conscience. I individuate a number of sceptical practices that, for Nietzsche, are entailed in the commitment to the intellectual conscience, at least as it is explained in GS 2. This commitment, I argue, takes the form of an ethics of belief and enquiry, which also requires an ethics of action. In Nietzsche's view, a form of intellectual dishonesty is at work when the ethics of belief and enquiry does not adequately inform the ethics of action and the resulting way of life. In Section 3.3, I resume the comparison between Nietzsche and Pyrrhonian scepticism, which I had commenced in Section 2.3, this time focusing on intellectual honesty and dishonesty. Although he explicitly praises the sceptics, including the Pyrrhonists, as honest investigators, I suggest that Nietzsche construes the Pyrrhonian way of life in conformity with traditions as a form intellectual dishonesty. Section 3.4 deals with Nietzsche's criticism across the middle and late writings of Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason, especially of his famous strategy to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith. Nietzsche, I suggest, regards this strategy as a form of fideism poorly committed to intellectual honesty and conscience.

In Chapter 4, I enter into the debate on Nietzsche and suspension of judgment, taking forward the comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism I had commenced in Sections 2.3 and 3.3. In contrast to the majority of commentators, I show that in his middle writings Nietzsche uses and recommends forms of suspension of judgment. In contrast to Jessica Berry,⁴³ I argue that, at all stages of his intellectual development, suspension of judgment is not the goal or end of Nietzsche's sceptical practice. It is my contention in this chapter that Nietzsche recommends a *temporary use* of suspension of judgment as a tool to think and enquire well in order to avoid drawing rushed, wishful, and erroneous conclusions. I also contend that at various times in the middle writings Nietzsche recommends an *issue-specific* use of suspension of judgment about religious and metaphysical questions (Sections 4.1-2). Section 4.1 shows that in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche deploys and recommends a form of suspension of judgment about the existence of the metaphysical world. I draw on Berry's comparison between Nietzsche's suspension of judgment in HH and Pyrrhonian *epoché*. But, to keep this comparison working well, I suggest, it is necessary to acknowledge that Nietzsche selects, appropriates, and transforms

⁴³ Berry 2011.

the ancient sceptical tradition for his own philosophical aims, which are ultimately different from and incompatible with Pyrrhonian scepticism. In Section 4.2, I individuate another instance of Nietzsche's suspension of judgment in aphorism 16 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, where he recommends indifference about religious and metaphysical questions. I link Nietzschean indifference to the ancient sceptical tradition but, once again, I highlight the differences with Pyrrhonian scepticism. Moreover, I compare Nietzsche's indifference in WS with his suspension of judgment in HH, tracing Nietzsche's intellectual development between the two works. I show that, unlike the suspension in HH, indifference in WS is directly linked to the reconcentration on and affirmation of the small, nearest things of earthly life. I also show that sceptical indifference is linked, through Nietzsche's reception of Socrates, Epicurus, and Montaigne, to cheerfulness and to the search for happiness and joy. Section 4.3 focuses on two forms of scepticism that Nietzsche associates with the figure of Epicurus, one in the middle writings and one in the late ones. The first part of this section shows that in WS 7 Nietzsche associates Epicurus with sceptical indifference and, especially, with its affirmative side. In the second part, I show that in the fifth book of GS (1887) Nietzsche associates Epicurus with another form of scepticism, one that takes intellectual and emotional delight in uncertainty. I also trace the development of Nietzsche's attitude towards certainty between HH and the second edition of GS.

In Chapter 5, I return to Nietzsche's encounter with Enlightenment scepticism. In particular, I show that, in line with the Enlightenment tradition, Nietzsche construes scepticism as an antidote or weapon against fanaticism. Section 5.1 explores the antithesis between scepticism and fanaticism in Nietzsche's middle and late writings, focusing especially on his Enlightenment-inspired account of conviction in *Human, All Too Human*. In Section 5.2, I note that in HH Nietzsche directly opposes conviction to intellectual justice too. I analyse Nietzsche's intriguing characterisation of the genius of justice, highlighting the link between fairmindedness and scepticism. Moreover, I suggest that in relation to his promotion of intellectual justice Nietzsche once again recommends forms of suspension of judgment to combat the intellectual rashness inherent in fanaticism. Section 5.3 deals with Nietzsche's worry that scepticism itself might degenerate into fanaticism. I provide a close reading of aphorism 213 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, which contains a largely undervalued, enigmatic, and ambivalent dialogue between an old man and the character of Pyrrho. I show in what senses Nietzsche characterises Pyrrho as a fanatic of mistrust, and in what senses, according to him, scepticism is instead helpful to combat fanaticism.

In the Conclusion, I summarise my main arguments in the light of the work done in the five chapters. Moreover, I consider the problem of scepticism in the late writings. First, I deal with Nietzsche's problematic distinction between weak and strong scepticism in BGE 208-209 and his characterisation of the philosophers of the future as partly sceptics. Then, I investigate Nietzsche's claim that Zarathustra is a sceptic, endeavouring to clarify in what sense or senses precisely Nietzsche regards Zarathustra as a sceptic. This is intended to show that appreciating the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings helps us to better understand his claims about scepticism in the post-Zarathustra works. Further, in the light of his characterisation of future philosophers and Zarathustra as sceptics, I take up again and problematise the question of whether or to what extent Nietzsche is in fact a sceptical thinker. Finally, I point to three directions for future research on the problem of scepticism in Nietzsche's philosophy.

CHAPTER 1

How Nietzsche Becomes a Sceptic

In the Introduction, I emphasised the need to pay close attention to Nietzsche's intellectual development when exploring his thinking about scepticism. Indeed, Nietzsche's conception of, attitude towards, and practice of scepticism develop, at times even drastically, in the course of the trajectory of his philosophy. In this chapter, I focus on what is undoubtedly the most drastic change in Nietzsche's views on scepticism. If in the early writings Nietzsche defines the task of tragic philosophy in alliance with art and in opposition to science and scepticism, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche comes to state that free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, 'needs doubt and mistrust as its closest confederates' (HH 22). In 1878, Nietzsche attaches a largely positive significance to scepticism, embracing and even seeking to promote a sceptical way of thinking and living. My aim here is to clarify the nature of the sceptical problem starting from the *Unfashionable Observations*, explaining how and why Nietzsche reverses his attitude towards scepticism in the turn from his early to his middle writings. In this chapter, I show that starting from HH Nietzsche becomes a sceptic, that is, he comes to accept scepticism as the starting point of his free-spirited investigation and commits himself to a sceptical practice of philosophy. In the following chapters, I will deal with Nietzsche's sceptical mode of philosophising and, more specifically, with the sceptical practices - such as doubt, mistrust, and suspension of judgment - that he recommends and deploys in his middle writings.

1.1 The Problem of Scepticism in Nietzsche's Early Writings: The Case of the *Unfashionable Observations*

In the early writings such as the *Unfashionable Observations*, Nietzsche largely conceives of the philosopher as 'a physician of culture' rather than as a lover of truth and knowledge (NF-

1872,23[15]):⁴⁴ ‘The value of philosophy does not lie in the sphere of knowledge, but in the sphere of life (NF-1872,19[45]). In other words, for the early Nietzsche, philosophers are not primarily concerned with the truth, nor with academic or scholarly debates. Rather, they are faced with the task of promoting cultural health and flourishing. In the period of the UO, as we will see, when he is openly committed to Wagner’s artistic-political project to reform or rejuvenate German culture, Nietzsche considers the task of the cultural physician to be a largely national affair. And Nietzsche himself intends to assume this role in the UO, ‘observing’ the status of contemporary German culture and way of life. His observations take the form of a critique of what is merely fashionable or popular in the present – especially in Germany – while damaging and obstructing cultural health and flourishing. On the constructive side, as Jeffrey Church notes, ‘the *Observations* as a whole is an attempt to create a new German culture, one that is unified by the great works of exemplary individuals in art, religion and philosophy’.⁴⁵

In the context of this intellectual, therapeutic, and cultural project, as I have mentioned, Nietzsche defines the task of philosophy by contrasting it with scepticism. Let me begin by noting that the problem of scepticism in the UO is generally neglected in the secondary literature.⁴⁶ For example, Jessica Berry, the author of the only book-length study on Nietzsche and scepticism in Anglo-American scholarship, exclusively focuses on the case of the unpublished and unfinished essay ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’, completely overlooking the importance of Nietzsche’s discussion of scepticism in the UO.⁴⁷ Attempting to read TL from the standpoint of Pyrrhonian scepticism, Berry suggests that, in contrast to many standard interpretations, in the essay Nietzsche is neither rejecting truth nor denying the possibility of knowledge. Rather, she attributes to the early Nietzsche a ‘sceptical position’ which, according to her, is comparable to Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment and its attack on dogmatism.⁴⁸ Nietzsche’s scepticism in the early unpublished writings, she goes on to say, poorly squares with the UO, but starting from *Human, All Too Human* ‘the sceptical themes of [TL] could be safely resurrected and expressed more clearly and perspicuously’.⁴⁹ I agree with Berry that in HH Nietzsche retrieves some themes

⁴⁴ See also NF-1873,30[8].

⁴⁵ Church 2019, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Few exceptions are Serini 2019; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁴⁷ Berry 2011, pp. 49-67.

⁴⁸ Berry 2011, pp. 52, 64. By ‘sceptical position’ Berry essentially means a form of metaphysical agnosticism that neither affirms nor rejects a metaphysical truth (pp. 61-63).

⁴⁹ Berry 2011, p. 69. Cf. HH 11.

of TL, such as the critique of language.⁵⁰ I also agree with her that Nietzsche is – indeed becomes – a sceptic in the middle writings, whereas his early published works are decidedly non-sceptical or, I want to stress, even anti-sceptical. However, I strongly disagree with Berry with respect to the nature of the problem of scepticism in Nietzsche’s early and middle writings. In particular, I think that a comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism is not helpful for better understanding and appreciating Nietzsche’s early philosophical project in the published and unpublished writings. Although in the text of TL there is a reference to the ancient sceptical tradition,⁵¹ in his early writings Nietzsche is directly engaging with a number of problems that are alien to Pyrrhonism.⁵² In this section, I place my focus on the UO and not on TL. It is my contention that the UO are important for understanding and appreciating the problem of scepticism both in Nietzsche’s early and middle writings, and for explaining how and why he becomes a sceptic in HH. I aim to identify the questions Nietzsche poses when discussing scepticism in his early writings and to trace his intellectual development between the UO and HH.

In the UO, Nietzsche construes scepticism as a danger or sickness threatening individuals and culture. In particular, he is worried about two forms of scepticism, one deriving from historical knowledge, the other from Kantian philosophy. It is important to note from the start that, so construed, scepticism is not much of a philosophical position, but rather the effect of forms of knowledge upon human life. Both scepticisms, according to Nietzsche’s observation, endanger German culture and young intellectuals by exposing the mutability, relativity, and limitations of human knowledge. Thus, I suggest, one important task of Nietzsche’s early philosophical therapy for culture is to ward off the dangers of scepticism. In what follows, I first briefly identify the cultural problem of scepticism in *History for Life*. Then, I extensively discuss the role of scepticism in *Schopenhauer as Educator* as well as in Nietzsche’s early philosophical project.

It is not often noticed that scepticism is central to Nietzsche’s main argument in HL. In the second UO, Nietzsche famously argues that an excess or misuse of history is disadvantageous for human life. In particular, observing the state of German education and scholarship, Nietzsche argues that an excessive focus on historical knowledge or a merely antiquarian or scientific attention to history is detrimental to the health and flourishing of German culture – especially to

⁵⁰ See D’Torio 2016, pp. 2-4.

⁵¹ Berry 2011 rightly notes that in ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’ Nietzsche makes use of a standard Pyrrhonian argument concerning the variation of perception among different kinds of animal to undermine the criterion of ‘correct perception’ (64-67). Cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 12-40, PH 1.35-163.

⁵² On the philosophical problems revolving around the notions of truth and lies in the early Nietzsche see, for example, Pippin 1996.

young intellectuals – and its way of life. One of the reasons why Nietzsche regards an excess of history as a sickness of the age is that it results in a form of scepticism. Historical knowledge and, particularly, ‘the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types, and species, of the lack of any cardinal difference between human and animal’ are ‘true but also deadly’ (HH §8, p. 153). Modern culture and education suffer a historical sickness, Nietzsche diagnoses, for they are excessively focused on historical knowledge or they approach history in a misguided way. According to his diagnosis, this historical sickness is deadly for human life because it generates scepticism about ‘all customs and concepts’, exposing the cultural relativity of all practices and ideas: ‘The young person has become an outcast and is sceptical of all customs and concepts. Now he knows that in every age things were different, that it does not matter who you are’ (HL §7, p. 135). The recognition of the ‘ephemeral and changing character of human thoughts and systems’, Nietzsche observes, could lead young intellectuals to a ‘melancholy apathy’ (HL §7, p. 135) – to both an intellectual and practical inactivity; causing confusion about opinions, it could discourage young thinkers from having opinions of their own (SE §8, p. 246).

It is important to bear in mind that in HL – as in the middle writings⁵³ – Nietzsche holds the doctrines generating scepticism to be true, but, assuming the role of the physician of German culture, he also diagnoses them as dangerous or deadly.⁵⁴ Accordingly, in the second UO he seeks to combat scepticism:

Enough, more than enough, of this passionately seeking but fruitless voyage on strange dark seas! Now, at least, we see a shore: regardless of what it is like, this is where we must land, and even the poorest haven is better than being swept back into this infinite hopelessness and skepticism. Our first task is to make land (HL §10, p. 158)

It should be clear that scepticism in the UO is not a strictly theoretical or epistemological issue; rather, it is a practical (cultural and psychological) problem. It should also be clear that, accordingly, Nietzsche’s intellectual response to the sceptical problem is not in the field of theoretical philosophy or epistemology. In HL, Nietzsche charges the cultural therapist with the task of warding off the danger of scepticism by mobilising the ahistorical and superhistorical powers or standpoints. The ahistorical is understood as ‘[the] power to *forget* and to enclose oneself in a limited *horizon*’; and the suprahistorical indicates ‘those powers that divert one’s gaze from what is in the process of becoming to what lends existence the character of something

⁵³ As we will see in Section 1.2, Nietzsche ends up advocating in public all those doctrines that he held to be true but deadly in HL §8.

⁵⁴ In a posthumous fragment, Nietzsche writes that *History for Life* was ‘[a]n attempt to close the eyes against the knowledge we get through history’ (NF-1878,27[34], translated in Brobjer 2004, p. 306). In a later note, Nietzsche even declares that in the second *Unfashionable Observation* he cared little about truth (NF-1885,35[48]).

eternal and stable in meaning, to *art* and *religion*' (HL §10, p. 163). For the early Nietzsche, 'every living thing [whether a human being, a people, or a culture] can become healthy, strong, and fruitful only within a defined horizon' (HL §1, p. 90).⁵⁵ Furthermore, this circumscribed horizon, as a condition of health, requires shared, stable beliefs, values, and practices ensuring cultural and existential securities. In contrast, Nietzsche observes, scientific enquiry and particularly scientific historiography seek 'to suspend all the limitations placed on horizons and to catapult the human being into an infinite, unlimited light-wave sea of knowing becoming' (HL §10, p. 164). Science, he goes on to say, unleash a '*concept-quake* [, robbing] the human being of the foundation for all his security and tranquillity, his belief in what is lasting and eternal' (HL §10, p. 164).

Nietzsche returns to the problem of scepticism in SE §3 in the context of his discussion of the second danger that threatened Schopenhauer's development as a philosopher and as a human being. This danger, Nietzsche writes, is called 'despair of truth [*Verzweiflung an der Wahrheit*]' and 'accompanies every thinker whose starting point is Kantian philosophy, provided that in his sufferings and his desires he is a strong and complete human being, not just a clattering machine that cogitates and calculates' (SE §3, pp. 187-188). What Nietzsche calls 'despair of truth' is inextricably linked to scepticism. This is somehow already implicit in the German word '*Verzweiflung*' which contains the word '*Zweifel*' (doubt). In German the feeling of despair is thus semantically connected to a state of doubt.⁵⁶ But Nietzsche also explicitly links despair of truth to scepticism as follows:

should the moment arise in which Kant begins to have a popular effect, then we will become aware of it in the form of a corrosive and disintegrating skepticism and relativism.⁵⁷ And only the

⁵⁵ See also BT §23, p. 108.

⁵⁶ The association between scepticism and despair is not unusual in the history of German philosophy. For example, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel 1979[1807] regards the road of natural consciousness towards absolute knowledge 'as the pathway of *doubt* [*Zweifel*], or more precisely as the way of despair [*Verzweiflung*]' (pp. 49-50). I became aware of Nietzsche's conception of scepticism as despair of truth in *Schopenhauer as Educator* thanks to Stephen Houlgate's inspiring lectures and seminars on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* during my MA visiting at the University of Warwick in 2013-2014.

⁵⁷ Lupo 2019 calls attention to the fact that SE §3 contains the sole occurrence of the term 'relativism [*Relativismus*]' in Nietzsche's entire oeuvre. Lupo shows that the Kantian-Schopenhauerian framework of Nietzsche's early philosophy leads the latter to a relativistic position, according to which we have epistemic access only to a 'relative' truth – that is, a kind of truth conditioned by the human subject – as opposed to 'absolute' truth – that is, a kind of truth which is independent from human experience. In the early notebooks, Nietzsche often refers to the relativity of truth as a form of anthropomorphism. 'Now philosophy can only stress the *relativity* and the *anthropomorphic* character of all knowledge, as well as the power of *illusion* that prevails everywhere' (NF-1872,19[37]). Nietzsche opposes this task to the traditional pretension of metaphysics to claim absolute truth (NF-1872,19[236]). Nietzsche suggests that a philosophy 'convinced of the anthropomorphic aspect [...] is skeptical' (NF-1872,23[45]). On the relation between anthropomorphism and Kantian philosophy see, for example, NF-1872,19[125]. As opposed to relative or anthropomorphic *truth*, Nietzsche often speaks of '[a]nthropomorphic *illusions*' (NF-1872,19[134], my emphasis). On whether Nietzsche attributes some kind of truth-value to relativity or anthropomorphism between

most active and noble spirits, those who could never endure living in a state of doubt, would experience a shattering and despair of all truth on the order of what Henrich von Kleist, for example, experienced as an effect of Kantian philosophy. (SE §3, p. 188)

Here, Nietzsche is not claiming that Kant is a sceptic;⁵⁸ rather, he is claiming that Kantian philosophy could have a sceptical and relativistic effect if it began to have a far-reaching impact upon German culture. As another effect, he is claiming, Kantian philosophy would drive some thinkers such as Kleist to despair at the possibility of attaining the truth.

In the first place, it is important to note that, as in HL, in SE too scepticism is not construed as a doctrine or a philosophical position but rather as the cultural and psychological effect of a specific form of knowledge.⁵⁹ In the text, Nietzsche does not go into a detailed philosophical analysis of Kantian philosophy. This is for two reasons. First, in the UO Nietzsche is not primarily concerned with epistemology and metaphysics but with the effect of theory upon human life and, more precisely, upon German culture. Second, as Jeffrey Church points out, much of the philosophical background with which Nietzsche engages in the UO ‘remains unstated, because it would have been implicitly understood by the philosophical audience of the time’.⁶⁰ This is the certainly the case of Nietzsche’s engagement with Kant. As will become clear,

The Birth of Tragedy and *Human, All Too* see Constâncio 2017, pp. 110-116. Whether or not our limited, relative, and anthropomorphic knowledge counts as a specific kind of truth for the early Nietzsche, I think that he does not consider it a source of value sufficient for fulfilling human beings’ most important moral, religious, and existential needs.

⁵⁸ As Forster 2008 shows, Kant largely intends his critical project to reform metaphysics as a defence from scepticism, more specifically from three forms of scepticism: first, scepticism about the external world; second, Hume’s scepticism about the notion of causation; and third, Pyrrhonian scepticism in relation to the antinomies of pure reason. According to Forster, each of these types of scepticism poses a threat to Kant’s project, though with varying degrees of danger. External-world scepticism does not play an extremely significant role in Kantian philosophy, since transcendental idealism, for Kant, entails a form of empirical realism, according to which we have direct epistemic access to experienceable objects – that is, to things as they appear to us in experience. The second and especially the third variety of scepticism, in Forster’s view, play a far more important role in Kantian philosophy. With regard to Humean scepticism, Kant’s defence is well known: the notion of causation is not derived a posteriori from experience out of habit; rather, it is one of the a priori concepts through which the human subject structures experience in collaboration with the a priori forms of intuitions (space and time). Although Kant does not directly discuss Pyrrhonism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Forster suggests that the antinomies of pure reason engenders a type of scepticism that may be effectively regarded as Pyrrhonian. Naturally tending towards metaphysics, reason unavoidably falls into antinomies, that is, into antithetical metaphysical propositions that are equally well-grounded. This condition, Forster notes, is analogous to the equipollence between opposite appearances or thoughts encountered and, to an extent, more or less deliberately generated by the Pyrrhonists. Kant’s strategy to defend metaphysics from the Pyrrhonian-like antinomies of reason is to deny transcendent knowledge to make room for rational, moral faith. On Kant and scepticism see also Guyer 2006, pp. 8-13.

⁵⁹ In his retrospective consideration of the *Unfashionable Observations* in *Ecce Homo* (1888/1904), Nietzsche spells out what his primary concerns were in *Schopenhauer as Educator*: first, ‘the problem of education’; second, his understanding of the philosopher; and third, his critique of academic philosophy, including even Kant (EH ‘The Untimely Ones’ §3, pp. 114-115). Nietzsche further clarifies that his major project in the piece on Schopenhauer was that of pointing to ‘a higher concept of culture’ (EH ‘The Untimely Ones’ §1, p. 112). The problem of scepticism in SE, I suggest, is framed in the context of these primary concerns.

⁶⁰ Church 2019, p. 12.

the problem of scepticism in SE §3 starts from the well-known Kantian thesis in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that we cannot attain theoretical, scientific knowledge about things-in-themselves or noumenal beings such as God and the immortal soul.

It is also important to bear in mind that the early Nietzsche regards himself as a Kantian or at least as philosophising in a largely post-Kantian tradition – including especially Kant, Schopenhauer,⁶¹ and Lange (BVN-1866, 526) – in that he accepts a version of Kant’s limitation of knowledge to phenomena and his denial of the possibility to know the thing-in-itself.⁶² In this section, I am not much interested in whether Nietzsche gets Kant right, nor in the intricacies of Nietzsche’s early reception of Kantian philosophy. I am primarily interested in the peculiar way Nietzsche construes scepticism as a psychological and cultural danger in SE §3. Indeed, I suggest, Nietzsche considers Kant’s denial of absolute, transcendent knowledge to be true but deadly in a similar fashion to what we saw in HL §8.⁶³ In SE §3 Nietzsche worries about the influence of

⁶¹ In attributing a ‘corrosive and disintegrating skepticism’ to Kant Nietzsche is likely drawing from Schopenhauer. In the *The World as Will and Representation* (1969[1819/1844]), Schopenhauer makes reference to Moses Mendelsohn’s famous designation of Kant as the ‘all-destroying [*Alleszermalmende*]’, that is, he who destroyed traditional metaphysics and, with it, endangers traditional religious and moral beliefs supported by metaphysical knowledge (1.‘Appendix’, p. 420). Schopenhauer himself highlights the destructive effect of the *Critique of Pure Reason* upon traditional metaphysics, especially on theology and rational psychology (1.‘Appendix’, p. 423), as well as upon religion (2.17, p. 168) and morality (2.17, p. 175). In the ‘Appendix’, Schopenhauer even associates this destructive effect with despair, regarding his philosophical project as a ‘midway between the doctrine of omniscience of the earlier dogmatism and the despair of the Kantian Critique (1.‘Appendix’, p. 428). However, it is important to bear in mind that, at least from 1868, Nietzsche did not believe in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, nor in the metaphysical basis of his ethics. See Janaway 1998.

⁶² The early Nietzsche explicitly commits himself to the denial of absolute, transcendent knowledge in various places. See, for example, ‘On Schopenhauer’, in WEN, pp. 1-8; BT §18, p. 87-88; NF-1872,19[37]; PPP §16, p. 130; TL §1. A large and still growing body of literature focuses on Nietzsche’s engagement with Kantian philosophy, with Kant himself but also with Schopenhauer and Lange. On Nietzsche and Kant see, especially, Hill 2003; Brusotti & Siemens 2017. For an account of the similarities and differences between Schopenhauer’s and Lange’s readings of Kant see, particularly, Hill 2003, pp. 13-19 and Constâncio 2017. On Nietzsche and Schopenhauer see Janaway 1998. On Nietzsche and Lange see Stack 1983.

⁶³ In German post-Kantian philosophy, as Franks 2005 notes, ‘[i]t is not unusual for a philosopher who considers himself a Kantian to think that, far from superseding skepticism, Kant has shown how deep a problem it really is, or even that Kant has given rise to a more thoroughgoing skepticism than any hitherto encountered’ (p. 154). Franks additionally notes that ‘some critics of Kant may criticize transcendental idealism because they find that it amounts to some new kind(s) of skepticism enabled by Kant’s revolution, whereas some post-Kantians may find that their acceptance of Kant’s revolution makes some new kind(s) of skepticism a source of anxiety for them’ (p. 147, n. 1). Moreover, it is not unusual for philosophers influenced by Kant to worry about the effect of Kantian philosophy upon culture and individuals. Consider the case of Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, the author of the *History and Spirit of Scepticism* (1794): ‘Skepticism begins to be an illness of the age, and – a rare appearance in history – to spread among more classes and to express its influence at large. [...] [T]he latest revolution in philosophy’ – by which he means Kantianism – has been ‘caused by it and has made it again the object of a deep philosophical investigation’ (p. iii, translated in Laursen 2015, p. 274.). Stäudlin, too, associates scepticism with despair (Laursen, 2015, p. 279). Although Stäudlin’s cultural prognosis is opposed to Nietzsche’s, the fundamental worry is the same. It seems to Nietzsche that Kant’s revolution ‘really penetrated and radically transformed very few people at all’ (SE §3, p. 188). This is because, according to Nietzsche’s observation, Kantian philosophy is mostly handled by academic philosophers who can see ‘only problems of knowledge’ as opposed to problems of life (SE §6, p. 224), having ‘no inkling of the suffering that goes hand in hand with certain kinds of knowledge (SE §6, p. 227). As we will see shortly, it is also because in SE Nietzsche is more or less confident that the edifying example of Schopenhauer can help us to fend off the psychological and cultural danger of the scepticism and relativism generated by Kant’s criticism. For

Kantian philosophy upon human life, particularly upon German culture and certain thinkers: ‘In a certain sense, *Kant’s* influence was also detrimental: for the belief in metaphysics has been lost. No one will be able to rely on his “thing in itself”’ (NF-1872,19[28]).

As an example, Nietzsche quotes a famous letter Kleist sent to his fiancé, confessing his desperate reaction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*: ‘We cannot decide whether what we call truth is really truth, or whether it only appears to us to be such. If the latter is the case, then the truth we collect here is nothing upon our death’ (SE §3, p. 188). As Nietzsche will jot down on a notebook of 1885, Kleist’s despair is a ‘sigh [...] over ultimate unknowability’ (NF-1885,34[126]).⁶⁴ On Kleist’s (and Nietzsche’s) readings, Kant demonstrates that we cannot have theoretical, scientific knowledge of an absolute truth capable of responding to the ultimate questions concerning our moral, religious, and existential aspirations. ‘The greatest suffering that exists for the individual’, Nietzsche writes in the UO on Wagner, is ‘the lack of a knowledge shared by all human beings, the lack of certainty in ultimate insights⁶⁵ [...]: all this makes him need art’ (WB §4, p. 278).

In the early writings, Nietzsche is still deeply influenced by Schopenhauer’s notion of the metaphysical need.⁶⁶ In his view, the health and flourishing of individuals as well as of the entirety of humanity depends on the satisfaction of this fundamental need for existential meaning.⁶⁷

Nietzsche, its sceptical and relativistic effect remains dangerous, nonetheless: if Kant began to have a popular effect, it would corrode and disintegrate cultural securities and even drive certain people to despair.

⁶⁴ In the 1886 preface to HH II, Nietzsche declares that in the period of *Schopenhauer as Educator* he was ‘already into the midst of moral skepticism and dissolution, *that is to say, just as much into the critique as into the deepening of all previous pessimism* – and already believed “in nothing anymore” [...] not in Schopenhauer either’ (HH II ‘Preface’ § 2, p. 4). According to this declaration, the early Nietzsche – like Kleist – was very much exposed to the danger of despairing at truth.

⁶⁵ These include questions such as ‘Why am I alive? What lesson is life supposed to teach me? How did I become what I am, and why do I suffer from being what I am? [...] What is the purpose of [my] life?’ (SE §4, pp. 205-206). In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, as we will see in Section 4.2, Nietzsche drastically changes this diagnosis, recommending indifference towards ultimate questions: ‘We have no *need* whatsoever for these certainties about the uttermost horizons in order for humanity to live fully and fitly’ (WS 16).

⁶⁶ In *The World as Will and Representation* (1969[1819/1844]), Schopenhauer describes the need for metaphysics as a fundamental aspect of the human nature, which distinguishes the human being (*animal metaphysicum*) from other animals. The metaphysical need, for Schopenhauer, arises naturally from wonder at and reflection upon the problem of existence, including death and the suffering and misery of life. As such it is ‘strong and ineradicable’ (2.17, pp. 160-162). Philosophy and religion, Schopenhauer argues, originate as human beings’ effort to make sense of these things. Both philosophy and religion attempt to satisfy the human need for metaphysics, albeit in different ways: philosophy or metaphysics, as Schopenhauer understands it, investigates the deepest and most difficult truths; religion presents truths about the human condition in an allegorical sense through dogmas and mysteries. According to Schopenhauer, religion is necessary for the vast majority of people – who do not engage in philosophical thinking – to satisfy their metaphysical needs (pp. 164-168). For Schopenhauer, ‘any attempt to found a religion on reason’ – as opposed as to allegory – ‘brings it under the rifle-fire of scepticism, and the heavy artillery of the *Critique of Pure Reason*’ (p. 168). Cf. NF-1872,19[32].

⁶⁷ See also NF-1872,19[175], 19[245],19[253]; 19[254]; NF-1873,21[13],29[8]; and NF-1873,29[17].

(Conversely, as we will see in Section 1.3, Nietzsche's intellectual, therapeutical, and cultural project in the middle writings is intended to combat this metaphysical need.)

As is made clear in BT §18, Kant and Schopenhauer reveal a tension between human existential needs and the limits of human knowledge, demonstrating that there are things we would like to know in order to live well but unfortunately cannot know (p. 87). This Kantian-Schopenhauerian insight, for the early Nietzsche, is at the basis of the tragic character of human life and knowledge.⁶⁸ In loose agreement with Kant and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche maintains that '[n]either the metaphysical, nor the ethical, nor the aesthetical significance of existence can be *proven*' by theoretical, scientific knowledge (NF-1872,19[123]). However, Nietzsche drastically diverges both from Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will⁶⁹ and from Kant's practical philosophy.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See NF-1872,19[248],19[319].

⁶⁹ Already in his 1868 notes 'On Schopenhauer', Nietzsche criticises Schopenhauer's characterisation of the thing-in-itself as will, considering the latter's attempt to be unsatisfactory and erroneous. For the early Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will is not a legitimate metaphysical discourse on the thing-in-itself; rather, it is 'a poetic intuition' (WEN, p. 3) and should be valued precisely as such. In a letter of 1866 to Carl von Gersdorff, Nietzsche writes that, in spite of his criticism of Schopenhauer, the latter's philosophy remains valuable as art with the fundamental task of 'edifying [*erbauen*]', to elevate us aesthetically and morally (BVN-1866, 517). On the possibility of such an 'aestheticist' interpretation of Schopenhauer see Gardner 2015, pp. 133-135. What Nietzsche tries to capture in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, I think, is nothing else than this edifying, uplifting value of Schopenhauer. The edifying and exemplary value of Schopenhauer in SE lies in the way he lived and thought as a true philosopher in opposition to the fashions of the age, in specific virtues of his way of living, thinking, and writing – not in the content of his doctrines. As Janaway 1998 rightly notes, in the essay Nietzsche mostly uses '*Schopenhauer as [an] exemplar*': here '[t]he figure of Schopenhauer functions as an instructive symbol and embodiment of the intellectual life for Germany and Europe' (pp. 14-15). However, it is important to specify that, in the *Unfashionable Observations* Nietzsche is primarily writing for a German audience. It is important to specify also that, in spite of the criticism of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, Nietzsche still highly values some parts of Schopenhauerian philosophy, especially in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1974[1851]). In the third *Observation*, for example, Nietzsche directly engages with Schopenhauer's thoughts on learning and education, his attempt to elaborate a wisdom of life, his criticism of academic philosophy, and his commitment to thinking for oneself.

⁷⁰ The early Nietzsche does not buy into the solution provided by Kantian practical philosophy for addressing the metaphysical need. In particular, Nietzsche is not fully convinced by Kant's famous strategy to deny absolute, transcendent knowledge in order to make room for practical faith. According to this strategy, from a practical standpoint we may, indeed we must, postulate God's existence, the soul's immortality, and freedom – that is, the ideas of traditional metaphysics that Kant had demonstrated to be unprovable in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is because, for Kant, although these ideas are not provable theoretically or scientifically, they remain in many ways enormously valuable for human life as a necessary source of moral and existential value. In all fairness, in the early notebooks Nietzsche even manifests a certain curiosity about Kant's attempt to make room for faith: '[a] cultural need drives Kant: he wants to *rescue* one domain from *knowledge*', that is, the domain of morality (NF-1872,19[34]). Nietzsche finds Kant's attempt 'remarkable' and, in a sense, analogous to his own (NF-1872,19[62]). The early Nietzsche, like Kant, wants to impose some limits onto the scientific pursuit of truth and knowledge (NF-1872,19[24]) in order to make room for art and to rescue the domain of ethical wisdom and value judgments from knowledge. For a discussion of Nietzsche's early strategy to make room for art and ethics see Hill 2003, pp. 113-114. Even in the early writings, though, Nietzsche does not fully endorse Kant's strategy to make room for a practical domain. Kant's attempt was to practically justify our beliefs in things in themselves, such as God, immortality, and freedom on account of their being necessary ideas of reason. Nietzsche's early reading of Kant, which – we should keep in mind – is largely mediated by Schopenhauer and Lange, leaves out Kantian practical reason. For the early Nietzsche, any attempt to metaphysically determine the thing-in-itself, such as the Kantian practical postulates of God and immortality or as the Schopenhauerian 'will', is 'created only with the help of a poetic intuition' ('On Schopenhauer', in WEN, p. 3). Unlike Kant, then, Nietzsche considers the ideas of God and immortality to be arbitrary products of the human mind and, in addition, to be even practically 'insufficient [...]' in answering our most

In SE §3, Nietzsche observes that Kantian philosophy, in spite of Kant's own attempts, is a danger for German culture because it demonstrates that the traditional religious and metaphysical beliefs – such as the belief in the existence of God – informing and guiding the modern way of life are theoretically or scientifically unprovable. When Nietzsche says that if Kantian philosophy begins to have a popular effect on German culture, we will become aware of it as a destructive scepticism, he means that modern human beings' existential needs will remain unfulfilled. This is construed as a form of scepticism because these beliefs cannot be proven true – at least from a theoretical and scientific standpoint;⁷¹ it is destructive because, unlike Kant, the fact that these beliefs cannot be proven true makes them untenable for Nietzsche: 'But how is *skepticism* possible? It appears to be the truly *ascetic* standpoint of the cognizant being. For it does not believe in belief and thereby destroys everything that benefits from belief' (NF-1873,29[8]).

Andreas Urs Sommer rightly notes that '[i]n his early work, when the formula for nihilism was not yet available to Nietzsche, occasional phenomena later classified as nihilistic (e.g. HL §8), are subsumed under the rubric of "scepticism"'.⁷² As Sommer more recently points out, '[i]n his first philosophical reflections, Nietzsche is well aware that a fundamental criticism of

profound needs' (NF-1872,19[34]). In general, Nietzsche takes the metaphysical belief that truth can be predicated of the nature of things to be a psychological projection. Consider the following posthumous fragments: 'Belief in a God and a Redeemer is nothing but mythological frills and has nothing to do with the essence of religion' (NF-1874,32[79]). See also NF 1872, 19[23], 19[175], 19[229]; NF-1873, 29[88]. In contrast to Kant, who 'clung to the university [and] sustained the appearance of religious faith', Nietzsche praises Schopenhauer who pursued philosophy as a way of life and sought a philosophical wisdom (SE §3, p. 184). Schopenhauer, according to the early Nietzsche, 'breaks with the elements of that faith and shows just how insufficient the Christian faith is in answering our most profound needs [focusing on] the question concerning the value of existence' (NF-1872,19[34]). In Section 3.4, I will show that in the middle writings Nietzsche associates Kant's strategy to make room for faith with a fideistic form of scepticism which can be used as a means for obscurantist ends.

⁷¹ '[T]o become skeptical', Nietzsche writes in a posthumous fragment, is to sigh over the realisation that "Truth is going down the drain" (NF-1872,19[216]). In all probability, here Nietzsche is quoting a passage from Diogenes Laertius 1931's chapter on Pyrrho, where it is said that some find Democritus to be a sceptic on account of his rejection of qualities: "Of a truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well" (p. 485, DL 2.9, 72).

⁷² Sommer 2006, p. 265. On the link between scepticism and nihilism in the late writings see also Busellato 2012, pp. 293-301. What is interesting is that Nietzsche is not the first thinker to establish a link between scepticism, nihilism, and Kantian philosophy. As Beiser 1987 reports, 'Jacobi has a striking word to designate the sceptical consequences of all philosophical investigation [and, in particular, of Kant's criticism]: "nihilism" (*Nihilismus*). He is indeed responsible for bringing this word into general use in modern philosophy. [...] The nihilist is someone who denies the existence of everything independent from the immediate contents of his own consciousness, whether external objects, other minds, God [...]. [T]he nihilist denies the existence not only of things but also of values. Since he denies the existence of an external world, other minds, a soul, and God, the nihilist discharges himself from all obligation to such pseud-entities' (pp. 81-82). Even though Jacobi was not one of Nietzsche's direct sources, I think that they both identify an analogous philosophical problem: Kant's denial of the possibility of knowing things in themselves could amount to the denial of the moral, religious, and existential significance or value of supersensible things such as God, immortality, and freedom for the human life.

knowledge has skeptical consequences [...], destroying all kinds of cultural and intellectual securities'.⁷³

The destruction of these securities, for Nietzsche, might drive specific⁷⁴ thinkers such as Kleist to despair of truth.⁷⁵ In the 1873 notebooks despair of truth is also construed as a philosophical 'affliction' or malady, caused by an excess of critical thinking, which profoundly upsets both the mind and the feelings (NF-1873,30[15]).⁷⁶

Hence, Nietzsche's worry about Kantian philosophy, scepticism, and despair in SE §3 is the following: is German culture prepared for the destructive impact of Kant's critique of metaphysical knowledge? How are we modern human beings - and, in particular, the Germans - to live if the beliefs that have informed and guided our way of life are proven not to be scientifically, theoretically true? Are we left with despair, as in the case of Kleist, as the only possible reaction to this realisation?⁷⁷

Confronted with the danger of '[t]ragic resignation', Nietzsche proposes in his early writings that '[o]nly art is capable of saving us' (NF-1872,19[319]): 'The supreme welfare of human beings lies rather in illusions' (NF-1873,29[8]) - that is, in something that we cannot know (at least not in absolute terms) but that we need to believe in order to live a happy and flourishing life.⁷⁸ For the early Nietzsche, then, the eminent task of philosophy, in concert with art, is not to

⁷³ Sommer 2018, p. 445.

⁷⁴ In SE §3, the experience of despair is presented as a danger to a small number of thinkers and, only potentially, to the majority of the people. The few thinkers (the most active and noble spirits), who start from Kantian philosophy and who are not only scholars but complete human beings, anticipate what could be the ultimate consequence of criticism for everybody, functioning as a thermometer for German culture. As suggested by Church 2019, in the UO Nietzsche largely relies on the Romantic ideal of a unity between 'cognitive and affective natures' (p. 22). See also SE §7, p. 239. Although, this desperate experience is regarded as a 'natural way' of experiencing the destructive scepticism engendered by Kant (SE §3, p. 188), Nietzsche is not recommending such a desperate response. As we will see shortly, the contrary is true. He is simply saying that, in measuring philosophy in relation to one's life, far beyond an exclusively theoretical and academic interest, it is natural to be deeply affected, both mentally and emotionally, by the sceptical destruction of existential securities.

⁷⁵ Reginster 2006 identifies despair as a specific form of nihilism in Nietzsche (especially in the late writings): 'Despair is the belief that what is most important to us is unattainable'; 'nihilism, in this sense, is the conviction that our highest values cannot be realised' (p. 28). He distinguishes despair from nihilism as disorientation, that is, as a lack of normative guidance (p. 26). In my view, Reginster tends to treat despair and disorientation merely as philosophical positions, failing to sufficiently bring out their psychological and socio-cultural dimensions which, I think, are prominent in Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism both in the early and late writings. Nevertheless, Reginster's terminology is helpful to highlight the link between despair and nihilism in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Moreover, I suggest that at least in the early writings despair and disorientation are two inextricably linked experiences of scepticism.

⁷⁶ See also NF-1873,29[230].

⁷⁷ As we will in Section 1.3, also when discussing the problem of scepticism in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche continues to ask these sorts of questions, albeit in the context of a different philosophical project and of a broader cultural perspective.

⁷⁸ See also NF-1872,19[52].

search for truth and knowledge but to address and satisfy the human need for illusions, providing life and action with depth and meaning. In particular, Nietzsche highlights the ‘necessity of art and illusion’ to counter ‘[a]bsolute skepticism’ (NF-1872,19[21]). In the 1872 notebooks, Nietzsche writes that ‘[n]o one can live in this skepticism’ – that engendered by Kantian philosophy: ‘[w]e must get beyond this skepticism, we must *forget* it’ (NF-1872,19[125]). Importantly, then, Nietzsche defines the task of philosophy, in concert with art and in contrast to scepticism:

The philosopher of tragic knowledge. He controls the unleashed drive for knowledge, not by means of a new metaphysics. He does not establish a new faith. He senses it to be tragic that the ground of metaphysics has been cut away and can never be satisfied by the colourful kaleidoscope of the sciences. He works toward the construction of a new life; he returns to art its right. The philosopher of desperate knowledge will be consumed with blind science: knowledge at any price. For the tragic philosopher the image of existence is made complete by the insight that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form. He is not a skeptic. Here it is necessary to create a concept: for skepticism is not the aim [...]. Knowledge in the service of the best life. One must even desire illusion – that is what makes it tragic. (NF-1872,19[35])

In SE, I suggest, Schopenhauer is construed as the example or exemplar of the tragic philosopher who wards off the danger of the scepticism produced by Kant. Moreover, in the move from 1872 to 1874 Nietzsche starts to think of a specific form of philosophical wisdom – in parallel and, at times, even as an alternative to art – as a therapy for scepticism.⁷⁹

Summarising the danger of despair of truth in SE §3, Nietzsche specifies that the danger of scepticism for thinkers is in fact twofold. First, as we have seen, desperation or resignation, which now is expounded as following: it is easy for individuals naturally endowed with perspicacity who ‘having grown accustomed to seeking the pro and con in things, [...] to become confused about truth itself, so that [they] must live without courage and confidence, denying, doubting, rankling, dissatisfied, in half-hearted hopefulness, in anticipated disappointment’ (SE §3, p. 192). The second danger is scholasticism: it is easy for a thinker, Nietzsche writes, ‘by

⁷⁹ While Nietzsche’s early idea that philosophy is more akin to art than science has been frequently investigated in the secondary literature, his early notion of wisdom certainly deserves more attention. On Nietzsche’s idea of philosophy as an aesthetic practice aimed at promoting an affirmation of life see, for example, Came 2014. Ansell-Pearson 2013a is one of the few commentators who notice that in the early writings Nietzsche conceives of philosophy also as a specific type of wisdom or *sophia* understood as the sense for taste and as the capacity for discrimination (pp. 232-237). Cf. NF-1872, 19[86]. As Ansell-Pearson spells out, ‘[f]or Nietzsche, this suggests the need for a discriminating taste, and his argument is that whilst philosophical thinking is of the same kind as scientific thinking [on account of their both being conceptual modes of thinking], it differs from it in that it directs itself “toward great things and possibilities”. He duly notes that the concept of greatness is amorphous, being partly aesthetic and partly moral. For Nietzsche, the great is that which departs from the normal and the familiar [...]. Humanity, he further states, can only grow through admiration for what is rare and great in life and culture’ (pp. 233-234). Ansell-Pearson also clarifies the link between the task of wisdom and that of art in Nietzsche’s early writings. This link, according to Ansell-Pearson, lies in Nietzsche’s notion of ‘poetry’ or ‘invention’ (*Dichtung*): philosophy as both an aesthetic practice and a form of wisdom opens up space for, and potentially creates, new possibilities of life (pp. 234-235).

giving free rein to his talent, to perish as a human being and merely live a ghostly existence in the realm of “pure knowledge” (SE §3, p. 192) – this is especially easy when dealing with Kant (SE §3, p. 184).⁸⁰

The second danger is linked to scepticism in two ways. On the one hand, a merely scholastic or scholarly approach to philosophy, for Nietzsche, fails to identify and thus avoid the detrimental consequences of scepticism – keeping theoretical problems separate from the problems of life and culture. Academic philosophers, then, fail to fulfil the task of cultural therapy: they are ‘never brave like Lucretius and outraged at the afflictions that oppressed humankind’ (SE §8, p. 248). On the other hand, Nietzsche observes, philosophical scholasticism even generates an unhelpful form of scepticism: in scholarly disputes ‘brooding, doubt, and contradiction are permitted’ (SE §3, p. 189). This makes it difficult to synthesize and encapsulate a wisdom capable of offering guidance for how to live (SE §2, p. 178-179).⁸¹ By endlessly accumulating arguments and counterarguments about virtually anything, and fabricating doubts which are at times unnecessary or even illegitimate, scholars end up ‘dissecting and dissolving all firm beliefs’ (SE §4, p. 198), ‘no matter how venerable’ or how valuable for life (SE §6, p. 225). In this way, scientific, academic enquiry ‘produces a disquiet, a confusion in the soul of modern human beings that condemns them to be unfruitful and joyless’ (SE §2, p. 179).⁸² With respect to Kantian philosophy, Nietzsche specifies that ‘[academic philosophers] have begun to take pleasure in maintaining that they are actually only the border guards and watchmen of the learned disciplines [*Wissenschaften*].⁸³ To this end they are served especially well by Kantian doctrine, which they are intent on making into an idle skepticism to which soon no one will even pay any attention (SE §8, p. 248).

According to Nietzsche’s observation, this is for two reasons: first, the discourse on Kantian philosophy has remained mostly confined to university. Second, Schopenhauer has

⁸⁰ See also SE §7, p. 239.

⁸¹ See also SE §3, pp.183, 184; §6, p. 226-227; §6, p. 230.

⁸² I will return to Nietzsche’s middle and late criticism of the unhelpful scepticism produced by an exclusively academic, scholarly practice of philosophy in Section 3.4.

⁸³ As Beiser 2015 reports, in the second half of the nineteenth century, after the decline of speculative idealism and romanticism, there began a Neo-Kantian period of German university philosophy. Neo-Kantian scholars returned to Kant’s criticism to rethink the relation between philosophy and the positive sciences. These had become autonomous from philosophy and even taken over some of the areas which were previously of its competence. Beiser notes that initially neo-Kantian scholarship almost exclusively focused on the theoretical side of philosophy, heavily neglecting questions about ethics, politics, and aesthetics, and that, when started considering the practical side in response to the challenge posed by the rise of pessimism in German culture (from the mid-1860s), its attempt turned out to be largely unoriginal and disappointing. When Nietzsche speaks of academic philosophers, I think he is frequently referring to these neo-Kantian scholars.

provided us with a valuable philosophical example to overcome the dangers of scepticism – both those of despairing at truth and of scholasticism: on the one hand ‘Kleist was lacking Schopenhauer’ (NF-1873,29[104]); on the other, as we will see in the following, Schopenhauer pursued (in an exemplary way) a wisdom of life without ‘getting himself entangled in a web of conceptual scholasticism’ (SE §3, p. 189).

After Kant, for Nietzsche, Schopenhauer is significant to us as ‘the guide [...] who guides us out of the cave of sceptical disgruntlement or of critical renunciation up to the heights of tragic contemplation’ (SE §3, pp. 188-189). ‘His greatness’, Nietzsche goes on to say, ‘lies in the fact that he dealt with the picture [*Bild*] of life as a whole in order to interpret⁸⁴ it as a whole’ (SE §3, p. 189). It should be clear that what Nietzsche calls ‘the picture of life’ is not Schopenhauer’s metaphysical characterisation of the thing-in-itself as will. Not surprisingly, Nietzsche speaks of a ‘picture’ or ‘image’ of life as opposed to the metaphysical explanation of the inner nature of the world.⁸⁵ Schopenhauer’s picture of life as a whole is contrasted with the narrow and fragmented perspective of the academic, scientific enquire (SE §3, p. 189),⁸⁶ and with the nit-picking academic practice of philosophy in German universities, which, according to Nietzsche, lacks a wider concern with the urgent problem of human life and culture.

The total picture of life, Nietzsche suggests, provides a ‘touchstone’: that is, it offers guidance or orientation for how to live – whereas the ‘fields of learning are threads that have no end and merely serve to make our path through life more confused and labyrinthine’ (SE §3, p. 189). In SE §3, then, the example of Schopenhauer – as a human being rather than a metaphysician⁸⁷ – is considered to be important especially for German culture because it

⁸⁴ Nietzsche characterises this form of interpretation as deciphering ‘the hieroglyphs of life’ (SE §3, p. 189). Cf. Schopenhauer 1958[1844], WWR 2.17, p. 182.

⁸⁵ In *The World as Will and Representation* itself, as Gardner 2015 notes, ‘there are moments when [...] philosophy is described as merely depositing in concepts “a reflected image [*reflektiertes Abbild*]” of the inner nature of the world’ (p. 133).

⁸⁶ See also SE §6, p. 226.

⁸⁷ It is clear that, for Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s example does not lie in his metaphysics-based ethics. Schopenhauer’s philosophy, Nietzsche exhorts, should not be interpreted scholarly but ‘individually, by the individual for himself alone, in order to gain insight into his own misery and need, into his own limitations, in order to become acquainted with antidotes and consolations’ (SE §3, pp. 189-190) – initially as a form of self-therapy and, then, as a cultural therapy (SE §3, p. 190). Among these antidotes and consolations Nietzsche mentions, in passing, ‘sacrifice of the ego, subjugation to the noblest intentions, above all to justice and compassion’ (SE §3, p. 190). In the middle writings and starting from HH, Nietzsche will become highly critical of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical-moral notions of self-denial and compassion, coming to describe them as ‘rapturous [*schwärmerischen*] and worthless poppycock’ (D 142). See Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 25. But in the early writings, too, Nietzsche does not fully buy into Schopenhauer metaphysics-based ethics: ‘[f]or the moment’, he sees ‘no other possibility for praxis than Schopenhauer’s worldly wisdom, wisdom for the more profound needs’ (NF-187,30[15]). Here, Nietzsche is likely referring to ‘Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life’ in *Parenga and Paralipomena* as opposed to *The World as Will and Representation*. The philosophical task, I want to stress, is not merely to adhere to the picture of life drawn by Schopenhauer, nor to his ethical doctrines. Nietzsche, in fact, seems to deliberately avoid referring to the actual

exemplifies the need for a philosophical wisdom and philosophy as a way life capable of showing us a way out from the sceptical sense of dissatisfaction, disorientation, and even despair generated by Kantian philosophy.

1.2. The Reversal of Nietzsche's Attitude Towards Scepticism Between His Early and Middle Writings

In this section, I endeavour to show that between the *Unfashionable Observations* and *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche completely reverses his attitude towards scepticism, particularly towards the scepticisms he had associated with historical knowledge (*History for Life*) and with Kantian philosophy (*Schopenhauer as Educator*).

As Paul Franco points out, '[o]f all the reversal in *Human, All Too Human*, perhaps none is so striking as its exaltation of the modern historical sense, the feature that he had so brilliantly criticized in [HL]'.⁸⁸ Indeed, Nietzsche moves away from the idea that philosophy, in concert with art, should promote the ahistorical and suprahistorical standpoint in contrast to an excess or misuse of historical knowledge; and he comes to fully embrace a historical mode of philosophizing – as well as, I suggest, the scepticism generated by it (HH 2). As Keith Ansell-Pearson notes, in contrast to the early writings (in which Nietzsche focused on the need to elevate human beings) in HH 'there is now the need to deflate and critique the "ideals" of humankind and to highlight the "human, all too human" origins and sources of our ideas and values'.⁸⁹ In the opening aphorisms of HH, Nietzsche makes it abundantly clear that free-spirited philosophy needs history and natural science, ending up advocating in public all the doctrines he held to be true but deadly in HL §8. Now, he maintains that free-spirited investigation needs to pay attention to the evolutionary and historical becoming of human beings – of their cognitive capacities, of their ideas, of their moral conceptions, of their affectivity, as well as of their customs and

contents of such an example and worldly wisdom in SE §3. As Ansell-Pearson 2013a explains '[t]he task is to allow ourselves to be inspired by Schopenhauer's example and employ his worldly wisdom for practical matters, and thus fight for an "improved physis" in our search for greatness – for what is excellent and extra-ordinary' (p. 241). In contrast to Schopenhauerian philosophy, which largely results in renunciation, resignation, and willessness, for Nietzsche, the therapeutic and pedagogical example of Schopenhauer leads to improvement of the individual and even of culture (SE §3, p. 190). Nietzsche spells out his early conception of the transformative, ameliorative task of philosophy in WB §3: 'it seems to me that the most important question in all of philosophy is the extent to which things possess an unalterable nature and form, so that, once this question has been answered, we can with relentless courage set about the *improvement of that aspect of the world recognized as being alterable*' (p. 272).

⁸⁸ Franco 2011, pp. 45-46. See also Brobjer 2004.

⁸⁹ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 28.

traditions. Furthermore, he observes, ‘knowledge of the [...] historical becoming [...] has for the first time shattered the ancient walls between nature and spirit, human and animal, morality and physics’ (MOM 185).

Starting from 1878, Nietzsche no longer diagnoses history as a deadly cultural sickness, but he even links it to a new form of spiritual therapy (WS 188). Accordingly, he also criticises the ahistorical and suprahistorical standpoints which he had construed as antidotes to the scepticism generated by historical knowledge. The middle Nietzsche is convinced that ‘there will never again be a religiously circumscribed horizon of life and of culture’ (HH 234), and that even art as an ahistorical and suprahistorical power is at its twilight (HH 223). As in HL, Nietzsche continues to see a fundamental difference between science and philosophy – or, more precisely, traditional metaphysics and his early tragic philosophy: ‘[t]he latter wants what art wants, to give to life and action as much depth and meaning as possible; in the former one seeks knowledge and nothing further – whatever may come from it’ (HH 6).⁹⁰ But, completely reversing his earlier position, in HH Nietzsche promotes the standpoint of scientific enquiry in opposition to the suprahistorical standpoint of art and religion. The task now is not to mobilise the artistic and religious powers to provide the belief in or illusion of something eternal and stable in meaning. As free spirits, Nietzsche states, ‘we need history’ to become ‘a hundred-eyed’ for the purpose of self-knowledge – that is, the knowledge of humanity – as well as of ‘self-determination and self-education’ (MOM 223). In clear contrast to HL, in HH Nietzsche portrays the philosophical task with respect to culture as follows:

We *cannot* go back to the old, we *have* burned our boats; all that remains is to be bold, regardless of what may result. Let us simply *step forward*, let us simply move on! Perhaps our behaviour will at least look like *progress*.⁹¹ (HH 248)

In HL §10, as we saw in the previous section, the task of the philosopher as physician of culture was to circumscribe the cultural horizon and to reinforce cultural securities – or, as Nietzsche phrases it, to make land, escaping the infinite hopelessness and scepticism of the passionately seeking but fruitless voyage in the strange, dark sea. Conversely, in HH the task of free-spirited

⁹⁰ See also HH 146, 150, 151, 220, 222.

⁹¹ This nautical imaginary is further developed in D 575, GS 124, and GS 343. The problem of scepticism is often treated in connection with the images of the voyage, the sea, and the horizon but, in the course of the maturation of Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is associated with different moods. In ‘History of Life’, this sceptical voyage is associated with hopelessness; in *Human, All Too Human* with courage and with what we may call a melancholic hope (HH 248); in *Dawn* with the passion of knowledge; in *The Gay Science* with terror and freedom (GS 124); and in the fifth book of GS even with cheerfulness (GS 343). This imaginary is further elaborated in BGE 23 and in the HH II ‘Preface’ §1, p. 6. See Mitcheson 2015; 2017.

philosophy is to embark on both a desperate and hopeful exploration in this strange, dark sea,⁹² expanding and opening the horizon of modern culture.⁹³

Moreover, in the first chapter of *HH* Nietzsche embraces and seeks to actively contribute to a Kantian-inspired critique of traditional metaphysics – which, as we saw, in *SE* he had regarded as a danger for individuals and culture.⁹⁴ In particular, Nietzsche provides a Kantian-inspired critique of the notion of the thing-in-itself (*HH* 16) and of what he calls the ‘metaphysical world’ (*HH* 9, 21). As in his early writings, in *HH* Nietzsche explicitly endorses Kant’s thesis that human knowledge is limited to phenomena (*HH* 19); but he no longer regards this view as inherently dangerous or deadly. Although Nietzsche takes the steps from a Kantian or Post-Kantian framework, as we will see in Sections 3.4 and 4.1, Nietzsche selects, appropriates, and transforms parts of Kant’s criticism in the context of his free-spirited philosophy for his intellectual, therapeutical, and cultural aims. Now, Nietzsche sees in the sceptical, destructive effect of Kantian philosophy an emancipatory potential as a tool to liberate the human spirit or mind from the erroneous beliefs of religion and metaphysics.⁹⁵ As we will see, Nietzsche combines Kant’s denial of absolute, transcendent knowledge with scientific enquiry – especially, history, natural science, psychological observation, and philology – to refute religious and metaphysical beliefs, such as the belief in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul (*HH* 9; *D* 95, 501). In the middle writings, it is important to note, Nietzsche is engaged in a historical and psychological refutation which is intended to reveal that these beliefs are largely engendered by error, self-deception, passion (such as the fear of death) and need, and that, accordingly, we do not believe in them on account of the best methods of knowledge (*HH* 9).⁹⁶ (Here, Nietzsche returns to Kant: we do not and cannot know, at least scientifically, about the first and last things of religion and metaphysics.)

Nietzsche’s attempt to refute these beliefs is not a purely theoretical matter; rather, he has therapeutic and cultural aims. He seeks to free the human mind from the intellectual and emotional excesses associated with religious and metaphysical beliefs: in particular, unjustified

⁹² See also *NF*-1875,6[48].

⁹³ Nietzsche remains aware that ‘the whole history of culture opens itself to our gaze as a tangle of evil and noble, true and false conceptions’ and that it is possible that ‘the sight of these breaking waves makes us feel seasick’ (*HH* 238); but now he attributes to historical knowledge an essential, indeed defining, role within his free-spirited philosophy.

⁹⁴ On Nietzsche’s (Post-)Kantianism in *Human, All Too Human* see, for example, Constâncio 2017.

⁹⁵ In Section 3.4, I will show that, in Nietzsche’s view, nevertheless, Kantian philosophy can also be used as a tool for a subtler obscurantism.

⁹⁶ See also *D* 95, 501.

fears, anxieties, and burdens as well as forms of fanaticism. If in the early writings Nietzsche believed that philosophy had the task of responding, in concert with art, to the human beings' metaphysical need, in the middle writings he becomes highly critical of this need.⁹⁷ Now, Nietzsche construes the task of philosophy, in concert with science, as a therapy for or against the metaphysical need: he no longer considers it a fundamental need of human beings but an after-effect of religious and metaphysical explanations of the world that must be weakened and extirpated in order to cultivate a higher form of culture, one in which knowledge has a primary role and the full potentialities of human life are opened up.⁹⁸ From a psychological standpoint, as will see in Sections 1.4 and in Chapter 4, in the middle writings Nietzsche links scepticism to forms of tranquillity, joy, and even cheerfulness rather than to despair.

Starting from HH, as it is well-known, Nietzsche 'holds that Schopenhauer, his great early educator, can no longer serve the role of a model'.⁹⁹ If in SE §3 Schopenhauer was the example of the tragic philosopher who, by interpreting the picture of life as whole, taught us how to ward off the dangers of scepticism caused by Kantian philosophy, then I suggest that in HH Nietzsche aligns himself with scepticism. It is not often noticed that, in *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* Nietzsche openly attacks the task of painting the picture of the whole life which he had attributed to Schopenhauer in SE as a defence and remedy against scepticism:

⁹⁷ In the middle writings, Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer's notion of the metaphysical need, changing his mind about its origin, its therapy, and its aftereffects. This rejection begins to take place at least in the notebook of 1876: 'The so-called metaphysical need proves nothing about any reality corresponding to that need' (NF-1876,19[85], in WEN, p. 221). See also NF-1876,23[19]. On Nietzsche's rejection of the metaphysical need in the middle writings see, especially, Franco 2011, pp. 11, 19, 36, 138; and Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 9, 25-29, 35, 53, 69. First, Nietzsche comes to think that the metaphysical need is 'an acquired and consequently also a transitory need' (HH 131); '[it] is not the *origin* of religions, as Schopenhauer supposed, but merely a late offshoot' (GS 151). See also GS 205; NF-1880,6[290]. Hence, according to Nietzsche's hypothesis, this need is not part of human nature but it is acquired as the result of a series of errors in reasoning (HH 27, 131) - perhaps, facilitated by what, in *Dawn*, Nietzsche calls '[t]he fear of the unintelligible' (D 40): 'what led to the positing of "another world" in primeval times was not some impulse or need but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, a failure of the intellect' (GS 151). 'For every religion', Nietzsche observes, has been born out of fear and need; on errant paths of reason'; and 'philosophers often philosophized under the influence of traditional religious habits [for example, in the Middle Ages], or at least under the ancient hereditary power of that "metaphysical need" [for example, Schopenhauer]' (HH 110). See also HH 111. Second, Nietzsche states, 'we should finally also learn that the needs that religion satisfied and that [metaphysical] philosophy is now supposed to satisfy are not unalterable; we can *weaken* and *exterminate* even them' (HH 27). Starting from HH, indeed, the eradication of the metaphysical need becomes one of the chief therapeutic roles of free-spirited philosophy, in concert with science (HH 26, 27, 131). As Ansell-Pearson 2018a nicely puts it, for Nietzsche, '[t]he scientific spirit is now to be cultivated at the expenses of our inherited metaphysical need' (p. 28). Third, Nietzsche is well aware of the fact that we have become accustomed to this need and that its eradication will come at a cost: certain people will be 'troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation' (GS 151).

⁹⁸ Nietzsche directly alludes to an opposition between scepticism and the metaphysical need: in HH 131, he states that '[h]unger [that is, the need for metaphysics] does not prove that the food that would sate it *exists* [that is, a metaphysical world], yet it wishes for this food'; in NF-1880,6[122], he construes scepticism as a rare passion in opposition to such a metaphysical hunger, one that would drive us to starve rather than eat something indigest to us.

⁹⁹ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 27.

The picture of life. - The task of painting *the picture of life*, however often it may have been set by poets and philosophers, is nevertheless nonsensical: even in the hands of the greatest painter-thinkers only pictures and miniatures *from a single* life, that is, from their own lives, have been produced - and nothing else is even possible. Amid what is becoming, something that is itself becoming cannot reflect itself as fixed and enduring, as any specific 'thing'. (MOM 19)

Now the task of painting the picture of the whole life is even considered to be impossible and nonsensical. Painter-thinkers such as Schopenhauer have the inmodest pretention to interpret life as a *whole* when, in fact, they can only deal with a portion of it based on their limited, particular perspectives on life and ultimately on their own lives. Second, they want to paint *the* picture of life as if the latter were a fixed thing when, in fact, it is constantly subject to becoming.¹⁰⁰ (They also lack historical sensibility.) Third, they fail to do justice to the complexity of life: attempting to decipher all the aspects of life on the basis of a single philosophical principle, they end up providing a simplistic solution. In contrast, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche affirms that he has 'too much curiosity, too many doubts and high spirits to be happy with a ridiculously crude answer' (EH 'Clever' §1, p. 85).

In particular, according to the middle Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer has turned out to be a disaster for science, due to [his] rage for generalization' (MOM 5): he invented the notion of the will by means of which he attempted to solve simultaneously and definitively all the problems of metaphysics, ethics, and of existence in general (MOM 5). All of this is now brutally dismissed as a 'mystical nonsense' (MOM 5). As Nietzsche sees it, Schopenhauer's philosophy is ultimately mastered by the metaphysical or religious need (HH 26) - which is based on 'the presentiment "that the essence of things is one"' (HH 131); such a presumption is associated with a suspicious form of intuition as opposed to the 'carefully inferred truths' of scientific enquiry (HH 131).¹⁰¹

The task of painting the whole picture of life, as we saw, was construed as a strategy to provide a way out from the sceptical disorientation and dissatisfaction caused by Kantian philosophy and by the scholarly disciplines. In HH and in the subsequent middle writings, Nietzsche continues to think that philosophy should be practiced as a way of life, seeking to transform the self and society. Nietzsche also remains deeply critical of academic philosophy¹⁰² and, as we will see in Section 4.3, especially of the scholastic or scholarly form of scepticism

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche provides a similar critique also of Schopenhauer as a metaphysician who relied on the distinction between appearances and thing-in-itself (HH 16).

¹⁰¹ Moreover, as we will see in Section 5.2, Nietzsche criticises Schopenhauer's judgmental stance on life, especially his pessimism about life (HH 28, 32, 33; MOM 33). Schopenhauer's pessimism, Nietzsche suggests, largely depends on his particular perspective on life: 'Schopenhauer's philosophy remains the mirror image of an ardent and melancholy *youth*' (MOM 271); it is not the result of his effort to do justice to life but of his melancholy temperament or mood (MOM 33).

¹⁰² See, for example, HH 282; WS 171.

promoted by ‘hair-splitting metaphysicians’ (MOM 27). But in the middle writings, as we will see, he embraces the sceptical disorientation as a cultural characteristic of and even opportunity for modernity. Indeed, now Nietzsche represents the modern philosopher as a free spirit, as a wanderer exploring and even finding pleasure in such a sceptical disorientation (HH 638). Accordingly, the task of drawing the picture of the whole of life exemplified by Schopenhauer in SE §3, I suggest, is now regarded as a dogmatic, anti-sceptical practice unsuitable to the needs of modernity. Here, I want to draw attention to a largely neglected aspect of Nietzsche’s criticism of Schopenhauer in the middle writings: Schopenhauer is criticised for being a fundamentally dogmatic or anti-sceptical thinker.¹⁰³

This line of criticism, I think, can be found especially in HH 261 and D 547 where Nietzsche discusses the figure of the tyrants of the spirit, including the Greek philosophers and Schopenhauer, respectively. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford rightly note that Nietzsche’s criticism of the tyrants of the spirit is one of the important changes in the turn from his early to his middle writings.¹⁰⁴ As Ansell-Pearson specifies, in the early writings Nietzsche admired the earliest Greek philosophers of the tragic age – as well as Schopenhauer, who was interpreted as their modern reincarnation – ‘as creative thinkers who give us new images of the world and establish new modes of life’.¹⁰⁵ Ansell-Pearson and Bamford further remark that in the middle writings Nietzsche ‘proclaims that the time of these tyrants of the spirit is over [...] There is a need for free spirits appropriate to the requirements of the modern age and these spirits aim to discover new possibilities of life’.¹⁰⁶ What changes between the early and middle writings, I propose, is the manner of discovery of these new possibilities of life: while the tyrants of the spirits establish new images and modes of life *dogmatically*, modern free spirits search for and potentially discover new possibilities of life *sceptically*. To show this let me provide a reading of the two aphorisms.

HH 261 contrasts the period of the tyrants of the spirit with modernity. At the time of the Greek tragic philosophers, Nietzsche observes, ‘[knowledge (*Erkenntnis*)] could still hope to reach the center of all being with a single leap and from there to solve the riddle of the world.

¹⁰³ For example, it is noteworthy that, although Schopenhauer has a keen interest in Hellenistic philosophy, especially Stoicism, in his writings we find no engagement with or appreciation of ancient scepticism.

¹⁰⁴ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

¹⁰⁵ See Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. Ansell Pearson 2018 notes that ‘Our task is now to take our time in our search; we are no longer looking for a single answer to our questions or some ultimate solution to the riddle of existence’ (p. 11).

These philosophers had a robust faith in themselves and in their “truths” (HH 261).¹⁰⁷ Among the Greeks, the quest for knowledge was conceived as the heroic attempt of the individual philosopher to find a single solution to the riddle of the world: every great thinker ‘believing himself to be the possessor of the absolute truth, became a tyrant’ and placed himself in an agonistic contention with other great spiritual tyrants, of the present and of the past (HH 261).¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche observes that in modernity ‘the period of the tyrants of the spirit is over’: ‘contending dogmas [*Gegenlehre*] and skepticism [*Skepsis*] now speak too powerfully, too loudly’ (HH 261).¹⁰⁹

Nietzsche returns to the topic of the tyrants of the spirit in D 547, this time in relation to Schopenhauer – who, like the early Greek philosophers, has the ‘boundless ambition’ and ‘secret wish’ ‘[t]o solve everything at one fell swoop, with one single word’, ‘to solve all questions with *one* answer’ (the will), compressing ‘the problem of the world into the simplest riddle-form’ and overlooking or roughly simplifying its complexity. From this, Nietzsche concludes, ‘the quest for knowledge, by and large has been held back by the *moral narrow-mindedness* of its disciples and that in the future it must be pursued with a higher and *more magnanimous* basic feeling. “What do I matter!” stands over the door of the future thinker’ (D 547). In a note from the period of *Dawn*, Nietzsche spells out what he means by magnanimity, particularly in the intellectual sphere: ‘*Intellectual magnanimity* consists in overcoming the thirst for absolute values and eternal things with the knowledge of relativity and the *love for everything that has a short life and transforms itself* (instead of contempt)’ (NF-1880, 7[212]).¹¹⁰ Intellectual magnanimity is one of the intellectual virtues – alongside modesty, honesty, mistrust, circumspection, caution, and justice – which, as we will see, inform Nietzsche’s commitment to scepticism in the middle writings. The sense in which Schopenhauer is anti-sceptical thinker or, in any case, a thinker unsuitable for the sceptical needs of modernity will become even clearer in the next section.

¹⁰⁷ As Corcilius 2020 notes one of the common features of early Greek philosophers is their ultimate philosophical ambition: that is, ‘the project, shared by many, if not all, cosmologists, of explaining the entire universe and everything in it. These thinkers offered – each in their own way – “theories of everything” with an unrestricted scope and the ambition of giving definitive and ultimate answers. Despite the differences in their particular doctrines, they all aimed at explanations to ultimate questions such as “where does it all come from?”, “Where will it all go?”’ (p. 61).

¹⁰⁸ The tyrants of the spirit then seem to exhibit a mental attitude that is comparable to ‘conviction’ which in the ninth chapter of *Human, All Too Human* is defined as ‘the belief that we possess the absolute truth about some specific point of knowledge’ (HH 630).

¹⁰⁹ See also HH 631 and HH 634.

¹¹⁰ My translation.

1.3. Scepticism and the Problem of Culture: From a German to a European (and Cosmopolitan) Perspective

In Section 1.1, we saw that in the *Unfashionable Observations* the problem of scepticism was inextricably linked to the problem of culture: the scepticisms generated by historical knowledge (HL) and Kantian philosophy (SE) were construed as dangers for individuals and culture or even as diseases damaging cultural health and flourishing. In this section, I show that in HH, too, the problem of scepticism is still linked to the problem of culture, highlighting that, in the context of Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy, this link acquires fundamentally positive connotations. In HH, scepticism is no longer considered a cultural danger to combat but a defining characteristic of modernity to be embraced and even promoted.

As Paul Franco points out, the cultural problem remains central in *Human, All Too Human*: 'Nietzsche's reflections on culture constitute the climax of his argument [...] the axis around which all his other reflections - on metaphysics, religion, and art - revolve'.¹¹¹ In the move from the early to the middle writings, however, his thinking about culture undergoes an important development. Franco neatly captures this, noting that in HH Nietzsche argues that 'the "higher culture" of the future will be based on knowledge and science rather than on religion, art, or metaphysical philosophy'.¹¹² For Nietzsche, I suggest, this higher culture based on scientific enquiry is in many respects sceptical.

According to Nietzsche's observation in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, as we saw in Section 1.1, the destructive scepticism brought about by Kantian philosophy was only a *potential* danger for German culture. In the third UO, Nietzsche seemed to be firmly convinced that Kant had not yet had and will not have a popular effect. In HH, he reformulates his prediction about the impact of scepticism upon culture, coming to announce its probable victory as a way of thinking and living in modernity:

Presumed triumph of skepticism [Muthmaasslicher Sieg der Skepsis]. - Let us concede for once the skeptical starting point: supposing there were no other, metaphysical world and all of the explanations taken from metaphysics for the only world we know were unusable for us, with what sort of look would we then gaze upon human beings and things? We can think this through for

¹¹¹ Franco 2011, p. 54.

¹¹² Franco 2011, p. 16. Paul Franco goes on to say that 'the problem of culture had been the pervasive preoccupation of Nietzsche's writings prior to *Human, All Too Human*. There Nietzsche attributed the fragmentation of modern culture to the "immoderate, indiscriminate drive for knowledge" [(NF-1872, 19[21])], especially as it was evinced in historical scholarship; and he called on art, myth, and sometimes even religion to restore cultural unity and wholeness. The negative conclusion that Nietzsche drew throughout these early writings [...] was that it is "impossible to erect a culture upon knowledge" [(NF-1872, 19[105])]. It is precisely this conclusion that Nietzsche rejects in *Human, All Too Human*' (p. 16).

ourselves, and it is useful to do so even if the question whether Kant and Schopenhauer have scientifically proven anything about metaphysics were to be denied. For it is, according to historical probability, quite possible that in this respect humanity as a whole and in general will someday become *sceptical*; so therefore the question goes: how will human society take shape then under the influence of such a conviction? Perhaps the *scientific proof* that any metaphysical world exists is already so *difficult* that humanity will never get rid of a mistrust for it. And if we mistrust metaphysics, this has by and large the same consequence as if it had been directly refuted and we were no longer *allowed* to believe in it. The historical question with respect to an unmetaphysical disposition on the part of humanity remains in both cases the same. (HH 21)

This aphorism is remarkable on many levels. Here, Nietzsche spells out exactly what he means by the sceptical starting point, associating it once again – albeit more loosely – with Kant and Schopenhauer.¹¹³ In HH 21, as in SE §3, the problem of scepticism starts from Kant’s premise that we do not and cannot have knowledge about the thing-in-itself or, more precisely, about what Nietzsche calls the ‘metaphysical world’, that is, a realm beyond the world of experience and life such as Plato’s *hyperuranon*, Christianity’s otherworldly heavens, including Kant’s thing-in-itself and Schopenhauer’s world as will.¹¹⁴ As in the UO, here too the problem of scepticism is not merely a theoretical issue.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Nietzsche treats scepticism as a largely historical and cultural problem posing questions such as ‘with what sort of look would we then gaze upon human beings and things?’ And ‘how will human society take shape then under the influence of such a conviction?’ (HH 21)

As in the UO, then, in HH Nietzsche remains primarily concerned with the practical consequences of scepticism for culture and, as we will see in the following section, for individuals. In contrast to the UO, in HH Nietzsche concedes the sceptical point of departure and he is ready to accept its full consequences for philosophy and for humanity. He now foresees that ‘it is, according to historical probability, quite possible that in this respect humanity as a whole and in general will someday become *sceptical*’ (HH 21).¹¹⁶ Nietzsche recognises that a sceptical way of

¹¹³ Cf. BT §18, p. 87; SE §3, p. 188.

¹¹⁴ I will return on Nietzsche’s critique of the metaphysical world in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

¹¹⁵ Although Nietzsche locates his discussion of scepticism in the first chapter of *Human, All Too Human* – the one devoted to his criticism of metaphysical philosophy – he is not primarily concerned with a purely theoretical analysis of the sceptical starting point: in fact, his epistemological, ontological, and metaphysical claims are often assumed and only seldomly receive a sustained argumentation.

¹¹⁶ To measure the extent of Nietzsche’s reassessment of the value of scepticism for culture, compare the following two passages; the first – which we encountered in Chapter 1 – from *Schopenhauer as Educator*; the second from *Human, All Too Human*: (1) ‘[S]hould the moment ever arise in which Kant begins to have a popular effect, the we will become aware of it in the form of a corrosive and disintegrating skepticism and relativism. (SE §3, p. 188); (2) From the times when people were accustomed to believing in the possession of absolute truth stems a deep *discontent* with all skeptical and relativistic positions towards any questions of knowledge whatsoever... (HH 631). It is noteworthy that these are the only passages in which Nietzsche directly pairs scepticism and relativism. In HH 631, Nietzsche seems to be making an attempt at self-critique with regard to his earlier position on scepticism and relativism in SE §3. In the former excerpt, as we saw in Section 1.1, scepticism and relativism have a strongly negative connotation: they were regarded as cultural dangers. There, to use the phrasing of HH 631, the young Nietzsche expressed his *discontent* with scepticism and relativism. Conversely, in the latter excerpt it is precisely that discontent

thinking – one that does not rely on the notion of the metaphysical world – has established itself in scientific enquiry. He also speculates that with all probability such a mindset will spread out, taking roots in humanity. According to this historical-cultural prediction, then, humanity will become sceptical; perhaps Western culture already is. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche suggests that we modern Europeans live in a ‘sceptical age’ (WS 158), that is, an age characterised by the mistrust of metaphysical explanations,¹¹⁷ and in which any fanatical devotion to absolute truth – such as we find in Christianity – is regarded as a sign of a lower form of culture.¹¹⁸ The reversal could not be more striking: in HH, scepticism is construed as a distinctive characteristic of modernity; it becomes the starting point of Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy; and it assumes a positive value as a sign of intellectual maturity and of a higher form culture (HH 631).

Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford propose a more than plausible hypothesis to explain this complete reversal:

One can only speculate about the reason for Nietzsche’s change of mind: from doing everything he can in his early writings, such as *Schopenhauer as Educator*, to ward off the dangers of scepticism, and even the menace of it, to now in his middle writings, and commencing with the volume one of *Human, All Too Human*, accepting (and embracing) the fact that Europe is now entering a sceptical age, and promoting in his own writings specific modes of scepticism and sceptical inquiry. With respect to the early Nietzsche one might venture the suggestion that in them he is operating in an essentially German context, and as a young nation state Nietzsche, one might add, is thinking that it is too premature for German education and culture to be exposed to scepticism that will have only a debilitating effect [...]. Instead, he clearly seems to think that a quite different intellectual strategy is required and merited, and so, one might suggest, he makes the decision to subordinate his intellectual project, including his conception of philosophy, which at this point he conceives as a way of life and a key vehicle in self-cultivation (*Bildung*), to the essential and key task of *energising* German education and culture. By the time of *Human, All Too Human*, however this intellectual orientation has fundamentally changed, and in dramatic ways. He is now addressing *European* culture and writing as a free-spirited ‘good European’ (WS 87)¹¹⁹ and committed to the view that to be a good German entails that one ‘de-Germanizes’ oneself [MOM 323].¹²⁰

which assumes a negative connotation: it is now associated with a backward and immature way of thinking (HH 633).

¹¹⁷ See also MOM 179.

¹¹⁸ See also HH 109.

¹¹⁹ See also HH 475.

¹²⁰ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. Cohen 1999 has a similar hypothesis with respect to Nietzsche’s change of mind about science from the early to the middle writings: ‘the question about why Nietzsche reversed his evaluation of science must become instead a question about why he changed his understanding of culture’ (p. 104). According to Cohen, this change takes place in concomitance with Nietzsche’s disillusionment with Wagner’s programme of reforming German culture through art. Between the *Unfashionable Observations* and *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche becomes aware of the fact that Wagner’s artistic, cultural, and political project had degenerated into a dangerous cult of overheated feelings: a backward-looking romanticism, a mystical religiosity, and even into a fanatic nationalism. Thus, Cohen proposes, ‘Nietzsche turns to science in *Human, All Too Human* in order to battle Wagnerian culture and promote his own more cosmopolitan vision in place’ (p. 104). As I have

According to their hypothesis, it is important to stress, the reason for Nietzsche's change of mind about scepticism is not theoretical but practical or cultural.

Between the UO and HH, Nietzsche realises that there is no way to return or regress to a pre-sceptical age; he also realises that any attempt to 'forget' or 'get beyond' scepticism, such as that he had made in the early writings (NF-1872,19[125]), would be deliberately holding on to illusion:¹²¹ 'For on the whole, contending dogmas and skepticism now speak too powerfully, too loudly' (HH 261). Nietzsche reaches the conclusion that the sceptical character of modern culture, then, can neither be ignored nor overcome; rather, it must be accepted and dealt with.¹²² It is worth noting that in his opening to a European perspective Nietzsche expands his intellectual horizons, putting himself into dialogue with European authors and books, notably with those of the French philosophical and literary tradition (WS 214).¹²³ In these dialogues, as we will see in the following chapters, Nietzsche encounters French varieties of philosophical scepticism, such as those of Montaigne, of the French moralists, and of the French Enlightenment thinkers.

mentioned, and as I will extensively show in Chapter 2, in Nietzsche's writings the problem of scepticism is closely linked to the problem of science or scientific enquiry. The reason for Nietzsche's change of mind about scepticism then, I think, is inextricably linked to his turning to science in *Human, All Too Human*; and, both that change and this turning are motivated by his shifting perspective on culture, from a German, Wagnerian context to a European and even cosmopolitan one.

¹²¹ In a 1883 fragment, Nietzsche recognises that behind his first period lay a form of Jesuitism: by which he means, 'the conscious adherence to the illusion and forced incorporation of it as the basis of culture' (NF-1883,16[23]).

¹²² The development of Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism and culture can be traced following the posthumous fragments. Surprisingly and intriguingly, already in the 1872 notebooks – in the context of the alliance between tragic philosophy and art (that is, illusion and mythmaking) – Nietzsche envisages that philosophy is significant to culture also on account of its 'skeptical' power to shatter rigid dogmatism in religion, morality, and science: 'Every power (religion, myth, drive for knowledge) has, when taken to extremes, a barbarizing, corrupting, and stultifying effect as unbending tyranny' (NF-1872,23[14]). Even the early Nietzsche, then, suggests that, when there is an excess of dogmatism in culture, scepticism 'becomes necessary' (NF-1872,23[8]). In his 1875 notes on Düring's *Der Wert des Lebens*, Nietzsche adds the following comment in parentheses: I wish to investigate what humanity owes to the imagination, to impure thinking, yes, whether a higher life is possible after only scepticism has come to dominate here, e.g. is art still possible' (NF-1875,9[1], my translation)? This is precisely the question that Nietzsche poses in *Human, All Too Human* concerning the problems of scepticism and culture. In another posthumous fragment of 1875 Nietzsche develops a line of thought which leads to HH 22 – that is, genuine cultural edification is allied with the search for truth, with scepticism, criticism, and destruction, as opposed as to art and illusion: '*I dream of a collective of men [...] who want to be called "destroyers"; they apply the standards of their criticism to everything and they sacrifice themselves to the truth. They want the bad and the false to come to light! We do not want to build prematurely, we do not know whether we shall ever be able to build and whether it is not best not to build. There are lazy pessimists, people who resign we do not want to be among those*' (NF-1875,5[30], in WEN, p. 206, Nietzsche's italic). This thought was somehow alluded to in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, too: 'All existence that can be negated deserves to be negated, and to be truthful means to believe in an existence that could not possibly be negated and that is itself true and without falsehood' (SE §4, pp. 203-207). At least from 1875, though, Nietzsche places himself in opposition to Schopenhauer's 'lazy' pessimism and to his own early commitment to art and illusion; from now onwards, edification cannot dispense with the scepticism, criticism, and destruction inherent in the search for truth.

¹²³ See Pippin 2010.

In the following section, I will propose another hypothesis, complementary to Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's, to explain Nietzsche's change of mind about scepticism between his early and middle writings. For now, let me focus on the characteristics of the sceptical age identified by Nietzsche. Not only does Nietzsche announce the probable victory of a sceptical way of thinking and living in modernity, but he also opens to the possibility that, in the future, edification may lie in scientific enquiry and scepticism. Having predicted that one way or another Western culture and perhaps even the entirety of humanity will become sceptical; in HH 22 Nietzsche poses the following question: can a healthy, flourishing culture be built upon a sceptical, unmetaphysical way of thinking? (This is a key aphorism for my thesis because, as I have mentioned, here Nietzsche is openly aligning himself with scepticism, in the form of doubt and mistrust, in the context of his commitment to science.) His principal concern, here, is whether the disbelief produced by scientific enquiry with respect to the metaphysical world may be compatible with cultural edification.

For millennia, Nietzsche observes, edification has been based on religious and metaphysical views promising an afterlife and salvation of the soul;¹²⁴ on the other hand, the doubt and mistrust cast by scientific enquiry do not allow to make such promises; and the small, unpretentious truths discovered by the various scientific disciplines do not seem to be able to fulfil such metaphysical aspirations. Nietzsche is aware of the immediate disadvantage brought by the cessation of metaphysical explanations of the world, which manifests itself in an 'agitated and ephemeral existence' (HH 22); nevertheless, he seems to think that science and scepticism may pave the way for a higher form of culture: 'the sum of incontestable truths, that is, truths'¹²⁵ that have outlasted all the storms of skepticism and all disintegration, can in time become so great (in the dietetics of health, for example)' (HH 22).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ For example, in a posthumous fragment Nietzsche notes that 'if men had not built houses for gods architecture would still be in its infancy. The tasks man set himself on the basis of false assumptions (e.g. the soul separable from the body) have given rise to the highest forms of culture. "Truths" are unable to supply such motives' (NF-1876,23[167], in WEN, p. 228).

¹²⁵ These truths are 'the small, unpretentious truths found by [the] rigorous methods' of scientific enquiry (HH 3). At first, they will appear 'so modest, simple, sober, [...] even discouraging' in comparison with the grand, pretentious metaphysical and religious answers (HH 3). The latter ones are 'beautiful, intoxicating, perhaps even enrapturing' (HH 3), but are the result of erroneous and ways of thinking (HH 9); conversely, the small, unpretentious truths outlasting scepticism are not 'as salutary, soothing, and beneficial as those errors' (HH 109). In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche sees a tragic tension between the rigorous search for truth and knowledge and the wellbeing of humanity (HH 34, 109, 277, 517); on the other hand, he seems to think that '[n]ot only the individual, but all humanity will gradually be raised up to [a higher, stronger culture], when it has finally grown accustomed to esteeming lasting, durable knowledge [acquired by means of scepticism] more highly and has lost all belief in inspiration and the miraculous communication of truth' (HH 3).

¹²⁶ In part, Nietzsche shares the Enlightenment expectation - or at least a less optimistic hope - that philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, would guide humanity towards a spiritual maturity and, in the long term, would ultimately improve individual lives and society at large. See also HH 37, 38. On Nietzsche's Enlightenment

In HH 23, Nietzsche further characterises modernity as an ‘age of comparison’. This is, I think, another sense in which a higher form of culture is sceptical for Nietzsche. An essential feature of modernity is ‘that in it the various worldviews, customs, cultures can be compared and experienced side by side; this was not possible earlier, when the dominance of every culture was always localized and all artistic styles were correspondingly restricted to a particular place and time’ (HH 23).¹²⁷ This comparison between competing worldviews, customs, and cultures, however, does not ultimately lead to a renunciatory suspension of judgment nor to a mere relativism; rather, it leads to a comparison of forms of thought and life and, in the long term, to a selection of the higher ones and a destruction of the lower ones. In other words, for Nietzsche the cultural task of free-spirited philosophy is to prepare culture and society for change by comparing, promoting, and criticising forms of thought and life: the task is ‘to compel mutually contentious powers into harmony by assembling an overwhelming array of other, less incompatible powers, yet without repressing them or putting them in chains’ (HH 276). The sceptical age of comparison will then open up to a ‘higher, many-stringed culture’ (HH 281).

The comparison is not only between various forms of thought and life in different places at a specific point of time; it is also diachronic, between old, waning and new, dawning forms: ‘Our age gives the impression of an interim state; the old worldviews, the old cultures, still exist in part, the new ones are not yet secure and habitual and hence lack decisiveness and consistency’ (HH 248). In this cultural interim, Nietzsche states, ‘we *cannot* go back to the old [...] [l]et us simply *step forward*: to do so, we need to do as ‘the soldier who is learning to march: for a time is more uncertain and awkward than ever because the muscles are being moved now according to the old system, now according to the old system, now according to the new one, and neither has yet decisively claimed victory’ (HH 248).¹²⁸ In *Dawn*, Nietzsche links this ‘*interregnum*’, especially in the realm of morality, to his key notion of experimentalism – which, as we will see in Section 4.3, is in turn linked to scepticism as a practice of truthfulness (GS 51). If, as we have

optimist’s view on culture see Lampert 2017, pp. 189-201. In contrast to Lampert’s reading, I think that although Nietzsche highly praises the Enlightenment in the middle writings, his view of the scientific transformation of culture cannot be reduced to a simple form of optimism. In fact, as we will see, Nietzsche believes that in the short term the scientific pursuit of truth and knowledge can cause disillusionment, melancholy, and even despair. He also thinks that to go forward it is necessary to do more justice to the important role played by religion, art, and event metaphysics.

¹²⁷ This comparison, for the middle Nietzsche, might have an initially detrimental effect upon people but, in the long term, it will be fruitful, generating new ways of thinking and living: ‘The less that people are constrained by tradition, the greater the inner agitation of their motives becomes, and the greater in turn the outward restlessness, the intermingling of peoples, the polyphony of their exertions’ (HH 23). In section 208 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, as we will see in the Conclusion, Nietzsche diagnoses this very condition as a sickness of modern Europe. See also NF-1885, 34[67].

¹²⁸ See also MOM 179.

seen, in HH he seems to be confident that the truths outlasting the scepticism produced by scientific enquiry and free-spirited philosophy will lay the foundation for a higher culture; in D, he observes, ‘physiology, medicine, sociology and solitude are not yet sure enough of themselves’ for the task ‘[t]o build anew the laws of life and of behaviour’ (D 453). In the interregnum between the old and the new, Nietzsche suggests, ‘[w]e are experiments: let us want to be such!’ (D 453) This, as we will see in Section 4.2, means that we have to experiment with new daring ideas as well as with individual and social modes of living.

1.4 The Intellectual and Emotional Reorientation of Nietzsche’s Attitude Towards Scepticism.

In this section, I want to propose a hypothesis complementary to Ansell-Pearson and Bamford’s to further explain how and why Nietzsche changes his mind about scepticism between his early and middle period. In a posthumous fragment from the period of HH II, Nietzsche explains his shifting from a narrow (national, German) to a wider (European and even cosmopolitan) perspective on culture in terms of a change in his emotional attitude towards the uncertainty of modernity, from fear to courage: ‘I became afraid at the sight of uncertainty of the modern cultural horizon. Somewhat ashamed, I praised the cultures under a bell and protective glass.¹²⁹ Finally I took heart and threw myself into the free world-ocean’ (NF-1879,40[9]). Nietzsche’s personal explanation of his shift of perspective on culture is not irrelevant to the problem of scepticism: we should recall that in *History for Life*, Nietzsche defined the cultural task precisely in opposition to the ‘strange, dark seas’ of modernity which he associated with ‘hopelessness and scepticism’ (HL §10, p. 158).

What I want to suggest is that not only can Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of scepticism be explained as the result of a shift of perspective on culture, but his adopting a wider cultural perspective can be explained as an intellectual and emotional re-orientation towards the sceptical character of modernity. In other words, in the middle writings Nietzsche seeks to come to terms with the modern sceptical age, accepting the probable victory of scepticism as a way of thinking and living and developing a more positive affective attitude towards it. In what follows, I want to show that, indeed, Nietzsche attaches a fundamental importance to the cultivation of a more positive intellectual-emotional attitude towards scepticism, from despair to joy and cheerfulness.

¹²⁹ Cf. HH 245, entitled ‘*Bell-casting of culture*’.

As in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche continues to think about scepticism in relation to the problems of personal despair and theoretical destruction. In HH 34, he wonders whether the practice of free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, would result in ‘a single way of thinking that yields despair as the personal result and a philosophy of destruction as the theoretical result’. As in SE, I think, Nietzsche’s project in HH points to an alternative to this way of thinking. We saw in Section 1.2 that in contrast to SE, in HH Nietzsche aligns his free-spirited philosophy with scepticism and theoretical destruction. That is to say, free-spirited, scientific, and sceptical ways of thinking might end up weakening or destroying cherished beliefs, especially those of religion and metaphysics.

In part, Nietzsche continues to be worried about the practical consequences of this way of thinking for the wellbeing of the philosopher and of humanity. In HH 34, Nietzsche asks: ‘Won’t our philosophy thus turn into tragedy? Won’t truth become inimical to life, to better things?’. As in SE, in HH Nietzsche is convinced that ‘[t]here is no preestablished harmony between the furthering of truth and the well-being of humanity’ (HH 517). In a fragment from 1875, the insight into the tragic opposition of truth and well-being is even described as ‘a sceptical-melancholic’ outlook on life (NF-1875,3[60]). But, in contrast to the early writings, he now sides with the furthering of truth whatever may come from it (HH 6) – even if this may be dangerous or deadly.¹³⁰

A commitment to free-spirited philosophy and scientific enquiry, in Nietzsche’s eyes, does not allow exchanging the ‘false assertions’ of religion and metaphysics for ‘truths that would be just as salutary, soothing, and beneficial as those errors’ (HH 109):

the tragedy is that we cannot *believe* those dogmas of religion and metaphysics if we have the strict method of truth in our hearts and heads, but on the other hand, the development of humanity has made us so delicate, irritable, and sickly that we need remedies and consolations of the highest kind; in consequence of which, therefore, the danger arises that humanity may bleed to death from recognizing truth. (HH 109)

For this reason, Nietzsche states, the pursuit of truth and knowledge can still be experienced with sorrow (HH 109).¹³¹ Nonetheless, ‘any degree of levity or melancholy’ is considered far

¹³⁰ For example, Nietzsche is well aware that psychological observation will lead to consequences that are both ‘fruitful and frightful’ (HH 37). But, he thinks, ‘whether [it] brings more utility or liability for human beings may still remain undecided; what is certain, however, is that it is necessary, because science cannot dispense with it (HH 38) – indeed, we cannot dispense with science if we do not want to dispense with the demands of our intellectual integrity or conscience as thinkers (HH 109). Nietzsche is also aware that at first historical critique and psychological observation will ‘plant a sense of diminishment and suspicion in the souls of human beings’ (HH 36).

¹³¹ Nietzsche is not saying, however, that there is no pleasure in knowledge. In HH 252 he affirms that, in fact, knowing is connected with certain kinds of pleasure and in HH 34, as we will see, even with a state of joy. In the subsequent texts of the middle writings, Nietzsche begins to link more directly knowledge with positive outcomes such as joy, happiness, grand passion, and cheerfulness. Starting from HH II, Nietzsche considers the search for

preferable to ‘a romantic turn to the past’ and to ‘an accommodation with any form of Christianity: for the present state of knowledge, we simply cannot have anything to do with it any more without irredeemably soiling our *intellectual conscience*’ (HH 109).

In HH, Nietzsche also discards the option he had taken in the early writings, that of ‘consciously remain in untruth’ (HH 34). In a posthumous fragment, Nietzsche recognises that behind his first period lay a form of Jesuitism: by which he means, ‘the conscious adherence to the illusion and forced incorporation of it as the basis of culture’ (NF-1883,16[23]). Starting from HH, this option becomes equally untenable for Nietzsche on account of his commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience.¹³²

So far Nietzsche’s picture of the tension between knowledge and human well-being in HH 34 does not seem promising: past errors are more beneficial than present truths. In addition, even free-spirited philosophy and scientific enquiry are not completely immune from errors. Is there anything at all left to pick up after having liberated or purified our mind from errors and moral, aesthetic, and religious sensibilities? Will scepticism lead to some positive, valuable fruits? I will answer these questions in the following Chapters. For now, let me note with Keith Ansell-Pearson that, in Nietzsche’s view, ‘there is a real danger that we will become gloomy, despondent and perhaps nihilist in the wake of the dissolution of the metaphysical need [...]. [H]umanity is in danger of reaching a disabling point of disillusionment and despair’.¹³³

Would free-spirited philosophy result in personal despair?¹³⁴ According to Nietzsche’s observation in SE §3, without the touchstone of a wisdom of life, the pursuit of knowledge could

truth and knowledge as occasionally harmful (MOM 13), but he also connects it to the search for joy and happiness (WS 332). In D Nietzsche seeks to cultivate the passion of knowledge; and in GS he associates a state of gayety and cheerfulness with science.

¹³² I will deal with the link between scepticism and intellectual honesty and conscience and in Chapter 3.

¹³³ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 29. As Cohen 2010 notes, ‘[t]he danger of punctuated illusions was a regular theme of the early works. Most of *Human, All Too Human* by contrast, is dedicated precisely to the puncturing of illusion; [...] [and] disillusionment is often portrayed in *Human, All Too Human* as quite a positive liberating event’ (p. 49). As in early writings Nietzsche continues to see the practice scientific enquiry as a form of disillusionment, but now this is reconsidered as a necessary and positively helpful thing to do.

¹³⁴ Nietzsche directly addresses the problem of personal despair in the first chapter of HH. See especially HH 31, 33, 34. In HH 31, Nietzsche writes: ‘Among the things that can bring a thinker to despair is the knowledge that being illogical is necessary for human beings, and that from being illogical arises much that is good. It is so firmly fixed in the passions, in language, in art, in religion, and generally in everything that lends value to life that we cannot remove it without thereby doing irremediable damage to these beautiful things. (HH 31). The problem of despair here, I think, is slightly different from the problem of ‘despair of truth’ in SE §3. There, we saw in Section 1.1, thinkers like Kleist were brought to despair by the realisation that what had so far been thought lend value to life could not be theoretically, scientifically proved. This took the form of an experience of disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and disorientation. In HH 31, the same experience is observed from the perspective of scientific thinkers, who are concerned with truth and nothing else, and are committed to eradicating intellectual errors. They can be brought to despair by the realisation that errors are entrenched in human in human thinking, feeling, and life

generate sceptical disorientation and dissatisfaction and even lead thinkers such as Kleist to despair. In HH, instead, Nietzsche suggests that the aftereffect of knowledge for people largely depends upon their temperament – that is, the typology of personality or, more precisely, the different bodily and spiritual characteristics of each individual:

I believe the decisive factor determining what aftereffect knowledge will have is the *temperament* of a person: could just as easily imagine an aftereffect for individual natures different from the one that has been described, one that would give rise to a much simpler life,¹³⁵ more purified of affects than at present: [...]. We would be rid of *emphasis* and would no longer feel the pricking of the thought that we are not only nature or are something more than nature. Admittedly, as I said, a good temperament would be required for this, a stable, mild, and basically cheerful soul. (HH 34)

The importance Nietzsche attaches to temperament in HH is largely neglected in the secondary literature.¹³⁶ Here, he is claiming that different temperaments would experience the purification from errors and illusions inherent in the search for knowledge in different ways.¹³⁷ If a melancholy spirit, like Kleist, feels despair in response to the undermining of metaphysical certainties and securities, a more cheerful spirit would have a rather different experience, one which is even compatible with a ‘state of joy’ (HH 34).¹³⁸

Vivetta Vivarelli convincingly demonstrates that for Nietzsche the example of such a cheerful soul and good temperament is none other than Montaigne.¹³⁹ Between the early and the middle writings Nietzsche intensively reads Montaigne’s *Essays* at various times.¹⁴⁰ As Vivarelli

and cannot be completely eliminated – in fact, these are even necessary for human beings. Scientific thinkers, then, are not so much despairing at truth as at error. See also HH 6, 16, 29, and 215.

¹³⁵ On living simply see also WS 196.

¹³⁶ Nietzsche reaffirms the importance of temperament in HH 275, 285, 485, 486, 608, 622; MOM 44, 216; WS 86.

¹³⁷ Nietzsche clearly explains this difference in a posthumous fragment: ‘Notice, for example, how a sudden downpour affects different people: each interprets the event according to mood and temperament. Our sensations of pain seem to be only weaknesses of the organism: the same stimuli lead to pleasure [in other people]. There is nothing inherently unhappy’ (NF-1880,4[94], my translation).

¹³⁸ Michael Ure 2013 suggests that in HH the joy associated with free-spirited philosophy is a ‘curiously joyless affair’ (p. 123). I agree with Ure that free spirit’s joy is rid of passionate emphasis and, especially, of the emotional excesses aroused by religious and metaphysical ways of thinking. However, I do not think this form of joy is necessarily a ‘joyless’ one. It is certainly a moderate joy rather than overflowing. It is the joy of detachment. As we will see in Sections 4.2-3, already in HH II Nietzsche develops a more affirmative notion of joy. A joy arising from a re-concentration on and re-attachment to the small, nearest things at hand, as opposed to the first and last things of religion and metaphysics.

¹³⁹ Vivarelli 1998, pp. 80-81. More in general, Vivarelli persuasively argues that Montaigne is one of the models for Nietzsche’s characterisation of the free spirit as a wanderer (pp. 55-94.)

¹⁴⁰ See Brobjer 2008, pp. 57, 198, 207, 210, 217.

clearly shows, in HH 34 Nietzsche is not only thinking about Montaigne, but he is also deliberately drawing on Montaigne's description of his temperamental characteristics.¹⁴¹

Nietzsche's notion of temperament, I propose, has important implications also for his conception of scepticism: different temperaments would experience scepticism differently. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche draws a comparison between Montaigne and Pascal with respect to doubt:

Doubt about doubt. - 'What a fine pillow doubt is for a well-formed head!'¹⁴² - This saying of Montaigne's always incensed Pascal, for no one longed as powerfully as he for a fine pillow. Then what was the problem?¹⁴³ (D 46)

As Robert Pippin notes what Nietzsche wants to know above all is '[H]ow [...] did Montaigne manage to exhibit such a thoroughgoing skepticism and clarity about human frailty and failings *without* Pascal's despair and eventual surrender?'¹⁴⁴ At least in HH, Nietzsche seems to think their opposite experiences are due to a difference in temperament: if Montaigne has a good temperament and a cheerful spirit; Pascal, like Kleist, has instead a gloomy temperament and a tormented spirit which are not fit for doubt.¹⁴⁵ In the first case, doubt is entertained with tranquillity; in the second, it tortures the mind driving thinkers such as Pascal and Kleist to despair.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Vivarelli 1998, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴² Nietzsche is quoting, with some inaccuracies, Montaigne 2003[1580-1595], p. 1001, *Essays* 3.13.

¹⁴³ Pascal and Montaigne are contrasted again in EH 'Clever' §3, p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ Pippin 2010, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ It is in this sense, I think, that in the late writings Nietzsche characterises scepticism as a luxury: it is a luxury that only well-formed minds endowed with good temperaments can allow themselves, whereas it would be detrimental for other minds which are more predisposed to credulity. As we will see in the Conclusion, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche criticises Carlyle, writing that '[a] yearning for strong faith is *not* a proof of strong faith, but rather its opposite. *If you have a strong faith* you can allow yourself the beautiful luxury of scepticism: you are certain enough, stable enough, committed enough for it' (TI 'Skirmishes' 12). One of Nietzsche's major claims about scepticism in the late writings is that minds like Carlyle's, as well as Pascal's and Kleist's, strongly yearning for faith, express a form of psychological weakness which make them unsuitable for a healthy form of doubt. In *Beyond Good and Evil* the psychological weakness inherent in the need to believe is construed as a form of fanaticism: one 'would rather lie down and die on a definite nothing than on an uncertain something, but this is nihilism and the sign of a desperate, dead-tired soul' (BGE 10).

¹⁴⁶ The psychological case of Pascal, I think, is especially interesting to Nietzsche because it unifies 'ardour, spirit, and honesty [*Redlichkeit*]' (D 192). In particular, Nietzsche finds in Pascal the self-consuming and despairing conflict between the spirit of truthful enquiry and a strong moral religious sensibility. According to Nietzsche's observation, in Pascal's case the latter is predominant (NF-1880,7[262]); temperamentally, Pascal needs faith. Indeed, Pascal already starts from a 'Christian predisposition' which is not immune to 'self-deception' in presuming that all pleasures, passions, and bodily aspects are evil (NF-1880,7[184]). Ironically, Nietzsche construes Pascal's predisposition as a passion itself, a passion that despises the other passions (NF-1880,7[234]). In this sense, for Nietzsche, Pascal is an unfortunate interpreter of the body: 'questioning whether it contains God or devil, good or evil, salvation or damnation [...], he has to twist and torture himself so as to stay in the right' (D 86). This is why in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche regards Pascal as 'Christianity's most instructive victim' (EH 'Clever' §3, p. 90). In Section 3.1, I will show that, for Nietzsche, the Christian form of questioning exemplified by Pascal engenders a genuine form of scepticism, which is then redirected against Christianity itself. Finally, in *Dawn* Pascal's psychological constitution is linked to two forms of despair: first, Pascal believes that knowledge without Christian faith would lead

On my reading, D 46 highlights well an important aspect of Nietzsche's idiosyncratic treatment of scepticism: throughout his writings he associates forms of scepticism with emotions, moods, temperaments, or more in general with affectivity. On the one hand, as we have seen, scepticism can be experienced as despair by thinkers such as Kleist and Pascal; on the other, Nietzsche observes, in France 'the courageous and [*froh müthige*] blithe skepticism of a Montaigne' was possible (NF-1885,36[7]). Scepticism, then, can be despairing or joyful or cheerful depending on the *forma mentis* and, Nietzsche specifically suggests in HH 34, on the temperament of a thinker.¹⁴⁷ My hypothesis, then, is that in the middle writings Nietzsche aspires to be more like Montaigne¹⁴⁸ and to have or cultivate a cheerful attitude towards scepticism.¹⁴⁹

Does Nietzsche's answer to the question of the aftereffect of knowledge for people boil down to the different constitution of individuals? Would not this be a rather crude answer? If the personal experience of knowledge merely depends on one's constitution, would philosophy have a role in self-cultivation and, for example, in the search for joy and happiness? Moreover, if the way one experiences knowledge really depends on the way one is constituted, how could

to despair; second, he despairs at the realisation that thinkers such as Montaigne are not brought to despair by knowledge, honesty, and doubt (D 64). We saw in Section 1.1 that Kleist's despair was generated by Kantian philosophy. Interestingly, Nietzsche criticises Pascal along with Kant on account of their analogous strategies 'to dethrone the intellect, to decapitate knowledge [*Wissen*] in favour of Christian faith' (NF-1880,7[34], my translation). I will return to Pascal's and Kant's forms of fideism in Section 3.4.

¹⁴⁷ Translation modified. I will return to this in Section 4.2.

¹⁴⁸ In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche writes that '[he has] something of Montaigne's mischief in [his] spirit, who knows? Perhaps in my body too' (EH 'Clever' 3, p. 90). Nietzsche even describes this bodily-spiritual affinity with Montaigne as a temperamental affinity. See Donnellan 1986, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ In his conclusive remarks, Pippin 2010 notes that '[f]or all his aspiration and admiration, Nietzsche never succeeded in writing with the kind of "cheerfulness", "*Heiterkeit*", and balance of Montaigne' (p. 121). In contrast, Anderson & Cristy 2017 argue that Nietzsche conceives of cheerfulness as a radically non-naïve attitude, one involving a complex psychological structure and the affirmation of the calamitous aspects of life. Anderson and Cristy trace back this non-naïve conception of cheerfulness to Montaigne himself, suggesting that both philosophers cultivate a similar cheerful attitude. In my view, Nietzsche's conception of cheerfulness is less similar to Montaigne's than Anderson and Cristy would have it. Although Nietzsche himself in SE §2 attributes to Montaigne 'a genuinely cheering cheerfulness' which is radically non-naïve in that it involves the courage and strength to win over the horrifying and serious aspects of existence (pp. 181-182), I think that Nietzsche is attaching his conception of cheerfulness to Montaigne or at least largely appropriating and transforming Montaigne's cheerfulness. As Hartle 2003 notes, Montaigne's cheerfulness is more accidental and has to do 'with the affirmation of the merely human' and ordinary (p. 173); Nietzsche's cheerfulness in SE §2, instead, is more hard-won. Moreover, Ansell-Pearson 2018a notes that there are different meanings of Nietzsche's cheerfulness in the course of his intellectual development (pp. 126-130). Ansell-Pearson explains one of the meanings of Nietzsche's cheerfulness as 'an instinctive fearlessness with regard to the questions and difficulties that life throws up for us' (p. 127). This is perhaps the meaning of cheerfulness in GS 343, where Nietzsche speaks of cheerfulness with regard to 'all the daring of the lover of knowledge'. Although this meaning is more naïve than that in SE §2, it still seems to be different from Montaigne's in that Nietzsche's cheerfulness, here, does not lead to a return to the ordinary but opens up to new expectations and possibilities – and perhaps to the superhuman. On the one hand, then, I agree with Pippin that Nietzsche never succeeds in achieving Montaigne's cheerfulness; on the other, however, I think Nietzsche's ambition as a writer and philosopher is to achieve a form of cheerfulness which is ultimate not reducible to Montaigne's joyful spirit.

Nietzsche cultivate a more positive affective response to scepticism for himself and for his readers? To problematise Nietzsche's answer, it is necessary to consider the distinction between temperament and character.

In HH 41, Nietzsche criticises Schopenhauer's doctrine of the inalterability of character:¹⁵⁰ character, he argues, is not unalterable in a strict sense; rather 'the motives influencing [a human being] cannot ordinarily scratch deeply enough to destroy the imprinted script of many millennia'. In light with his historical approach, Nietzsche claims that human beings' character has evolved throughout millennia.¹⁵¹ The character of a human being at a given historical period, for Nietzsche, is not unalterable but is, nevertheless, profoundly influenced and shaped by the socio-cultural milieu (HH 224).¹⁵²

If character is largely determined by the environment, according to Nietzsche, what alters is its degree of strength.¹⁵³ A character is strong when it narrowly adheres to its socio-cultural context, whereas 'the free spirit is always weak, especially in action; for he is acquainted with too many motives and points of view and therefore has an uncertain, inexperienced hand' (HH 230). In his notebook in preparation for HH Nietzsche writes that 'a lack of character can be a sign of a predominance of spirit, (NF-1876,17[90]),¹⁵⁴ and he even associates this spiritual condition to a form of light scepticism: 'The free spirit acts little: hence insecurity of character. He wanders also in his thinking: light scepticism' (NF-1876,17[93]).¹⁵⁵

In GS 290 Nietzsche concedes that it is in fact possible – indeed necessary – to give style to one's character.¹⁵⁶ In the preceding middle writings, instead, he seems to think that there is more room for manoeuvre in the cultivation of one's temperament. Although Nietzsche does not provide us with an explicit, precise account of the distinction between temperament from

¹⁵⁰ See also MOM 5.

¹⁵¹ Cf. HH 2, 41; MOM 5.

¹⁵² For example, Nietzsche observes that '[c]hanged opinions do not change the character of a human (or only very little); but they do in fact illuminate individual sides of the constellation of his personality, which until then, under a different constellation of opinions, had remained dark and unrecognizable' (MOM 58).

¹⁵³ Nietzsche defines strength of character as follows: 'A narrowness of views that has, out of habit, become instinctive leads to what we call strength of character. When someone acts on the basis of just a few motives, but always the same ones, his action attains great energy [...]. Someone with strength of character lacks any knowledge of the many possibilities for action and the many directions it can take: his intellect is unfree, constrained, because in any given case it indicates perhaps only two possibilities to him' (HH 228).

¹⁵⁴ My translation.

¹⁵⁵ My translation.

¹⁵⁶ This consists in surveying 'all the strength and weaknesses of [one's] nature and then fit them into an artistic plan [...]. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed'. This art can be mastered through a 'long practice and daily work' of self-cultivation (GS 290).

character, one might speculate that temperament has to do with the way in which the individual forms their mind and affectivity in the context of the determinations of their character. In other words, some individuals who have a propensity to a *vita contemplativa* can adjust their temperament, giving form to their mind and affectivity where the determining power of character weakens. In the 1879-1880 notebooks, Nietzsche poses two questions concerning the cultivation of temperament. The first concerns the problem of culture at large: ‘How do we produce human beings with good temperament?’ (NF-1879,40[27]); the second concerns the problem of self-cultivation: ‘It is in our hands to cultivate our temperament like a garden. To plant experiences in it, to eradicate others: to build a beautiful and calm boulevard of friendship, to have a silent view on fame – to have ready access to all these good corners of one’s garden so that we do not miss it when we need it!’ (NF-1880,7[211]).¹⁵⁷ Reaffirming the priority of the politics of culture and self-cultivation over *Realpolitik* in his jottings of 1877, Nietzsche even suggests that ‘it is not by changing the institutions that happiness on earth is increased, but by making the dark, weak, tormented, bilious temperament die out’ (NF-1877,25[1]).

In the middle writings, I think, Nietzsche is embarking on the programme of combatting such a bad, gloomy temperament, both in himself and in his readers, and simultaneously cultivating a good, cheerful temperament. Part of this programme, according to my hypothesis, involves the cultivation of a cheerful scepticism in opposition to the ‘inertia of despair [*Trägheit der Verzweiflung*]’ (NF-1880,6[356]).

After HH and HH II, Nietzsche seems to interrupt his reflections on temperament. Nevertheless, it is important to note, the temperamental dimension of human life and thinking remains a fundamental concern of his middle and late philosophy. Although he ceases to directly speak of this in terms of temperament, Nietzsche continues to attribute key philosophical importance to the dimensions of the emotions, moods, affectivity, the body, the drives, etc. In particular, throughout his writings Nietzsche remains profoundly concerned with the opposition between cheerfulness (good temperament) and melancholy (bad temperament), with the philosophical effort to cultivate a cheerful spirit.¹⁵⁸ I will return to temperament and cheerful scepticism in Sections 4.2-3.

¹⁵⁷ My translation. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche employs the same image of the garden in relation to the problem of self-cultivation, albeit substituting the notion of temperament with that of the drives (D 560). Here, Nietzsche similarly explores the extent to which we are free to cultivate our drives.

¹⁵⁸ The importance of this is evident in one of the most important places of Nietzsche’s philosophy – the discussion of the death of God between GS 125 and GS 334. In GS 125, Nietzsche portrays the reception of the death of God in a melancholic soul such as the madman. On the madman’s response to the death of God in GS 125 as a pathological, melancholic response see Pippin 2010, pp. 47-51. In GS 334, in contrast, Nietzsche envisages and seeks to cultivate a cheerful reception of the same thought.

Scepticism and the Methods of Free-Spirited Philosophy

In the previous chapter, I showed that in the early writings Nietzsche was not a sceptic. Indeed, he defined the task of his philosophical therapy for culture, in concert with art and tragic wisdom, and in opposition to scepticism. I also showed how and why the middle Nietzsche comes to embrace the sceptical character of modernity and even to associate a sceptical way of thinking with cultural edification (health and flourishing) and with individual joy and cheerfulness. In *Human, All Too Human*, we saw that Nietzsche largely understood scepticism as a way of thinking and living that does not rely on religious and metaphysical beliefs.

In this chapter, I show that in HH scepticism acquires a positive philosophical significance. In the middle writings, I want to argue, Nietzsche incorporates scepticism, in various forms, into his philosophical projects and construes, in many senses, free-spirited philosophy as a sceptical mode of investigation. In these writings, Nietzsche frequently defines the task of philosophy in alliance with scepticism. In HH 22, he states that free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, ‘needs doubt and mistrust as its closest confederates’. In D 207, Nietzsche recommends reprising the philosophical sensibility of the ancient Greeks and Romans who had a ‘little bit of skepticism for each and every thing, be it god, human, or concept’. Still in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, he reaffirms that ‘[t]he more mistrust, the more philosophy’ (GS 346). In this chapter, I explore the terms of the many-sided alliance that Nietzsche forges between scepticism and free-spirited philosophy starting from HH.

Completely reversing his early position, then, in HH Nietzsche aligns his free-spirited philosophy with science (*Wissenschaft*) and with the search for truth and knowledge. Nevertheless, as Stephen Houlgate suggests, we should also bear in mind that, at different stages of his intellectual development, Nietzsche largely uses science as a means for his philosophical ends.¹⁵⁹ And his philosophical projects in the middle writings are inseparable from his therapeutic

¹⁵⁹ Houlgate 1986, pp. 50, 238, n. 74. See also Bamford 2019.

and cultural ends. As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford put it, ‘Nietzsche is committed to a programme of intellectual reform [...], in which the chief aim is to cool down the human mind’ prone to mental and emotional excesses’.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, as we have seen, in HH Nietzsche continues to conceive of philosophy as a way of life¹⁶¹ and a cultural and personal therapy.¹⁶² But, if in the early writings art, illusion, and tragic wisdom were prescribed as cultural antidotes, in the middle writings – and especially in HH – Nietzsche recommends turning to scientific enquiry instead. In the context of his free-spirited philosophy, science becomes a means for a spiritual exercise to liberate oneself from errors and ‘false views of the world and of life’ as well as from the torments associated with them (HH 56).

This does not change the fact that at various times in HH free-spirited philosophy is described as a mode of investigation which is directed at truth and truthfulness. In essence, for Nietzsche, this mode of investigation is powered by ‘the pathos of searching for the truth’ (HH 633) and by the ‘the spirit of truthful inquiry’ (HH 225). In my view, free-spirited philosophy is truth-directed insofar it is guided by epistemic norms or preferences, including avoidance of error, self-deception, and disturbance of mental and emotional excesses; appreciation of empirical truths; and search for adequate reasons and empirical evidence for one’s beliefs. In this sense, I think, the truth-directedness of free-spirited philosophy, should be understood not much in the context of pure epistemology or theory of knowledge but rather in that of an ethics of belief and enquiry. Moreover, as we will see in Section 2.2, at least in HH and HH II, free-spirited philosophy can be described as as truth directed insofar, in concert with scientific enquiry, it leads to the production or discovery of empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities.

In this chapter, I want to argue that scepticism is central to Nietzsche’s commitment to science and its methods, both with respect to specific scientific disciplines (such as history, natural science, psychological observation, and philology) and to the scientific spirit in general – that is, to a rigorous mode of investigation. It is well known in the secondary literature that starting from

¹⁶⁰ Ansell-Pearson and Bamford forthcoming.

¹⁶¹ On Nietzsche’s conception of philosophy as a way of life in the middle writings see, especially, Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 130-134.

¹⁶² In HH 243, Nietzsche even refashions his early conception of the philosopher as physician of culture in the context of his new commitment to science. Here he sees a future for ‘spiritual physicians [*geistlichen Aerzte*]’, that is, philosophers who take care of the spirit – that is, of the human soul or psyche both in its mental and affective dimensions: they will become benefactor of all society ‘by increasing good works, spiritual joy, and fruitfulness, by preventing evil thoughts, designs, knaveries [...], by establishing a spiritual-body aristocracy [...], by benevolent amputating all so-called tortures of the soul and remorse’ (HH 243). On Nietzsche’s therapeutic ambition in the middle writings see, especially, Ure 2008; Hutter & Friedland 2013; Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 17-45.

HH Nietzsche values *Wissenschaft*¹⁶³ first and foremost on account of its rigorous methods.¹⁶⁴ What is less known is that scepticism plays a fundamental role in Nietzsche's discourse on the methods of scientific enquiry.¹⁶⁵ My major claim in this chapter is that Nietzsche attaches a fundamental methodological significance to scepticism, both as truth-searching and truth-producing methodology.

Let me make a further introductory remark about Nietzsche's discourse on methods. Although Nietzsche does reflect on the practice and goals of scientific enquiry – especially in relation to the problem of culture – he is not primarily concerned with epistemology, nor with what today we call philosophy of science. (For example, Nietzsche is not much interested in providing an epistemic justification of scientific claims). As Sebastian Gardner notes, '[i]n place of pure epistemological motives, Nietzsche refers in HH to [...] science's promotion of a new set of qualities, attitudes, affects, forces, virtues and so on, characteristic of the new type of subjectivity that Nietzsche calls "the free spirit"'.¹⁶⁶ This is also brought out well by Karl Jaspers when he writes that Nietzsche largely '[takes] the validity of scientific insight for granted'.¹⁶⁷ His

¹⁶³ As Constâncio 2019 puts it succinctly: '[Nietzsche] usually uses the term "science [*Wissenschaft*]" to designate all of the academic disciplines, and he has in view the "science" in which he became a professor – that is, ancient philology – no less than, say physics or mathematics. And because he has the academia in view, the opposition is often between philosophers and "scholars [*Gelhrte*]", those who do "science" at universities' (p. 188).

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche continues to highly value the methods of scientific enquiry until his latest writings, in spite of his growing suspicion about science – and, more precisely, about its degenerating into mere scientism. See, for example, A 13, 59.

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, very few studies notice the methodological significance Nietzsche attaches to scepticism in the context of his valuation of scientific enquiry. These include Gallo 1990 and Franco 2011. Gallo 1990 rightly notes that 'Nietzsche emphasized the importance of the doubt, mistrust and skepticism of scientific method because he saw them as the means by which the thinker could temper his desire to know and the need to believe' (p. 117). Franco 2011 interestingly suggests that in the middle writings Nietzsche adopts a 'scientific scepticism' whose ultimate conclusion is the doctrine of the death of God (p. 127). Franco also alludes to the antithesis between scepticism and conviction in *Human, All Too Human* (p. 19). Both studies have the merit to take notice of the link between scepticism and the scientific spirit but fail to clarify the precise sense or senses in which scepticism acquires a methodological significance for the middle Nietzsche.

¹⁶⁶ Gardner 2019, p. 307.

¹⁶⁷ To be more precise, even in *Human, All Too Human*, where Nietzsche seems to be very confident about the validity of science, he is still aware of some limitations of scientific enquiry. Nietzsche cautiously claims that 'rigorous science can really free us only to a small extent from this world of representation [...] insofar as it essentially cannot break the force of age-old habits of sensation' (HH 16). Nietzsche here means 'the representation of the world that has been spun out of intellectual errors', which are generated by the (psychological) fact that 'we have for millennia looked upon the world with moral, aesthetic, and religious demands, with blind inclination, passion or fear, and have actually revealed in the bad habits of illogical thinking'. See also HH 30-31. Moreover, Nietzsche goes on to say, a complete liberation from these errors would be neither possible nor desirable (HH 16). Science itself, for Nietzsche, is not completely immune from error, indeed it originates in the erroneous belief in having found truth through language (HH 11). On Nietzsche's view that science is the process of a long process of evolution, which originates in errors see, for example, Gardner 2019, pp. 308-209.

theme was not the methods as such, but *the methodical attitude*.¹⁶⁸ In what follows, I explore the roles of scepticism in Nietzsche's methodical attitude in HH.

2.1 Scepticism as Truth-Searching Methodology: Philology as the Paradigm for Scientific Enquiry

In this section, I want to show that scepticism, in various forms, plays a central role in Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy as a truth-searching methodology. In HH 9, Nietzsche criticises metaphysics and religion on account of their being based on 'the worst of all methods of knowledge', that is, 'passion, error, self-deception', and need. In contrast, he considers the rigorous procedures of scientific enquiry as the best ways to search for the truth or at least to avoid error, self-deception, and the interference of mental and emotional excesses such as the metaphysical pretensions of reason and moral, aesthetic, and religious sentiments.¹⁶⁹ In particular, Nietzsche embraces the methods of scientific disciplines such as history, natural science, psychological observation, and philology. It is noteworthy that each of these sciences with its methods is one way or another associated with a form of scepticism – either by Nietzsche himself or by his commentators.

In HH 2, as we saw in Section 1.2, Nietzsche publicly commits himself to a 'historical philosophizing'.¹⁷⁰ As in the first and second *Unfashionable Observations* (D §2, p. 15; HL §7, p. 135; §10, p. 158), throughout his middle and late writings Nietzsche attributes a form of scepticism to historical knowledge, in general, and to scientific historiography, in particular. One of the most significant places where we can find this is BGE 209 – a key aphorism in which, as we will see in the Conclusion, Nietzsche introduces his conception of a 'strong kind of scepticism'. There, Nietzsche attributes the strong kind of scepticism to 'the great German

¹⁶⁸ Jaspers 1997, p. 172.

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, HH 3, 109, 110, 633.

¹⁷⁰ The main assumptions of a philosophy having such historical sensibility are that '[e]verything [...] has come to be; there are *no eternal facts*: just as there are no absolute truths' (HH 2). Here, it is important to note, Nietzsche is referring specifically to humanity: 'humanity has come to be, that even the faculty of cognition has also come to be' (HH 2). He is claiming that there are no immutable facts about human beings, nor definitive truths in isolation from the human becoming:¹⁷⁰ 'what we human beings call now call life and experience [...] has gradually *come to be*, indeed, is still wholly *becoming*, and therefore should not be considered as a fixed quantity' (HH 16). In particular, Nietzsche commits himself to a Heraclitean-like worldview, according to which 'everything in the field of morality has come to be, is changeable, unsteady' (HH 107) – 'moral conceptions [are] continually in flux' (HH 56). In the early notebooks, Nietzsche had already seen the 'resolute [sceptical]' character of this Heraclitean insight into morality (NF-1872,23[27]).

philologists and critical historians (who, properly viewed, were all artists of destruction and disintegration as well)' (BGE 209). This link, I suggest, is already present in the middle writings. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche writes, '[t]he [free-minded] thinker [...] takes everything as having come into being and everything that has come into being as debatable' (WS 43) – in contrast to metaphysical philosophy that 'makes us believe completely that what stands at the beginning of all things is most valuable and essential' (WS 3). Free-spirited philosophy, as construed by Nietzsche, needs history as a tool for deflating and criticising religious and metaphysical ways of thinking which attempt to explain things human, all too human – and, especially, moral conceptions – as something eternal and otherworldly.¹⁷¹ Starting from HH, Nietzsche favours a critical use of history, in concert with psychological observation, to generate a form of scepticism towards or even to refute the beliefs of religion and metaphysics, by exposing their historical and psychological origin (HH 9).¹⁷²

In addition to a historical sensibility, Nietzsche states that philosophy needs the intellectual 'virtue of modesty' (HH 2). As it becomes clear in HH 3, intellectual modesty has to do with the estimation of the small, unpretentious – or, indeed, modest – truths concerning the empirical world of human life, experience, and becoming over the grandiose, pretentious 'truths' of metaphysical philosophy. These alleged 'truths' for Nietzsche are, in fact, errors arising from a fundamental immodesty of the mind, that is, from its ambition and presumption to speculate about the first and last things beyond the limits of human knowledge. (The direct target of Nietzsche's criticism, here, seems to be Schopenhauer.¹⁷³)

This immodesty is construed as an intellectual vice because, according to Nietzsche, it is not guided by the best and most rigorous methods of knowledge but by the worst, that is, under

¹⁷¹ Ruth Abbey rightly notes that '[o]ne of the deflationary effects of his historical approach is to show that what appears now to be lofty can have much more banal origins, and even origins that would appear distasteful by the current standards of moral value or practice' (Abbey 2020, p. 193).

¹⁷² One could argue that in HH Nietzsche is putting to use the critical mode of history he had introduced in *History for Life*. History, Nietzsche claimed in the second *Unfashionable Observation*, can be used as a form of critique 'to shatter and dissolve a past [...], bringing this past before a tribunal, painstakingly interrogating it, and finally condemning it' (HL §3, p. 106); historical knowledge is used for taking the knife at [the] roots' of this past and cut off everything that deserves to be destroyed (HL §3, p. 107) – for example, because certain past things are disadvantageous to human life or originate in violence and weakness, in 'aberrations, passions, and errors' (HL §3, pp. 106-107). In HL, Nietzsche seemed to prefer the monumental mode of history over the antiquarian and the critical because it more actively promotes the search for greatness, which is so central to his early philosophical-cultural project in the UO. See Ansell Pearson 2016. Nietzsche was particularly worried about the dangers or disadvantages of the critical history for human life and culture. An excessive use of critical history might destroy too much, too many valuable things of our past, which are still crucially important for the present way of life (HL §3, p. 107). Despite this, already in 1874 Nietzsche observed that critical history has also certain liberating powers (HL §3, p. 107). In 1878, I think, he favours such a critical use of history precisely for its freeing potential with respect to erroneous or deceptive ways of thinking.

¹⁷³ See Section 1.2.

the pressure of need (especially, the metaphysical need), passion (especially, fear of death), and self-deception (especially, wishful thinking) (HH 9).¹⁷⁴ In contrast, modesty is construed as an intellectual virtue: it is the disposition of the mind to appropriately attend to the limitations of one's knowledge and perspective. This is closely linked to scepticism, which – as we have seen – is defined as a 'unmetaphysical disposition' of the mind (HH 21). On the one hand, the sceptical way of thinking is guided by modesty (the sensibility for the limitations of human knowledge); on the other, the practice of scepticism promotes intellectual modesty: considering things sceptically prevents the mind from falling into intellectual vices such as immodesty and other mental excesses.

For example, in *David Strauss* Nietzsche noted in passing that 'historical consciousness' – and the modesty later attached to it – may rescue us from fanaticism (DS §2 p. 15). Although in the UO Nietzsche was critical of the sceptical attitude of thinkers who 'seek to understand everything historically', starting from HH he becomes himself an admirer of the '*nil admirari* [marvel at nothing]' inherent in historical philosophy (DS §2, p. 15). This, as we will see in Chapter 5, is now considered a helpful tool to combat forms of conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism generated by intellectual immodesty. In D 207, indeed, Nietzsche celebrates the ancient Greeks and Romans for their seeing the whole philosophy in the proposition '[*nil*]*admirari*' which expresses itself in 'a little bit of skepticism for each and every thing' – in contrast to the German tendency towards unconditional trust. I conclude my consideration of history as a form of scepticism with an allusion – but an important one: the intellectual virtue of modesty is praised and practiced by a number of thinkers deeply valued by Nietzsche in the middle writings, including Montaigne, Voltaire, and, as we will see in Section 2.4, Diderot.¹⁷⁵

In the opening aphorisms of HH, Nietzsche publicly commits himself to natural science, too, which he considers 'the youngest of all philosophical methods' (HH 1). As in the case of history, natural science is contrasted with metaphysics, particularly with its tendency to set an opposition between a physical and metaphysical world and to attach a higher value to the first and last things that are believed to have their origins in an other-worldly reality other than the physical or natural (HH 1). For Nietzsche, turning to history and natural science, free spirits 'will [...] acquire mistrust for the whole metaphysical way of explaining things' (HH 17). Free-spirited philosophy, as construed by Nietzsche, needs natural science, together with history, as a tool to deflate and criticise religious and metaphysical ways of thinking which attempt to explain things

¹⁷⁴ See also HH 110.

¹⁷⁵ On Montaigne and Voltaire as modest thinkers see Levine 2001, p. 145. On Diderot on modesty and scepticism see Lom 2001, pp. 63-64.

human, all too human, by relying on a supersensible world which lies beyond the limits of our empirical, scientific knowledge. In the secondary literature, the majority of commentators tend to focus on Nietzsche's commitment to natural science and to forms of 'naturalism'. In contrast, I want to stress that when Nietzsche values science and its methods in HH he values a variety of individual scientific disciplines – including natural science but also philology, for example – as well as the methodical or rigorous mode of scientific enquiry in general. Here, I will not address the problem of 'naturalism', at least not as it is fashionably posed in Nietzsche studies.

As to the relation between natural science and scepticism, I want to mention two commentators. First, Matthew Mayer points out that Nietzsche favours natural science's 'sceptical method that carefully observes, identifies, and describes patterns in the empirical world'.¹⁷⁶ Second, according to Jessica Berry, what Nietzsche finds in natural science is a form of naturalism, understood as 'a methodological stance' that views human beings in continuity with the natural world; this stance is adopted as an antidote to metaphysical dogmatism without entailing a commitment to any substantial ontological-metaphysical position.¹⁷⁷ Berry argues that this naturalistic methodological stance is compatible with and reminiscent of the ancient sceptical tradition, including Montaigne's revival of it.¹⁷⁸ I will closely consider Berry's interpretation in Section 2.3.

In addition to history and natural science, for Nietzsche, free-spirited philosophy needs psychological observation (or moral psychology¹⁷⁹), that is, 'the science that inquires about the origin and history of the so-called moral sensations and that as it advances has to pose and solve complicate sociological problems' (HH 37). As Ian Morrison puts it plainly, psychology for Nietzsche 'involves an attempt to see moral beliefs as the product of human psychology, rather than as a set of metaphysical "truths" that are somehow given to, or discoverable by, us'.¹⁸⁰ Psychologists, by which Nietzsche largely means the French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld (but also as Montaigne and Pascal) are masters 'in examining the soul' (HH 36): they put moral sensations and notions as well as social practices on the 'psychological dissecting table', analysing and cutting them apart with 'knives and forceps' (HH 37). As suggested by Robert Pippin, starting

¹⁷⁶ Meyer 2019, p. 243. However, like the majority of commentators, Meyer does not adequately explain in what sense this method can be regarded as 'sceptical', nor the methodological significance of scepticism in Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy.

¹⁷⁷ Berry 2011, p. 89.

¹⁷⁸ Berry 2011, pp. 68-103.

¹⁷⁹ On Nietzsche's moral psychology see Alfano 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Morrison 2003, p. 657.

from HH – and, especially, in the late writings such as *Beyond Good and Evil* – Nietzsche is much better understood as one of these psychologists or French moralists rather than as a metaphysician.¹⁸¹

Nietzsche attributes a form of scepticism to the French moralists’ psychological observation. The practice of psychology, Nietzsche states, is often negatively seen, especially by unscientific minds, for it ‘seems to plant a sense of diminishment and suspicion in the souls of human beings’ (HH 36).¹⁸² At the time of HH, Nietzsche himself is unsure as to whether its consequences will be more fruitful or frightful for the well-being of humanity (HH 37). As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford ask, ‘[w]ill the new psychologists not simply promote widespread scepticism and mistrust, so ridding the world of helpful beliefs, such as the belief that the world is characterised by an abundance of impersonal benevolence?’¹⁸³ Suspicion is not only considered the aftereffect of psychological observation but also its very method. This is what Ruth Abbey identifies as a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’: that is to say, a mode of interpretation that casts suspicion by bringing to light what is hidden in the depths and complexity of the human psyche.¹⁸⁴

Psychologists such as the French Moralist deploy this hermeneutic of suspicion in order to puncture and deflate commonly held beliefs about morality. For example, La Rochefoucauld seeks to show that many beliefs, feelings, and actions that are normally regarded as moral on account of their being altruistic, in fact, have their origins in egoism. Nietzsche treats this hermeneutic of suspicion as an actual form of scepticism. This can be seen clearly in a fragment of 1882 where Nietzsche speaks of La Rochefoucauld as a ‘moral sceptic [*moralische Skeptiker*]’, one that ‘mistrusts morality’ (NF-1882,3[1]).¹⁸⁵ In all probability, Nietzsche refers to this in MOM 71 where he discusses the ‘skeptics in the field of morality’. Sceptics who enquire and have doubts

¹⁸¹ Pippin 2010, p. 11. I agree with Pippin that Nietzsche’s intellectual practice is much more akin to psychological observation than to metaphysics or first philosophy. I also agree with him that Nietzsche is not principally interested in offering traditional philosophical theories, especially in the fields of metaphysics and epistemology. I am in disagreement with him, nevertheless, when he suggests that for Nietzsche psychology will replace philosophy (p. 1). It seems to me that, in spite of his criticism of traditional philosophy and especially of metaphysics, in the middle writings Nietzsche is very much endeavouring to redefine the practice and goal of philosophy (at least for himself). In HH, for example, Nietzsche speaks of a ‘historical philosophizing’ (HH 2) and more in general of a ‘truly liberating philosophical science’ (HH 27) or ‘[s]cientific philosophy’ (HH 131). And, I think, in the subsequent middle writings, too, Nietzsche continues to see his intellectual practice as a form of philosophy.

¹⁸² See also NF-1876,23[41]. Abbey 2020 rightly points out that ‘[t]he disadvantages of psychological observation [Nietzsche] enumerates are not epistemological but psychological, social and ethical’ (p. 45).

¹⁸³ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

¹⁸⁴ See Abbey 2015, p. 17. See also Abbey 2020, pp. 46-47.

¹⁸⁵ Abbey 2015 translates this as ‘skeptical moralist’ somehow losing Nietzsche’s emphasis on La Rochefoucauld being a sceptic about morality (p. 14). Cf. MOM 71.

about moral sensations, notions, and values, he observes, annoy the majority of people who unquestioningly believe in morality. Nevertheless, it should be noted, Nietzsche identifies some limits to the French moralists' scepticism about morality: 'When the moral sceptic [such as La Rochefoucauld] mistrusts morality, it still remains to be sceptical about his mistrust' (NF-1882,3[1]). In particular, in Nietzsche's view, La Rochefoucauld's mistrust about morality seems to focus only on the lowest parts of the human psyche, taking delight in diminishing human motivations – to the level of misanthropy.¹⁸⁶ In contrast, Nietzsche seeks to revive the heavily neglected art of psychological observation in the context of his programme to reform the human mind, liberating it from mental and emotional constraints with a view to promoting higher forms of culture and perhaps the well-being of humanity.

It is important not to forget that Nietzsche also praises the methods of philology, understood as the art of reading a text well, which is driven by 'the simple desire to understand what an author is saying' (HH 270).¹⁸⁷ What is intriguing, I think, is that the methods of philological exegesis are presented as the origin of and the paradigm for all scientific enquiry: 'All of science attained continuity and steadiness only when the art of reading correctly, that is, philology had reached its peak' (HH 270).¹⁸⁸

In HH 270-271, Nietzsche suggests an analogy between philology, the art of reading carefully, and science in general, which is characterised as '*[t]he art of drawing conclusions correctly*'. Similarly, Nietzsche looks at the metaphysical manner of explaining nature in analogy to the church's way of reading the Bible, criticising both as forms of 'bad exegesis': 'It requires a great deal of understanding to apply the same sort of more rigorous exegesis to nature that philologists have created for all books' (HH 8).¹⁸⁹ In *The Anti-Christ*, it becomes even more evident that Nietzsche construes the methods of philology as the paradigm for all scientific enquiry. There, Nietzsche explicitly states that the Greeks and the Romans had already established 'all the *scientific* methods [...] the great, incomparable art of reading well [...], a free view of reality, a cautious hand, the patience and the seriousness for the smallest things, all the

¹⁸⁶ On Nietzsche's criticism of La Rochefoucauld see Abbey 2015. Ruth Abbey notes that in NF-1876,18[21] Nietzsche compares La Rochefoucauld's tendency to debase the human being with Christianity. See also NF-1887, 10[57]. Cf. HH 114, 141.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. A 52.

¹⁸⁸ See also the following extracts: 'The whole of the Middle ages was incapable of a rigorous philological exegesis' (HH 270), 'drawing conclusions that are false is the rule in more ancient times' (HH 271); '[t]he greatest advantage that human beings have made lies in having learned to draw conclusions correctly' (HH 271).

¹⁸⁹ See also WS 17.

integrity of knowledge’ (A 59).¹⁹⁰ In light of this, Nietzsche’s estimation of philology reveals an important aspect of his estimation of science: first and foremost, Nietzsche esteems the latter as a rigorous mode of investigation, one which is slow, careful, free, cautious, full of reserve, patient, serious, and rightful or honest.¹⁹¹ On the model of philology, scientific enquiry is largely understood as good exegesis or interpretation not only of texts but of the most desperate phenomena.

Moreover, philology as (the model for) a rigorous or scientific mode of investigation is linked to a form of scepticism. In his notes for the never-published unfashionable observation ‘We Philologists’, Nietzsche characterises the figure of the philologist of the future as a ‘*grosse Skeptiker* [great sceptic]’ (NF-1875,3[17]) – in contrast to the mere antiquarian scholar who is merely interested in preserving the past.¹⁹² James Porter explains in what sense Nietzsche regards such a philology of the future as inherently sceptical: classical philology has a ‘tendency to skepticism (or “Pyrrhonism”)', it is ‘broadly speaking, a hermeneutics of suspicion’, which ‘[involves] the capacity to distinguish spurious from authentic texts’; from the 18th century onwards, ‘methodological skepticism’ became an important procedure of philology, which ‘strove to wrest for itself the status of a full-fledged science’.¹⁹³ Philology, as Nietzsche construes it, exemplifies the intellectual capacity to identify and avoid bad exegesis. It is precisely on account of this capacity that, I propose, Nietzsche takes philology as a model for scientific enquiry in general: that is, the capacity to identify and avoid bad interpretations of the world – those based on the worst methods of knowledge such as error, self-deception, passion, and need.

Jessica Berry attempts to characterise the form of scepticism Nietzsche attributes to philology as a form of Pyrrhonian *epoché* or suspension of judgment. This characterisation, I think, has both merits and demerits. Berry places heavy emphasis on Nietzsche’s conception of ‘philology as *ephexis* [suspension] in interpretation’ in A 52 in relation to his famous notion of perspectivism in the late writings.¹⁹⁴ As Richard Bett notes, *ephexis* is ‘a close etymological correlate of *epoché*, the Pyrrhonists’ standard term for suspension of judgement, and Nietzsche

¹⁹⁰ In D 207, as we have seen, the Greeks and Romans’ sensibility is associated with ‘a little bit of skepticism for each and everything’.

¹⁹¹ What Nietzsche says about philology in the preface to *Dawn*, I think, applies more in general also to the rigorous or scientific mode of investigation of other disciplines: ‘[philology] teaches to read *well*, which means to read slowly, deeply, backward and forward with care and respect, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate fingers and eyes’ (D ‘Preface’ §5).

¹⁹² See also BVN-1868,569; NF-1875,3[17], 5[55]. On Nietzsche’s characterisation of the philologist as a sceptic see Busellato 2012, pp. 71-75.

¹⁹³ Porter 2000, p. 38. Cf. GS 358.

¹⁹⁴ Berry 2011, pp. 104-132. See also NF-1876,19[107].

must have known this'.¹⁹⁵ Here, I will not discuss the problem of the relation between scepticism and perspectivism; I am principally concerned with understanding and appreciating the form of scepticism Nietzsche sees at work in philology and in scientific enquiry in HH. Can this be interpreted as Pyrrhonian *epoché* or *ephexis*, as Berry suggests?

In my view, the comparison between philology and Pyrrhonian suspension of judgement can be made, but with a necessary caveat. Indeed, Nietzsche uses the Greek term '*ephexis*' that, as Berry correctly notes, means 'stopping or checking' and was dear to the Pyrrhonists.¹⁹⁶ At times, however, Berry seems to rashly conclude that Pyrrhonian *epoché* is the goal of his philosophical project.¹⁹⁷ I strongly disagree with this. Although – as we will see in Chapter 4 – Nietzsche does recommend Pyrrhonian-like forms of suspension of judgment with respect to specific issues such as religious and metaphysical questions, at all stage of his intellectual development he simply does not see suspension *on all matters* as the goal or end of his philological and philosophical investigation. As we will see in Sections 2.2-3, this is particularly evident in HH and HH II, where Nietzsche makes it clear that the practice of free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, leads to specific kinds of discoveries, such as empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities.

What Nietzsche means by philology as *ephexis* of interpretation, I think, is not that it always results in suspension of judgment but that its mode or method is *ephectic* or suspensive:¹⁹⁸ 'Philology should be understood here in a very general sense, as the art of reading well, – to be able to read facts *without* falsifying them through interpretations, without letting the desire to understand make you lose caution, patience, subtlety' (A 52). That is to say, philology is taken as a paradigm for a mode of investigation that teaches how to pay close attention to the matter under consideration, to patiently slow down our thinking, to temporarily suspend our immediate judgment about the issue at stake, to carefully ponder divergent views, and to cautiously formulate hypotheses. All of this is to investigate well, to be honest with oneself and do full justice to what is considered, to avoid rushed or partial interpretations, to make better judgments, and draw more accurate conclusions. I will extensively discuss Nietzsche's uses of suspension of judgment in Chapter 4 and in Section 5.2.

¹⁹⁵ Bett 2000, p. 73.

¹⁹⁶ Berry 2011, p. 131. See Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 4, PH 1.7.

¹⁹⁷ Berry 2011, p. 176.

¹⁹⁸ Not even all the ancient sceptics agree that suspension of judgment is the aim of philosophical investigation. For example, according to Sextus Empiricus' outline, the aim of Pyrrhonists is the hope to become tranquil rather than suspension of judgment. See Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.30.

Hence, Nietzsche promotes the methods of philology – including temporary suspension of judgment – as the paradigm for a rigorous, scientific mode of investigation. In an analogous way to philology, I want to propose now that for Nietzsche free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, ought to be guided by sceptical practices or attitudes such as mistrust, circumspection, and caution.

These sceptical practices, I suggest, are at the centre of Nietzsche’s estimation of scientific methods starting from HH. It is important to stress that most of the times Nietzsche refers to scientific methods as plural, emphasising the methodological variety of scientific enquiry; this leads him to claim in *Dawn* that ‘[t]here is no one and only scientific method that leads to knowledge’, exhorting researchers to ‘proceed experimentally’, trying out different modes of investigation (D 432).¹⁹⁹ It is not often noticed in the secondary literature that, nevertheless, the procedures of different scientific disciplines are valued and grouped together for their being rigorous. Of course, Nietzsche is interested also in the specific methods of history and natural science, for example, but what seems to be most valuable to him is the rigour of the scientific sense in searching for the truth (HH 272).²⁰⁰ Indeed, for Nietzsche, scientific enquiry principally trains a capacity to do as opposed to the capacity to know this or that fact: ‘The value of having some time rigorously pursued a *rigorous* science does not rest directly upon the results of this pursuit’, rather ‘one has learned how to attain a *purpose purposefully*’ (HH 256). In particular, Nietzsche values scientific enquiry inasmuch it develops and requires a number of sceptical attitudes of the mind – which, as I have shown, are typical of the philologist as a sceptic.

These sceptical practices are at the centre of Nietzsche’s distinction between free minds, which are driven by the scientific spirit, and people who merely learn about the results of science: the latter ones ‘do not have the instinctive²⁰¹ distrust [*Misstrauen*] for misguided ways of thinking that has sunk its roots into the soul of every scientific person as a result of lengthily training’ (HH 635). In this sense, I propose, we can speak of a ‘method of mistrust’ in Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy. Furthermore, thinkers who practice at least one science ‘will know what method means and how necessary the most extreme circumspection [*Besonnenheit*] is’ (HH 635).²⁰² In

¹⁹⁹ See also D 43. On the plural modes and methods of knowledge advanced in *Dawn* see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 74-81.

²⁰⁰ See also HH 3, 109, 633.

²⁰¹ On mistrust as an instinct as opposed to a theoretical position such as a commitment to a sceptical doctrine see Berry 2011, p. 139.

²⁰² Translation modified.

addition, the scientific spirit ‘must gradually bring to maturity the virtue of *cautious reserve* [and] wise moderation’ (HH 631).²⁰³

Precisely the mistrustful, circumspect, ‘cautious and modest scientific sensibility’ (HH 635) – which is well exemplified by the practice of philology – seems to be what makes the methods of science rigorous and what characterises a well-guided way of thinking in Nietzsche’s view. This sceptical sensibility is, indeed, the basis of a ‘rule-governed thinking’ capable of distinguishing between truth and fiction or fantasies, between evidence-based reasoning and convictions stemming from personal observation (HH 265). In this, on my reading, sceptical practices, acquire an important methodological significance: they are tools to guide and govern thinking in a rigorous way in order to enquire well.

In the first place, these sceptical practices aid scientific people and free spirits to identify, avoid, and critique misguided ways of thinking – those based on ‘*bad habits in drawing conclusions*’ (HH 30). And in the second place, it is important to note, for Nietzsche the goal of scientific training is ‘rigorous thinking, careful judging, and logical reasoning [...] [as well as] critical thinking’ (HH 265). As we will see in Chapter 4, unlike the Pyrrhonists Nietzsche recommends sceptical practices, including issue-specific and temporary uses of suspension of judgments, as tools to form more careful, better judgment (WS 19, 296) – at times, as we will see in Chapter 5, even at the cost of being intellectually unjust (GS 111). Nietzschean free spirits follow these sceptical practices not only as a method of investigation in the hope to become tranquil suspending judgment on all matters but also as a method for discovery. In HH, Nietzsche envisages a constructive aspect of his sceptical mode of investigation: in the future new cultural forms will be built upon what scepticism leaves uncorroded. In the next section, I will focus on Nietzsche’s construal of scepticism as a truth-producing methodology.

2.2 Scepticism as Truth-Producing Methodology and Descartes’ Method of Doubt

In this section, I aim to show that at least in *Human, All Too Human* I and II scepticism is construed as a truth-producing methodology, too – that is, as a method to produce or discover specific kinds of truths. At various times in volume one, Nietzsche makes it clear that the use of the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry, guided by sceptical attitudes, leads to the acquisition of ‘certain’ and ‘enduring’ knowledge of ‘small, unpretentious truths’ (HH 3). In particular, he

²⁰³ See also HH 635.

maintains, empirical truths can be ‘found’ through rigorous thinking guided by modesty (HH 3). In HH 634, Nietzsche insists that thanks to the sharpening of scientific methods ‘truths really could be discovered’ and in the following aphorism, he also suggests that the instinct for mistrust is specifically directed at a form of certainty: while the vast majority of people and thinkers want merely opinions and convictions, the tiny minority of scientific thinkers and free spirits ‘wants *certainty*’ (HH 635). This line of thought is developed in HH 637 where Nietzsche writes that free spirits will have ‘not opinions but only certainties and precisely measured probabilities in [their] head’. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche reaffirms that scientific enquiry demands the coldest mistrust ‘because mistrust is the touchstone for the gold of certainty’ (WS 145). In HH and HH II, then, Nietzsche seems to construe mistrust not only as a truth-searching methodology but also as a method for producing lasting or durable knowledge, empirical truths, certainties and probabilities.

It is important to reiterate that for Nietzsche, though, scepticism is not only merely an epistemological method but, as we saw in Section 1.3, it has a crucial cultural significance, too. Indeed, according to Nietzsche’s observation, the development of scientific thinking, rigorous methods of enquiry, and sceptical attitudes has two principal effects upon European culture and potentially upon humanity as a whole. First, it exposes and combats fanatical modes of thinking and living as a sign of lower culture: ‘Rigorous methods of inquiry have disseminated enough mistrust and caution that everyone who advocates opinions violently in his words and actions is felt to be an enemy of our present-day culture, or at least to be a backward person’ (HH 633).²⁰⁴

Second, scepticism will transform human life, producing truths on the basis of which it will be possible to edify new, higher cultural forms. We saw in Chapter 1 that in HH 22 Nietzsche forges an alliance between free-spirited philosophy, science, and scepticism. We also saw that in this aphorism he reflects on the cultural effect of the disbelief in metaphysical views, suggesting that edification will be possible in the future in spite of and on the basis of science and scepticism. In this context, Nietzsche writes that, although free-spirited philosophy, in concert with science, needs doubt and mistrust, ‘the sum of incontestable truths, that is, truths that have outlasted all the storms of skepticism and all disintegration, can in time become so great (in the dietetics of health, for example) that it prompts people to undertake “eternal” works’ (HH 22). This striking passage is frequently neglected, especially in the literature on Nietzsche and scepticism. Here, Nietzsche seems to put forth a conception of truth typical of a modern sceptical tradition which

²⁰⁴ I will focus on Nietzsche’s conception of scepticism as a weapon to combat fanaticism in Chapter 5.

has its origin in Descartes: truth is what outlasts doubt, mistrust, and critique.²⁰⁵ Hence, Nietzsche individuates two constructive aspects of the conjoint practice of scientific enquiry and free-spirited philosophy: first, scepticism is a truth-producing methodology; second, at this stage of his intellectual development, he envisages that future forms of culture and life will be built upon truth, that is, upon what doubt and mistrust leave uncorroded.

Commenting on HH 635, Paul Franco writes that '[t]he emphasis on method and mistrust in this aphorism remains a key feature of Nietzsche's understanding of science throughout his career, and it receives vivid expression in the quote from Descartes' *Discourse on Method* that he chose as the motto for the 1878 edition of *Human, All Too Human*'.²⁰⁶ But what is exactly the relation between Nietzsche's emphasis on method and mistrust and his Descartes quotation? Franco remains vague about this question. Surely Nietzsche's putting a passage from the *Discourse of Method* in place of the preface reveals a sympathetic reception of Descartes - at least at the time he first published HH.²⁰⁷ This is somehow confirmed in *Dawn* where Nietzsche describes Descartes and Spinoza as thinkers 'who must have enjoyed knowledge' (D 550). In light of this, another question inevitably comes to the fore: is there an affinity between Nietzsche's method of mistrust and Descartes's famous method of doubt? As we have seen, in HH scepticism and sceptical attitudes, including doubt, are construed as a truth-searching and truth-producing methodology; and we have also seen that the methodological use of scepticism, for Nietzsche, is even directed at truth and certainty. At this point one cannot but think of a parallelism with Descartes's method of doubt - which is deployed in *The Meditations* and, to an extent, in the *Discourse of Method* for establishing undoubtable and therefore certain truths. My position is that such a parallelism is simultaneously helpful and unhelpful; and for this reason, I think, it is important to address it. This parallelism will help us to clarify some of the uses and goals of Nietzsche's scepticism in HH.

Jessica Berry, who is keen - at times too keen - to interpret Nietzsche in relation to Pyrrhonism, tries everything she can to distance Nietzsche from the Cartesian tradition of doubt

²⁰⁵ For an overview of this modern tradition of scepticism see, for example, Reed 2018.

²⁰⁶ Franco 2011, p. 18.

²⁰⁷ In 1886, Nietzsche removes both the Voltaire dedication and the Descartes prefatory quotation from the second edition of *Human, All Too Human*, replacing them with a new preface. Lampert 2017 suggests that Nietzsche replaces the original dedication and prefatory quotation because in his late writings he becomes increasingly critical of the philosophical and cultural project of the Enlightenment which he publicly embraced in 1878; and because the late Nietzsche becomes severely critical of Descartes (pp. 155-157). His criticism, as we will see, is developed in the notebooks of 1885. On the reversal of Nietzsche's attitude to the Enlightenment between the middle and late writings see Garrard 2008.

and in general from modern and contemporary forms of scepticism.²⁰⁸ I agree with Berry that Nietzsche's concern with scepticism could not be more remote from 'the purely academic skepticism of contemporary epistemology':²⁰⁹ Nietzsche is much more interested in doxastic scepticism, one concerning belief and doxastic attitudes (acceptance, rejection, and suspension).²¹⁰ Moreover, Nietzsche's conception of philosophy as a way of life and his interest in the cultural dimension of sceptical problems are not principal concerns in contemporary epistemology. However, it is one of the main arguments of this thesis that Nietzsche is engaging not only with the ancient sceptical tradition but also with modern forms of scepticism, especially of French origin, such as Montaigne's essays, the French moralists' suspicion about morality, and Enlightenment scepticism. Here, I want to propose that in a specific sense Descartes may be regarded as a source of Nietzsche's methodological use of scepticism in HH.

Other commentators have attempted to read Nietzsche in relation to Descartes's philosophy. Robert Rethy interprets the Descartes quotation in the first edition of HH as a clear indication that Nietzsche is aligning himself with the Cartesian tradition; more specifically, Rethy claims, Nietzsche intends to continue and radicalise Descartes' philosophy of doubt.²¹¹ Drawing on this, Matthew Meyer more recently notes that Nietzsche's ethos of scientific enquiry in the free spirit project is reminiscent of Descartes' *Meditations*, for it is similarly aimed at liberating the mind from false beliefs.²¹² Meyer identifies three fundamental similarities:

First, [...] [l]ike the *Meditations*, *Human* invites the reader to join the free spirit in a spiritual exercise of epistemic purification [...]. Second, Nietzsche adopts a method for investigation in *Human* that resembles the method in Descartes' *Meditations*. Whereas Descartes turns to radical doubt, Nietzsche turns to the sober methods of natural sciences to reveal the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric nature of many commonly held beliefs. Finally, the desire to identify and eliminate false beliefs from one's thinking presupposes that the discovery of truth is of the utmost importance.²¹³

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Berry 2011, pp. 10-14.

²⁰⁹ Berry 2011, pp. 33. Nietzsche shows little to no interest in theory of knowledge, especially in the Cartesian epistemological project that has become fashionable in contemporary, Anglo-American epistemology. This is the project of artificially designing sceptical hypotheses and arguments (such as the dream and the evil genius scenarios in the *Meditations*) in order to test whether we are in fact justified in believing propositions that we ordinarily take to be true (such as any proposition about the external world). Following Descartes, contemporary epistemologies are largely engaged in designing and trying to respond to sceptical challenges with the aim to demonstrate the absolute certainty and justified true belief about propositions that we would never doubt ordinarily. In my view, Nietzsche is much more interested in the practice of enquire and in the characteristics of the enquirer.

²¹⁰ Here, too, I am in agreement with Berry 2011, pp. 13-14.

²¹¹ Rethy 1976, pp. 293-294. See also Sommer 2018, p. 445.

²¹² Meyer 2019, pp. 7, 109.

²¹³ Meyer 2019, p. 88.

These points, in my view, illustrate three superficial similarities that, on closer inspection, conceal three profound differences between Nietzsche and Descartes with respect to their uses of scepticism.

The first similarity identified by Meyer appears to be the least problematic. In particular, Meyer's characterisation of Nietzsche's free-spirited project as a 'spiritual exercise' of liberation from erroneous beliefs seems promising; this, evoking Hadot's notion of spiritual exercises, somehow brings out an important aspect of Nietzsche's middle writing: that is to say, his conception of philosophy as a way of life. Having said that, I find the comparison with Descartes's *Meditations* relatively weak. A stronger comparison could have been drawn with the *Discourse of Method*, which Nietzsche himself quotes in place of a preface. As Descartes in the *Discourse*, in HH Nietzsche has embarked upon a project of reforming his mind, seeking intellectual autonomy and freeing himself from erroneous beliefs.²¹⁴ (Like Descartes's, Nietzsche's project is both individual and cultural.)

My problem with Meyer's first point is that the use of doubt in the *Meditations* is, in fact, incompatible with Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy. In his *Meditations*, Descartes largely uses doubt as a wilful, coolly calculated, and artificial strategy in order to establish the absolute certainty of the first principles of philosophy such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. In contrast, for Nietzsche, although the instinct of mistrust is directed at the search and discovery of specific kinds of truths and certainties, it might as well lead to the renunciation of the doubted beliefs: it might reveal that some beliefs are in fact unbelievable because were held on the basis of need, error, passion, self-deception, and faith rather than scientific knowledge (HH 9, 109, 225-226). Nietzsche's spiritual exercise in scepticism in HH is aimed at the refutation and often painful eradication of erroneous beliefs, such as those of religion and metaphysics. Conversely, the objective of Descartes's strategic use of doubt is to refute doubt itself: he aims to demonstrate that a number of epistemological and metaphysical claims are undoubtable and absolutely certain; what is ultimately abandoned is the sceptical scenario artificially designed to reaffirm the beliefs initially called into question.

Moreover, I cannot accept another claim Meyer makes about the first point. This has to do with the centre of his argument about the free spirit works, namely, with his 'dialectical reading'. According to Meyer,

²¹⁴ Cf. Descartes 2006[1637], pp. 11, and 15-17. Descartes's first maxim, in particular, seems to resonate well with Nietzsche recommendation of sceptical attitudes such as mistrust, caution, and circumspection to avoid prejudice and premature conclusions.

Nietzsche is best understood as knowing, at the time of writing a work like *Human*, that the free spirit will undergo further transformations and developments. In this sense, the free spirit works can be understood more like Descartes' *Meditations* [...]. Although Descartes the author knows where his meditations will lead, the meditator in the text is presented as having little idea where the quest for knowledge will go once everything is subjected to radical doubt.²¹⁵

I find it very hard to believe that by the time of HH Nietzsche knew exactly where his philosophy was going to go and artificially planned a number of writings to stage his intellectual development.²¹⁶ I agree with commentators like Richard Schacht who see in the middle writings a mind in transition, 'moving in many different directions and in many different ways'.²¹⁷ The movements of Nietzsche's mind, both forwards and backwards, can be traced in his notebooks and letters as well as in his developing philosophical projects in the middle writings.

The case of scepticism, I think, is telling. It is one of the central arguments of my thesis that Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism develops in his writings; in particular, I argue, he is constantly in search of a positive, constructive goal of sceptical ways of thinking; but in the course of his intellectual development he tries out different solutions. In HH, as I have been suggesting, he tries to link scepticism to the discovery of empirical truths and certainties; in WS to a wisdom of life which focuses on the small things at hand in our earthly lives; in D and in GS to experimentalism; in the late writings such as BGE and the fifth book of GS to the psychological notions of strength and weakness. The late Nietzsche even regards some of his previous attempts with scepticism as real failures. For example, in the second edition of GS Nietzsche becomes deeply suspicious of the scientific use of scepticism as a truth-producing methodology, regarding it as just another instance of the 'need to believe' which expresses a particular psychological weakness (GS 347).²¹⁸ Indeed, as we will see in Section 4.4, in GS Preface and in GS 375, Nietzsche no longer links scepticism to certainty but rather to uncertainty, curiosity, and to the capacity to take delight in the questionable character of things. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche even states, more or less ironically, that 'it is not doubt, it is *certainty* that drives people mad' (EH 'Clever' §4, pp. 91-92). Analogously, as we will see in the Conclusion, in BGE 208 Nietzsche

²¹⁵ Meyer 2019, p. 42.

²¹⁶ The only way I can think of saving Myer's dialectical reading is applying it to Nietzsche's retrospective presentation of his intellectual development starting from 1886 – not to its intellectual development itself. Rethinking his philosophical trajectory in the 1886 prefaces and in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche does re-interpret his writings in a way that might be compatible with Myer's 'dialectical reading' – but this is mostly because then Nietzsche did know where his philosophizing headed to.

²¹⁷ Schacht 1996, p. xi. See also Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 1, 5-6, and 24.

²¹⁸ Despite this growing suspicion for science's demand for certainty, it should be noted, in his late writings Nietzsche still values the sceptical side of rigorous, scientific thinking, especially as an antidote against conviction and fanaticism. See, for example, Nietzsche's estimation of the 'police of mistrust' in GS 344. See also A 54.

seems to criticise the very French kind of scepticism he was embracing in the middle writings. Again, it is very hard to believe that Nietzsche had all of this in mind while writing HH.

As to the second point, Meyer rightly notices an important difference between the methods of Nietzsche and Descartes. Nietzsche is not interested in the method of radical doubt Descartes deployed in the *Meditations*: for example, he does not defend knowledge claims from the dream argument or the deceiving God argument. Andreas Urs Sommer notes that, moreover, '[Descartes's] methodological doubt in the philosophy of knowledge did not seem radical enough to Nietzsche. Descartes still seeks and intends to find evidence for an absolute and evident truth'.²¹⁹ Returning to Meyer's second point, as mentioned above, he focuses only on the 'sceptical' method of natural science 'that carefully observes, identifies, and describes patterns in the empirical world',²²⁰ as opposed to the methodical attitude of rigorous enquiry in general (exemplified by philology). In doing so, I think, he misses an important similarity between Nietzsche's and Descartes's discourses on methods. As Descartes in the *Discourse*, Nietzsche in the middle writings is directly concerned with methods for 'rightly conducting one's reason'²²¹ – or, in Nietzsche's own words, with 'rule-governed thinking' (HH 265) and with 'the art of drawing conclusions correctly' (HH 271).²²² Recognising this, as I argued in Section 2.1, is important to

²¹⁹ Sommer 2018, p. 445. It should be specified that this is Nietzsche's position especially in the late writings. Although Nietzsche is critical about absolute truth virtually at each stage of his philosophical development, in the two volumes of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche positively values certain knowledge and truth. Things are very different in the late writings. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, alluding to Descartes, Nietzsche writes that even philosophers who vowed themselves to '*de omnibus dubitandum* [all is doubted]' left a number of beliefs undoubted (BGE 2). This criticism is elaborated in several posthumous fragments of 1885, in which Nietzsche seeks to show that Descartes's methodological doubt is, in fact, restricted to and dependent upon his unquestioned demand for certainty and security (NF-1885,40[10]). In particular, Nietzsche identifies a number of undoubted assumptions constraining Descartes's epistemological scepticism. I mention two. First, the belief in the immediate certainty of the proposition '*cogito ergo sum*' (NF-1885,40[24]). Nietzsche famously claims that this proposition cannot be considered an immediate certainty, for it 'presupposes that one knows what "thinking" is and secondly, what "being" is' (NF-1885, 40[24]). In leaving the immediate certainty of the *cogito* undoubted, Nietzsche suggests, Descartes gets caught in the trap of language, assuming (without doubting) that there is a substantial subject underlying the activity of thinking – that there is an 'I' that 'thinks' (NF-1885,40[23]). See also NF-1885, 40[20]; NF-1887,10[158]. Cf. BGE 17. On Nietzsche's scepticism about metaphysical categories, such as subject, and his criticism of Descartes see Poellner 1995, pp. 29-78. The second undoubted assumption Nietzsche identifies in Cartesian use of doubt is the invocation of God's existence and credibility to guarantee the truth of our sensory experience (NF-1885,36[30]; 2[93]). For the late Nietzsche, then, Descartes is neither sufficiently radical nor completely genuine in his doubting: not only does he fail to question a number of assumptions, but he also uses doubt in a merely strategic way in order to reaffirm the absolute certainty of knowledge and metaphysical claims he considers indubitable and is never genuinely willing to suspend or reject.

²²⁰ Meyer 2019, p. 243. However, like the majority of commentators, Meyer does not adequately explain the methodological significance of scepticism.

²²¹ On the distinction between the radical method of doubt in the *Meditations* and other Cartesian methods of enquiry see Broughton 2002, pp. 2-7

²²² Indeed, in a posthumous fragment of 1887 (contemporary to his criticism of the Cartesian method of radical doubt) Nietzsche praises Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, and Comte as 'the great methodologists' (NF-1887, 9[61]).

understand and appreciate the methodological significance that Nietzsche attaches to sceptical attitudes or virtues as tool to think and enquire well.

It is important to pay close attention to the third and final point made by Meyer, that concerning truth and certainty. As I have suggested, in a number of passages from HH, he makes it clear that doubt and mistrust lead to the discovery of a specific kind of truths and certainties. This was precisely what invited the parallelism with Descartes. But there, I think, the similarities end. Descartes is primarily concerned with first philosophy, with metaphysics and epistemology; especially in the *Meditations*, he seeks to demonstrate the absolute certainty, both metaphysical and epistemic, of the first and last things such as the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul. On the contrary, in HH and HH II Nietzsche defines his free-spirited philosophy in opposition to such metaphysical ambitions. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 4, in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* he even recommends to practice indifference towards metaphysical questions about the first and last things, proposing to re-concentrate our philosophical attention on the small things at hand:

Nothing would be more absurd than wanting to await what science will finally ascertain about the first and last things, while still thinking (and especially believing!), until that time, in the *traditional way* [...]. The drive for wanting to have *only certainties* [*Sicherheiten*] in this area is a *religious drive*, nothing more – a concealed and only seemingly sceptical form of the ‘metaphysical need’ [...]. We have no *need* whatsoever for these certainties about the uttermost horizons in order for humanity to live fully and fitly. (WS 16)

It is abundantly clear from this passage that for Nietzsche there is simply a lack of certainty about the first and last things; genuine scientific enquiry has not ascertained anything in these matters: ‘there is no *consensus omnium sapientium* at all’, for example, in regard to ‘the existence of God’ (HH 110). Nietzsche is claiming that wanting only certainties in this area – in spite of disagreement and the lack of conclusive proof – is not a scientific drive but rather a religious drive, one that secretly wants existential security as opposed to genuine knowledge.

Notice that Nietzsche distinguishes between epistemic certainties (*Gewissheiten*)²²³ and existential securities (*Sicherheiten*). As Jaspers carefully observes

scientific certainty provides no security in connection with the things that really matter the most. Such certainty relates to methodically acquired knowledge of the determinate and relative, while the sort of security generally desired is confidence in the whole thing. Nietzsche’s remark that it is a “prejudice that certainty is better than uncertainty and the open seas” is not directed against the methodical certainty of science but against the will to security within the whole.²²⁴

²²³ See HH 635, 637; and WS 145.

²²⁴ Jaspers 1997, p. 177.

On the one hand, the sort of certainty attained by scientific enquiry, by means of scepticism, does not satisfy the metaphysical drive or need for existential security; on the other, the security that some people want does not meet the intellectual or epistemic standard of rigorous, scientific thinking.²²⁵ According to Nietzsche's diagnosis in the middle writings, metaphysical certainties are no longer needed for the health and flourishing of modern humanity, whereas scepticism might become an unavoidable way of thinking perhaps precipitating a new condition of health.²²⁶

It is clear that for Nietzsche, in light of WS 16, Descartes's method of doubt would be a notable example of the concealed and only seemingly sceptical form of the metaphysical need: this form of scepticism is not used to openly investigate into the first and last things, nor to genuinely question one's beliefs about them; rather, it is used to satisfy the psychological-religious drive of wanting to have only securities about metaphysical issues – about which we have no absolute scientific certainties. For this reason, Nietzsche attributes a 'dogmatic carelessness in doubting' to Descartes (NF-1885,40[25]).

It is also very clear that the absolute certainties about metaphysical questions that Descartes seeks to establish by means of his radical doubt are completely different from the empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities that for Nietzsche are produced by the method of mistrust. Firstly, Nietzsche suggests that scientific thinkers and free spirits do not require 'the hypothesis of a god' to explain the world and morality (HH 28). Furthermore, Nietzsche casts doubt on a number of Descartes's indubitable certainties such as his dualism between mind and body (HH 5), his strict separation between human beings and animals (HH 11; MOM 185), and his belief in God's honesty (D 91).

Secondly, in HH Nietzsche never says, explicitly and precisely, the nature of free spirits' truths, certainties, and probabilities – he limits himself to say that they are empirical rather than metaphysical. This, I think, is largely because in 1878 Nietzsche is not quite sure about what these might ultimately be: indeed, the emphasis is often placed on their novelty, on their difference from old beliefs, and on their being future discoveries. The positive, constructive side of scepticism in HH and HH II, then, is a search for new certain but modest truths and plausible hypotheses. As I have mentioned, Nietzsche also envisions that, in the future, edification will be possible on the basis of what is left to pick up after such a sceptical investigation. Indeed, for

²²⁵ To complicate the picture, in MOM 7 Nietzsche observes that 'much people prefer uncertainty in their spiritual horizon and [...] in the depths of their souls they *hate* the truth because of its certainty'. Those people, for Nietzsche, are hostile to light because, similarly to those who want only certainties, they are not driven by the spirit of scientific enquiry but rather by their need for security – they are afraid of the potentially negative consequences of unwanted discoveries.

²²⁶ Cf. HH 21-22.

Nietzsche, certainty plays a central role in establishing ‘[*the two principles of a new life*’: – *First Principle*: we should base our lives upon what is most certain, most demonstrable: not as in the past, upon what is furthest away, most indefinite, cloudiest upon the horizon. *Second Principle*: we should determine the *sequential ordering* of what is near and nearest at hand, of what is certain and less certain, before we arrange our lives and give them definite direction’ (WS 310).

2.3 Ancient and Modern Practices of Scepticism Combined

We saw that in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche construes scepticism, in the form of doubt and mistrust, not only as truth-searching methodology but also as a method to produce or discover specific kinds of truths and certainties. In this, I suggested, Nietzsche aligns himself with a modern sceptical tradition inaugurated by Descartes’s methodological doubt. As we saw, however, Nietzsche’s construal of mistrust as truth-producing methodology is fundamentally different from Descartes’s method of doubt. In this section, I explore the relation between scepticism as truth-searching methodology and scepticism as truth-producing methodology. In particular, I address a potential tension between the two sceptical methodologies, arising from Nietzsche’s famous emphasis on ‘the pathos of searching the truth’ in contrast to ‘the pathos that we possess the truth’ (HH 633). On the one hand, Nietzsche favours a mode of investigation powered by the pathos of search to avoid and combat the pathos of possession, associating the latter with conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism; on the other, as we have seen, at various times in HH Nietzsche claims that scientific and free-spirited enquiry, guided by rigorous methods and sceptical attitudes, will produce new truths and certainties. The tension, then, is the following: are the truths and certainties produced by scientific enquiry an instance of the pathos of possession? Nietzsche himself seems to point to this when he says that ‘*the belief of having found truth*’ through language is operative even in science (HH 11).

Paul Franco, among other commentators, tries to minimise the tension by stressing that for Nietzsche ‘[s]cience is less about the products of inquiry than it is about the process of relentless and radical questioning of everything that presents itself as certain knowledge’.²²⁷ As mentioned above, I largely agree that when Nietzsche values science, he primarily values the methodical, procedural, and sceptical nature of scientific enquiry. Nevertheless, I think, a potential tension remains. As we saw in Section 2.2, Nietzsche also seems to value the products

²²⁷ Franco 2011, p. 18.

or discoveries of scientific enquiry – that is, ‘the small, unpretentious truths found by rigorous methods’ and the laboriously acquired knowledge (HH 3).²²⁸ We also saw that, in a Cartesian-like fashion, for Nietzsche, ‘incontestable truths’ are those that ‘have outlasted [...] skepticism’ (HH 22). How does Nietzsche’s emphasis on relentless questioning square with his estimation of scientific discoveries, empirical truths, certainties, and lasting knowledge?

In this section, I investigate the tension between the pathos of search and scientific discovery in Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy, especially in HH and HH II. This tension, in my view, is generated by a contamination or combination between two forms of scepticism in Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy: on the one hand, he is committed to the ancient sceptical practice of continuous investigation; on the other, at least in HH, he appreciates the importance of the modern use of doubt and mistrust as methods for discovery. For Nietzsche, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 3, this combination of scepticisms is important for thinking and enquiring well in the context of his commitment to the intellectual conscience and to an ethics of belief. Here, I try to release or at least ease the interpretive tension between sceptical investigation, scientific discovery, and belief in Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy.

Commentators notice an affinity between Nietzsche’s commitment to the pathos of searching in the middle writings and the ancient practices of *scepsis* and *zetesis* – that is, a continuous activity of investigation and an inclination for enquiry or research as opposed to discovery. This practice of investigation is famously at the centre of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Pyrrhonian sceptics, as Sextus Empiricus reports, describe themselves as those who ‘are still investigating’, distinguishing themselves from the Dogmatists, who ‘think that they have discovered the truth’, and from the Academics, who ‘have asserted that things cannot be apprehended’.²²⁹ Both Dogmatists and Academics, one way or another, bring their investigations to an end: the former ones because they think they have discovered the truth; the latter ones – who can in fact be regarded as negative dogmatists – because they think that they have discovered that things cannot be apprehended. In contrast, the Pyrrhonists want to remain engaged in a continuous activity of investigation or search. The Pyrrhonian mode of investigation is, then, defined sceptical and zetetic, for it neither results in discovery (dogmatism) nor in the denial of discovery (negative dogmatism).²³⁰ Moreover, Sextus Empiricus specifies that, unlike the

²²⁸ See also HH 637.

²²⁹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 3, PH 1.1-4.

²³⁰ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 3-4, PH 1.1-4, 7.

Academics, the Pyrrhonists do not make use of probabilism in their life but only of *epoché* or suspension of judgment.²³¹

A critical comparison with the Pyrrhonian mode of investigation, I suggest, can help us to illuminate Nietzsche's commitment to the pathos of truth. To be helpful, however, this comparison should remain critical: that is to say, we should resist the temptation to reduce Nietzsche's practice of philosophy to Pyrrhonian scepticism. This interpretive reduction obscures our understanding and appreciation of crucial aspects of Nietzsche's philosophical projects and especially of his use of modern forms of scepticism.

Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford correctly point out that '[p]erhaps the most important sense of sceptical practice we need for a proper understanding of Nietzsche is that of an endless searching and seeking, and this takes the form of a commitment to experimentalism in his writings (see, for example, GS 51). Here Nietzsche is faithful to the original Greek sense of being a sceptic and where the sceptics are conceived as seekers, the *zeteikoi*'.²³² They especially see an affinity with Montaigne's revival of the sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation. Quoting a reflection on Montaigne by Stefan Zweig, Ansell-Pearson and Bamford suggest in passing that Nietzsche, like Montaigne, develops a '*pensée vagabonde*' that takes the greatest pleasure in the search, not in the discovery.²³³ Ansell-Pearson and Bamford rightly identify a limit of the comparison with Montaigne and the Pyrrhonists, highlighting Nietzsche's peculiar and even unique way to appropriate and transform the practices of *scepsis* and *zetesis*: Nietzsche conjoins the activity of continuous investigation with 'a commitment to experimentalism with respect to both individual and social modes of living'.²³⁴ This commitment, they note, is not present in Pyrrhonian scepticism, including Montaigne's revival of it,²³⁵ for the latter promotes a way of life which simply acquiesces to traditional customs and laws. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford further remark that, although we see Nietzsche's devotion to a sceptical, zetetic, and experimental investigation fully at work in *Dawn* as a part of his commitment to the passion of knowledge, 'it deeply informs and guides [also] Nietzsche's philosophical practice in the middle writings preceding *Dawn*'.²³⁶ In what follows, I want to show with precision how the sceptical, zetetic

²³¹ Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 61, PH 1.231.

²³² Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

²³³ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

²³⁴ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

²³⁵ Nevertheless, I will suggest in Section 4.2 that, in a sense, Montaigne could be a source of Nietzsche's experimental scepticism.

²³⁶ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. In contrast, in the early writings Nietzsche is largely critical of such a sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation. See, for example, BT §15, p. 73; HL §10, p. 158. Having said that, in the

practice of investigation informs and guides Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy in HH and HH II – when his commitment to experimentalism has not fully come to maturation.

In HH 633, as I have anticipated, Nietzsche opposes the pathos of search to the pathos of possession, committing himself to the former and criticising the latter as a backward way of thinking. In the first place, it is important to note, Nietzsche calls these '*pathe*', by which he means two opposite attitudes that move the spirit or the mind: the pathos of search is the sceptical, zetetic attitude of continuous investigation;²³⁷ the pathos of possession is the attitude of conviction, dogmatism, or fanaticism. These are *pathe* or attitudes, not theories to be defended. In committing himself to the pathos of search, I think, Nietzsche is not advancing a theory according to which truth can only be searched for and never be found or possessed; rather, he is criticising a specific dogmatic or even fanatical attitude of the mind – which he finds predominant in some religious fanatics (HH 633), pre-Platonic philosophers (HH 261), and Schopenhauer (D 547).²³⁸ In contrast to the pathos of dogmatism and fanaticism, Nietzsche favours the pathos of scepticism, understood as the mental attitude that 'does not grow weary of relearning and examining anew' (HH 633).

The pathos of sceptical, zetetic search is embodied by the figure of the free spirit, who is famously characterised as a wanderer precisely on account of their commitment to this mode of investigation. Driven by the pathos for searching, according to Nietzsche's characterisation, free spirits are like wanderers who do not travel towards some final goal but constantly change opinions, striding from one to another and finding '[their] pleasure in change and ephemerality' (HH 637-638). It is in this sense that, in my view, free spirits and wanderers can be regarded as sceptics. In a posthumous fragment preparatory to HH, Nietzsche even attributes a 'light scepticism' to free spirits' intellectual wandering (NF-1876,17[93]).

Free spirits are defined in contrast to constrained spirits, people of convictions, dogmatists, and fanatics – all driven by the pathos of possession – who one way or another believe to have discovered, once and for all, the truth about something and cease to investigate. In contrast, for Nietzsche, free spirits and wanderers are *skeptikoi* and *zeteikoi* precisely because they are engaged in a continuous activity of investigation, one that does not abandon or call off the search for truth – not even when, as we will see shortly, some truths are found or discovered.

period prior to his involvement in Wagner's artistic and cultural project Nietzsche had spoken of his earliest commitment to philosophy as a devotion to the search for truth, in opposition to belief or faith and to a search for peace of the soul (BVN-1865,469).

²³⁷ In NF-1880,6[122], Nietzsche even states that 'scepticism is a passion [*Passion*]'.

²³⁸ See Section 1.2. I will address Nietzsche's criticism of the pathos of possession in Chapter 5, focusing on Nietzsche's critique of conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism.

In *Mixed Opinion and Maxims*, Nietzsche even proposes to call us free spirits ‘free-moving spirits’: ‘because we feel moved toward freedom as the strongest drive of our spirit and, in opposition to constrained and firmly rooted intellects, see our ideal almost in spiritual nomadism’ (MOM 211). This ideal of spiritual nomadism, of course, informs the title and the philosophical project of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. What I have endeavoured to show so far is that Nietzsche’s commitment to the pathos of searching in HH and to the ideal of spiritual nomadism in MOM and WS is, in fact, a commitment to a sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation. If Ansell-Pearson and Bamford place special emphasis on the importance of the sceptical, zetetic character of Nietzsche’s practice of philosophy in D and in GS, we can now better understand and appreciate its importance also in HH and HH II, too.

I think Ansell-Pearson and Bamford are right when they allude to a comparison with Montaigne. Nietzsche seems to mould the character of the free spirit and wanderer upon Montaigne’s description of the vagabond nature of his style and mind: ‘I seek out change indiscriminately and tumultuously. My style and my mind alike go roaming [*vont vagabondant*]’.²³⁹ The vagabond mode of investigation that Nietzsche attributes to free spirits and wanderers, nevertheless, should not be regarded as merely unguided or aimless, albeit in HH 638 Nietzsche himself states that a final goal of spiritual exploration does not exist. On the contrary, as we have seen, their free-spirited philosophy is guided by rigorous methods, sceptical attitudes, and intellectual virtues; furthermore, we also saw that in a number of senses it is even aimed at truth or at least at truthfulness. Finally, as I have been arguing, free-spirited investigation is compatible with specific kinds of discoveries – with empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities. When Nietzsche says that there is no final goal of spiritual wandering, I think, he is not claiming that free-spirited investigation is completely goalless; nor is he claiming that there is no truth whatsoever to be discovered. (After all, he commits himself to the pathos of searching for the truth!) Rather, he is suggesting that the wandering attitude of the mind does not seek to gain dogmatic possession of truth about something, understood as a final discovery that would permanently settle an issue and, therefore, would make any further consideration of it unnecessary. Such an end (both in the senses of goal and conclusion) does not exist at least for free spirits and wanderers; their ‘pathos of searching for the truth does not grow weary of *relearning* and *examining anew* (HH 633, my emphasis): they continue to openly investigate and re-examine even things they have learned or discovered. This is a key point to understand and

²³⁹ Montaigne 2003[1580-1595], p. 925, *Essays* 3.9. On Montaigne as a model for Nietzsche’s characters of the free spirit and the wanderer see Vivarelli 1994; 1998, pp. 55-94.

appreciate the relation between the pathos of search and the possibility of scientific discovery in Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy. I will return to this shortly, but before I do so, let me consider another interpretation of Nietzsche's commitment to continuous investigation.

In her attempt to compare Nietzsche with the Pyrrhonists, Jessica Berry argues that Nietzschean philosophers of the future in *Beyond Good and Evil* are Sceptics and Zetetics in a Pyrrhonian sense on account of their commitment to experimentality, namely, of their being curious investigators, seekers, and attempters.²⁴⁰ This comparison, I think, is both illuminating and obscuring with respect to Nietzsche's philosophical practices in the late and middle writings. In the first place, if the Pyrrhonists are without a doubt investigators and seekers, I am by no means convinced that the late Nietzsche would see them as attempters. As mentioned above, Nietzsche's commitment to experimentality is in fact not entirely compatible with Pyrrhonian suspensive (or ephectic) scepticism, nor with their way of life. Although – as we will see in the Conclusion – Nietzschean philosophers of the future are characterised as strong sceptics on account of their commitment to experimentality (BGE 209-210), they are not only sceptical thinkers: they are also characterised as 'commanders and legislators' because they create through their experimentations, determining new values and goals for themselves and for the whole of Western society (BGE 211). The Pyrrhonian mode of continuous investigation, as we have seen, not only does not result in discovery but, as we will see in more detail in Section 3.4 and in Chapter 4, it also leads to theoretical suspension of judgment and practical conservatism. Hence, Pyrrhonian scepticism does not help us to fully explain the philosophical task the late Nietzsche attributes to philosophers of the future, one requiring commandments or legislations with a view to a revaluation of all values.²⁴¹

As to the middle writings, Berry poses the question of whether and how the Pyrrhonian attitude she attributes to Nietzsche 'could be compatible with the scientific methods of investigation and the naturalist attitudes that he champions [...] specifically in *Human, All Too Human*'.²⁴² She goes on to say that Nietzsche, like the Pyrrhonists and Montaigne, recurs to natural science and naturalism as a therapy for metaphysics – without entailing a commitment to any substantial ontological-metaphysical position.²⁴³ The Pyrrhonists study natural science without

²⁴⁰ Berry 2011, pp. 92-93, 150.

²⁴¹ See, for example, Parush 1976; Bett 2000; Wilkerson 2006, p. 53; Mitcheson 2017; Miner 2017, p. 39; Sommer 2018; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

²⁴² Berry 2011, p. 72.

²⁴³ Berry 2011, p. 89.

forming dogmatic beliefs in order to practice equipollence and suspension of judgment with the therapeutic purposes of achieving *ataraxia* or peace of mind.²⁴⁴

Emphasising Montaigne's kinship with the Pyrrhonists, Berry claims that Pyrrhonian scepticism, for Montaigne, motivates a form of naturalism that functions as an antidote to religious and metaphysical dogmatism: '[t]hat is to say, this position develops naturally out of Pyrrhonian skepticism as Montaigne understands it'.²⁴⁵ She further claims that Nietzsche's so-called 'naturalism' can be best understood in light of his reception of Montaigne and, more specifically, of the latter's practice of scepticism as an antidote to the metaphysical pretention of human reason.²⁴⁶ Indeed, Nietzsche praises Montaigne's ethical naturalism: 'Montaigne, too, in relation to the ancients, is an ethical naturalist, but a boundlessly richer and more thoughtful one. We are thoughtless naturalists, and that despite all our knowledge' (NF-1873,30[26]).²⁴⁷ One might speculate that Nietzsche's distinction between thoughtful and thoughtless forms of naturalism is, in fact, based on scepticism. According to this reading, Montaigne's naturalism would be thoughtful, for it assumes a sceptical form in the sense that it is conjoined with a continuous activity of investigation; modern forms of naturalism, such as positivism and scientism, would be thoughtless, for they assume a dogmatic form in the sense that they lose their commitment to sceptical, zetetic investigation and degenerate in mere belief or faith and conviction. I will return to Nietzsche's reception and appropriation of Montaigne's scepticism in Section 4.2.

So far I largely agree with Berry that Nietzsche's practice of philosophy, especially in the middle writings, may be regarded as sceptical and zetetic - in some respects. I also agree with her that Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism is compatible with his estimation of scientific enquiry, especially of its methods in HH (although she tends to focus only on natural science). I agree with her that Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism is compatible with his 'naturalism'. In disagreement with Berry, however, I think the comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism has some serious limitations. In particular, I suggest, Nietzsche's commitment to a zetetic mode of investigation and his appreciation of a sceptical form of 'naturalism' should not be understood exclusively in a Pyrrhonian sense.

²⁴⁴ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 7-8, PH 1.9.

²⁴⁵ Berry 2011, p. 84.

²⁴⁶ See also Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

²⁴⁷ It is perhaps because of this ethical naturalism that Nietzsche pairs Montaigne with Epicurus in MOM 408.

Although the comparison with Pyrrhonism does illuminate an important sense of Nietzsche's scepticism in the middle writings (his commitment to sceptical, zetetic investigation), it is unable to fully explain the philosophical task the middle Nietzsche attributes to free spirits, at least as described in HH. In other words, I suggest, free spirits are committed to a continuous activity of investigation but do not conduct it exactly in the same way as the Pyrrhonists. There are two major differences: first, as I argued in Section 2.2, free-spirited investigation draws on and even leads to scientific discoveries, whereas Pyrrhonian scepticism – which, as we have seen, is defined in contrast to discovery – results in suspension of judgment on all matters; second, as noted by Ansell-Pearson and Bamford, unlike the Pyrrhonists, free spirits do not acquiesce to traditional customs and laws.²⁴⁸ Here, I focus on the first difference; I will address the second in Section 3.4 and in Chapter 4.

Nietzsche's statements about scientific discoveries, empirical truths, and certainties in HH, I think, are incompatible with Pyrrhonism. As we have seen, for Nietzsche, free spirits 'will generally have no opinions, but only certainties and precisely measured probabilities in [their] head' (HH 637). This passage curiously begins with a Pyrrhonian-sounding statement and concludes with one which is instead hardly reconcilable with Pyrrhonian scepticism. In the context of this aphorism, when he says that free spirits will have no opinions, Nietzsche means that they will not accept as true the first impressions formed in the mind under the pressure of the passions. The second part of the quotation makes clear that, unlike Pyrrhonism, free-spirited investigation does not result in suspension judgment about any matter.²⁴⁹ Of course, free spirits will deal with a lot of doubts, uncertainties, and unknowns, especially about metaphysical questions; and yet, they will not end up with nothing at all. On the contrary, in their enquiries they will discover things with a degree of certainty and will even put forward plausible hypotheses. The Pyrrhonian mode of investigation is neither compatible with certainty, nor with probabilism.

If in HH Nietzsche is not a Pyrrhonian sceptic, he is not a dogmatist either – not even with respect to scientific discoveries. In particular, I think, Nietzsche's estimation of scientific enquiry, both of its methods and of its products, should not be mistaken for a form of positivism placing uncompromising faith in scientific truths,²⁵⁰ nor as a form of materialism making dogmatic

²⁴⁸ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

²⁴⁹ In Chapter 4, I will show that in the middle writings Nietzsche selectively recommends forms of suspension of judgment about metaphysical and religious matters.

²⁵⁰ In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche might be associated with positivism in two major senses: first, his repudiation of metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality beyond empirical evidence; second, his idea that the higher culture of the future will be based on scientific enquiry rather than on religion, art, and metaphysics. The latter idea is analogous to August Comte's famous law of three stages, according to which the human mind develops or progresses through three fundamental stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive or scientific. See

claims about the nature of reality (WS 16). This estimation is, in fact, inseparable from his commitment to the pathos of sceptical search.

I am now in the position to at least ease the tension between the pathos of search and scientific discovery in HH. In a posthumous fragment of 1876, Nietzsche clearly distinguishes a form of scientific scepticism from ‘the pathos of “truth”’ – that is, what he calls ‘the pathos that we possess the truth’ in HH 633:

The pathos of ‘truth’ is not itself conducive to truth, for it forestalls critical re-examination and further research. There is a kind of blindness linked with it, indeed one becomes a fool with that pathos – as Winkler says. One has to go through sceptical periods from time to time, if one wants to have the right to call oneself a scientific person’. (NF-1876,23[38])²⁵¹

Nietzsche is making reference to Paul Winkler, a German writer from the 17th Century. Winkler’s saying is mentioned in another fragment: ‘people are wise in so far as they search for the truth; when they claim to have found it, they become fools’ (NF-1876,23[158]).²⁵² Driven by the pathos of searching for the truth, scientific minds are sceptical, even though their investigation does not end with complete unbelief, nor with Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment – rather they go through sceptical periods. In particular, free spirits practice scientific scepticism by continuing their investigation, without ‘[growing] weary of relearning and examining anew’ (HH 633). In their sceptical practice, they re-examine their beliefs, re-learn old things in different ways, and learn or discover new things. This practice is not incompatible with specific kinds of scientific discoveries such as modest truths, durable knowledge, certainties, and hypotheses. As Ruth Abbey nicely puts it, ‘[t]he sort of anti-dogmatic practitioners of science that [Nietzsche] both lauds and advocates will be ever willing to reconsider things they hold to be true. And as this indicates, his suspicion of convictions applies no matter how the initial attachment was formed: even beliefs formed in calm and rational ways must be subject to continuous review’.²⁵³

Scientific scepticism is described as truth-directed, in that it aims to avoid error and to potentially advance knowledge. In contrast, in NF-1876,23[38] the pathos of possession is

Comte 1975[1830], pp. 19-41. However, Nietzsche’s view of progress in HH is much more complex than Comte’s, for the former maintains that the transition from the metaphysical, religious, and artistic stages to the scientific, philosophical comes at a great cost. Nietzsche’s view of progress, in fact, entails looking back with respect (HH 20) and, to an extent, even making a small step backward (HH 26) in order to make a careful step forward (HH 292). Interestingly, Nietzsche’s account of the difference between historical philosophizing and metaphysics in the first chapter of HH seems to echo Comte’s distinction between the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages of mind. Compare especially HH 2 and Comte 1975[1830], p. 20. On Nietzsche’s temporary and superficial attachment to positivism see Cohen 1999.

²⁵¹ My translation.

²⁵² My translation.

²⁵³ Abbey 2020, p. 151.

criticised precisely on account of its not being conducive to truth. The dogmatic attitude to believe that one possesses the truth is diametrically opposed to the pathos of search, for it forestalls critical re-examination and further research. In this sense, the pathos of possession is not directed at truth but at maintaining belief or faith: forestalling critical re-examination, it is unable to detect and correct error; forestalling further research, it precludes the possibility of new discoveries.

In NF-1876,23[38], Nietzsche attributes the pathos of possession to Schopenhauer, accusing him once again of being a largely anti-sceptical thinker, one who is not principally guided by the scientific spirit and by pathos of searching for the truth.²⁵⁴ If philosophy is not immune from dogmatism, science, too, can degenerate into scientism. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche becomes suspicious about science and its will to truth and certainty.²⁵⁵ It is perhaps for the same reason that in the second edition of GS Nietzsche links his philosophical enquiry to uncertainty, curiosity, and the intellectual-emotional delight in the questionable character of things, rather than to the scientific production of truth and certainty.²⁵⁶

2.4 Nietzsche and Diderot: Enlightenment Scepticism as the First Step Towards Truth

To better understand and appreciate the relation between the pathos of search and the possibility of discovery in Nietzsche's free-spirited philosophy, I want to invite a comparison with the French Enlightenment tradition of scepticism and, more specifically, with Diderot. Although considerable research has been devoted to Nietzsche's reception of and commitment to the French Enlightenment in the middle writings,²⁵⁷ rather less attention has been paid to his reception of Enlightenment scepticism.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ See also HH 26; MOM 5. In NF-1880,6[381], Nietzsche makes a similar accusation against Schopenhauer, this time in relation to the passion of knowledge: 'His passion for knowledge was *not great* enough for him to suffer for it: he entrenched himself' (my translation). In this posthumous fragment, Nietzsche completely reverses the attitude towards Schopenhauer he displays in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in which he values the educative example of the Schopenhauerian human being for their voluntary taking upon themselves the suffering inherent in truthfulness (SE §4, p. 203).

²⁵⁵ See, especially, GS 344, 347, 373.

²⁵⁶ See Section 4.3.

²⁵⁷ See, especially, Garrard 2008; Martin 2008; Franco 2011; Ansell-Pearson 2015; Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 47-52; Ansell-Pearson 2018b.

²⁵⁸ Few exceptions include Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

A distinctive feature of Enlightenment scepticism is precisely a revival and transformation of ancient sceptical practices for the needs of Modernity. In the French Enlightenment, as Charles reports, ‘scepticism becomes a prerequisite to the search for truth and a necessary reminder of the true limitations of human understanding’.²⁵⁹ French Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot align scepticism with scientific enquiry. In this alignment, scepticism assumes a positive, constructive (and, in certain circumstances, even anti-sceptical) side, in that it is used as tool for the advancement of truth and knowledge. Hence, Enlightenment scepticism differs from both Pyrrhonism and a certain revival of it in the Renaissance and Modernity.²⁶⁰ The Pyrrhonists practice scepticism as the ability to oppose equally credible arguments so as to bring about suspension judgment in the hope of becoming tranquil; and thinkers such as Montaigne (at least in the ‘Apology’²⁶¹) and Pascal, largely aligning ancient scepticism with the Christian tradition, use sceptical strategies for the purposes of fideism – that is, a way to justify beliefs on the basis of faith rather than critical reason.²⁶² In both instances, although with some differences, the use of scepticism leads to the uncertainty of all our beliefs and the ultimate powerlessness of reason.

Moreover, for the first time in the history of philosophy and in contrast to ancient scepticism, in the post-Montaigne, French tradition, scepticism is – used as a tool to critique beliefs merely held on the basis of faith, prejudice, and the authority of tradition. As Gianni Paganini notes, in this context the ‘skeptical sage is someone who *fights* against an entire corpus of beliefs, someone who *decides to doubt* and *seeks* for argument to this effect’; scepticism ‘becomes now a vigorous and voluntary liberating move from a system of beliefs rather than an imponderable point of balance between different opinions, as it was before in the ancient [Pyrrhonian] idea of equipollence’ and suspension of judgment.²⁶³ Paganini goes on to say that ‘[m]odern skepticism [...] needs a discipline of the intellect and its judgment. [...] [T]he modern skeptic is someone who *wants* to cast into doubt almost everything whereas the ancient Pyrrhonian *was cast* in doubt by different phenomena. [...] From passive, skepticism becomes

²⁵⁹ Charles 2013, p. 12.

²⁶⁰ See Popkin 2003, pp. 17-79.

²⁶¹ In this, Diderot’s scepticism is more positive and optimistic than Montaigne’s, who especially in ‘The Apology for Raymond Sebond’ tends to emphasise the weakness of reason. In other essays, though, Montaigne’s sceptical enquiry seems to be more positive, playful, and even experimental. On the similarities and differences between Diderot’s and Montaigne’s scepticism see Schwartz 1966, pp. 60-85.

²⁶² I will deal with Nietzsche’s critique of fideism in Section 3.4.

²⁶³ Paganini 2018b, p. 249.

active; [it becomes] the pose of a conscious protagonist who does not want to be enslaved to prejudices or opinions devoid of any ratiō justification'.²⁶⁴

In this section, I endeavour to identify Diderot as a possible influence on Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism in the middle writings. I am prepared to admit from the start that, due to the paucity of textual evidence, my interpretative attempt is not without risk. If it fails, however, I hope to show at least an important affinity between Nietzsche and Diderot. One way or the other, I think, this comparison can help us to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche's encounter with Enlightenment scepticism.

Let me begin by noting that Nietzsche was well aware of Diderot. We know for certain that Nietzsche read Diderot in 1877 in the context of his reading group in Sorrento.²⁶⁵ Although none of Diderot's books are available in Nietzsche's private library,²⁶⁶ we know that he read at least *Rameau's Nephew* and *Jacques the Fatalist* in Sorrento.²⁶⁷ In the middle writings there are only two explicit references to Diderot and his works.²⁶⁸ First, in *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* Diderot is compared with Sterne ('the freest of writers'); Nietzsche sees a 'Sternean metahumor'²⁶⁹ at work in *Jacques the Fatalist* and, on account of this, he praises Diderot as 'a great writer', 'the first of the [French] masters (who does not need to be ashamed by comparison with any author, old or new)' (MOM 113). Second, in *Dawn* Nietzsche sides with Diderot against Rousseau on the themes of human nature, evil, and solitude (D 499). Moreover, in a note jotted on a preliminary draft for MOM Nietzsche expresses his interest in Diderot's *D'Alembert's Dream*.²⁷⁰ Despite the fact that there are only a few, scattered references in the published and unpublished writings, it is clear that not only does Nietzsche have a genuine interest in Diderot, but he also holds him in high esteem.

²⁶⁴ Paganini 2018b, p. 250.

²⁶⁵ In a letter from 1877, Nietzsche declares that in the Sorrento reading group they 'are dealing with Voltaire, Diderot, Michelet, and Thucydides' (BVN-1877,590, my translation). See also Brobjer 2008, pp. 8, 46, 62, 71; D'Iorio 2016, pp. 38, 40.

²⁶⁶ Brobjer 2008, p. 216.

²⁶⁷ D'Iorio 2016, p. 38.

²⁶⁸ It is very likely that Nietzsche read Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* even before 1877. Already in the notebooks of 1873, Nietzsche mentioned Diderot (NF-1873,30[18]) and his *Rameau's Nephew* (NF-1873,29[6]; and NF-1873,30[18]), a philosophical dialogue translated in German by Goethe in 1805. Nietzsche quoted the following sentence from it: 'One gulps down the flattering lie in full draughts, and only swallows drop by drop the bitter truth' (NF-1873,29[6]).

²⁶⁹ This, Nietzsche explains, is a form of '*equivocation*' that 'elicits from the right sort of reader a feeling of uncertainty [...]: a feeling that is most closely related to floating' (MOM 113).

²⁷⁰ See Gary Handwerk's editorial note in HH II (p. 479, n. 395). Nietzsche also alludes to Diderot, along with Montaigne and Pascal, albeit in a highly enigmatic way, in a letter of 1881 (BVN-1881,94).

The potential influence of Diderot and, in particular, of his scepticism on Nietzsche has been largely neglected in the secondary literature,²⁷¹ especially in the Anglo-American scholarship.²⁷² In what is the only article entirely devoted to the issue (in French), Angelika Schober notes that, in light of the scarcity of Nietzsche's remarks on Diderot, the only viable strategy to bring these two thinkers into rapport is by showing the affinities between their philosophies.²⁷³ In this section, I adopt a similar interpretative strategy, but I also dare to go two steps further: first, I want to argue that the affinities between Diderot's and Nietzsche's views on scepticism can help us better understand the latter's sceptical practice of philosophy in the middle writings; second, I want to suggest that it is at least plausible to suppose that Diderot's scepticism influenced Nietzsche.

Andreas Urs Sommer identifies in 'the skeptic Diderot' a potential source for Nietzsche's views on scepticism, suggesting that Nietzsche came across the sceptical thoughts of Diderot and other French thinkers at least via secondary literature: 'Nietzsche even urged Ida Overbeck, the wife of his closest friend, Franz Overbeck, to translate – for him and for the general public – some selected *Causeries* by Sainte-Beuve on major exponents of the French Enlightenment, particularly on the skeptic Diderot'.²⁷⁴ Indeed, Sainte-Beuve writes a chapter on Diderot in his *People from the 18th Century* [*Menschen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*], a largely biographical book that portrays the life, personality, works and cultural role of eminent men and women of the 18th Century in France and Europe. Although, here, there is no direct reference to Diderot's treatment of scepticism, Nietzsche's positive reception of the book implies a certain admiration for the people of the 18th Century depicted by Sainte-Beuve, including Diderot.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ There are few exceptions, including Schober 1993; Lom 2001, pp. 70-71, Sommer 2018, p. 444; and Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. I will discuss these in the course of this section.

²⁷² For a review of the secondary literature in French that touches upon the relationship between Diderot and Nietzsche see Schober 1993, pp. 91-93. Schober notes that also in the French scholarship there are no studies primarily focused on the affinities between Diderot and Nietzsche; and the commentators who do mention the Diderot-Nietzsche relationship, they do it only in passing and without going into detail. French commentators, too, have neglected the affinities between Diderot's and Nietzsche's scepticism.

²⁷³ Schober 1993. According to Schober, some points of affinity are, for example, their conception of artistic creation, their idea that reality is an eternal flux, their concept of will, and their criticism of traditional metaphysics. Schober does not include scepticism among them. She only vaguely claims that Diderot and Nietzsche 'are sceptical about the concept of truth in traditional Western ontology' (p. 104, my translation), failing to qualify with precision their views on scepticism as well as their sceptical practices of philosophy. She interestingly highlights, nevertheless, that both thinkers often articulate their criticism of the traditional concept of truth by means of fables and narratives rather than theoretical reflections.

²⁷⁴ Sommer 2018, pp. 443-444.

²⁷⁵ In a letter of 1879, Nietzsche announces to his publisher that Ida Overbeck completed the translation of Sainte-Beuve's *People from the 18th Century* (BVN-1879,906). The translation was then published in 1880; when Nietzsche received a copy of it, he immediately wrote a letter to Franz and Ida Overbeck, sharing his profound emotional reaction to that 'marvellous book' (BVN-1880,48, my translation). In another letter, he described such a reaction as

I want to follow Sommer's suggestion and attempt to present some more evidence for the claim that Nietzsche regards Diderot as a sceptic. In the first place, it should be noted that the spirit of scepticism runs throughout Diderot's assorted works,²⁷⁶ even throughout the writings presented in a more literary form such as *Rameau's Nephew*²⁷⁷ and *Jacques the Fatalist*²⁷⁸ (which, as mentioned above, Nietzsche did read).

Moreover, in a long note on the *Journal des Goncourt* jotted down in 1887 Nietzsche moves from a reflection on Voltaire and Diderot to a criticism of French scepticism:²⁷⁹ 'Voltaire the last spirit of the old France, Diderot the first of the new. Voltaire buried the epic, the fable, the small verses, the tragedy. *Diderot* inaugurated the modern novel, the drama and the art criticism.²⁸⁰ To be a sceptic, to profess scepticism – a bad way to make your way!' (NF-1887,11[296]).²⁸¹ Moving from one thought to the other is Nietzsche associating Diderot with scepticism? Although we cannot know this with absolute certainty, it might not be a coincidence that in the second part of his jottings Nietzsche says that 'the means of scepticism is irony' (NF-1887,11[296]):²⁸² we should recall that a specific kind of irony was attributed to Sterne and Diderot in MOM 113 – at that time, though, with distinctly positive connotations. In consideration of these two additional pieces of evidence, we can speculate that also in the middle writings (the only time in which Nietzsche read Diderot) Nietzsche was aware of and favourably impressed by Diderot's scepticism.

In this section, I limit myself to a brief consideration of Diderot's *Philosophical Thoughts* (1746) in which he masterfully encapsulates his reflection on scepticism in aphorisms not dissimilar to Nietzsche's. Here, Diderot describes the sceptical thinker – and himself as a sceptic

following: 'This is the kind of people whose existence I cannot even hear about without emotion, I miss them and find nothing in the present to replace them' (BVN-1880,50, my translation).

²⁷⁶ In particular, according to Jerome Schwartz, Diderot's early works could be grouped as 'Diderot's sceptical period': 'The unifying principle in these works is their sceptical attitude which seems finally to result in Diderot's rejection of Christian dogma' (Schwartz 1966, p. 61).

²⁷⁷ See Lom 2001, pp. 65-68; Knee 2003. Lom even sees a close affinity between Rameau's and Nietzsche's immoralism (Lom 2001, pp. 70-71).

²⁷⁸ See Lom 2001, p. 64; Mannies 2015a, p. 190. Mannies 2015b.

²⁷⁹ If in the middle writings Nietzsche positively receives French sceptical traditions, such as Enlightenment scepticism, in the late writings he becomes increasingly critical of them. I will reflect of this development in the Conclusion.

²⁸⁰ These sentences are originally separated by a blank line.

²⁸¹ My translation. In the *Journal des Goncourt* by Goncourt & Goncourt 1888 (present in Nietzsche's private library), there is an interesting reflection on scepticism: 'the scepticism of the 18th Century was a form of health; we [people of the 19th Century] are sceptics with bitterness and suffering' (p. 50, my translation). I would like to thank Paolo D'Iorio for drawing my attention to this passage.

²⁸² My translation.

– as follows: ‘What is a sceptic? A philosopher who has questioned all he believes, and who believes what a legitimate use of his reason and his senses has proved him to be true. Do you want a more precise definition? Make a Pyrrhonist sincere, and you have the sceptic’.²⁸³ This description individuates three fundamental characteristics of the Diderotian sceptic: first, he *questions* all their beliefs; second, he *believes* what is legitimate to believe; third, he *is more sincere* than the Pyrrhonist. These three characteristics, I propose, could help us to disclose the identity of the Nietzschean sceptic, too.

First and foremost, for Diderot, genuine sceptics are questioning enquirers committed to a sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation. In the same spirit of Nietzsche, Diderot places emphasis on the pathos of search as opposed to the pathos of possession: ‘A search for truth should be required of one, but not its attainment’.²⁸⁴ The sceptics described by Diderot investigate things carefully, questioning all they believe with patience and courage, and searching for adequate reasons and empirical evidence for their beliefs. The first characteristic of the Diderotian sceptic, then, conjoins the commitment to a continuous mode of investigation with an ethics of belief. Nietzsche’s appreciation for this first characteristic has been very recently noted by Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford in the context of their discussion of the close link between Nietzsche’s conception of scepticism as a practice of truthfulness and his notion of the intellectual conscience in *The Gay Science*.²⁸⁵ They suggest that ‘Nietzsche appears to be echoing the sentiments expressed by French Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot’.²⁸⁶ More specifically, they refer to the following two passages from Nietzsche and Diderot, respectively:

The great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterward. (GS 2)

²⁸³ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 45, §30.

²⁸⁴ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 45, §29.

²⁸⁵ I will extensively explore this link in Chapter 3.

²⁸⁶ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. Moreover, they observe that Nietzsche ‘[allies] himself with a long line of impressive scepticism who seek to combat fanaticism in their own times and places – one thinks of historians and philosophers such as Montaigne, Hume, Edward Gibbon, Diderot, and, most important of all for an appreciation of Nietzsche in his middle writings, Voltaire’. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford do not delve into this, but in the case of Diderot the opposition between scepticism and fanaticism can be clearly seen in the following thought: ‘He who would die for a faith whose falsity he was aware of, would be a madman. He who dies for a false faith, which he thinks a true one, or a true faith of whose truth he has not been convinced by proofs, is a fanatic’ (Diderot, 1916[1746], p. 48, §38). The fanatic, unlike the sceptic, fails to either investigate things carefully (mistaking falsity for truth) or to search for adequate proofs for their faith (forming a belief in irrational ways).

Scepticism does not suit everybody. It supposes a profound and careful examination. He who doubts because he is not acquainted with the grounds of credibility is no better than an ignoramus. The true sceptic has counted and weighed his reasons.²⁸⁷

In these passages, both Diderot and Nietzsche conceive of scepticism as the practice of searching for and weighing reasons in favour or against one's belief. For Diderot and Nietzsche, furthermore, this sceptical practice is fundamentally linked to the freedom and integrity of the mind.²⁸⁸ According to Diderot, sceptics have a free and honest attitude towards their beliefs. When one of their beliefs is conclusively disproved, they reject and criticise it. When convincing proof in favour of or against one of their beliefs is not available, they acknowledge that – at least for the moment – it is impossible for them to gain knowledge about this issue.²⁸⁹ And, as we will see shortly, when they find grounds of credibility, they hold their beliefs as true, albeit in a sceptical, non-dogmatic manner.

Before moving to the second characteristic of the Diderotian sceptic, I want to note another remarkable affinity between Diderot and Nietzsche with respect to their practices of scepticism. Echoing Montaigne and in turn the Pyrrhonists, Diderot attacks constrained minds and dogmatic thinkers, 'who could not conceive how tranquillity of mind could be allied with scepticism':²⁹⁰

'How can one live happily without knowing what one is, whence one comes, whither one goes, why we are here?' 'I make a point of my ignorance on all these questions, and am not in distress', replies the sceptic coolly; 'it is not my fault if my reason is mute when question on my state. All my life I shall live in ignorance of what it is impossible for me to know, and be none the worse for it [...]'²⁹¹

Like Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*, Diderot recommends cool scepticism as an antidote to the concern about metaphysical questions. It is impossible for the Diderotian sceptic, who searches for adequate reasons and empirical evidence, to gain verifiable knowledge about these

²⁸⁷ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 41, §24. For Diderot, this sceptical investigation is not easy to pursue, and the majority of the people easily remain bounded to their 'dogmatic presumption' (Diderot 1916[1746], p. 41, §24). See Diderot's characterisation of '[b]oiling [*bouillants*] spirits' (pp. 43-44, §28, translation modified). Like Nietzsche, Diderot suggests that certain temperaments are not compatible with scepticism – interestingly, both thinkers quote the same passage from Montaigne's *Essays*. See D 48 and Diderot 1916[1746], p. 43, §27. Moreover, compare Nietzsche's description of the strength of character in HH 228 with the following passage from the *Philosophical Thoughts*: 'The [human being of intelligence] sees far into the immense ocean of possibilities, the [fool] scarcely sees anything possible but the actual. Perhaps this is what produces the timidity of the one, the temerity of the other' (Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §32).

²⁸⁸ On Diderot's conception of scepticism as intellectual independence and probity see Lom 2001, pp. 62-63.

²⁸⁹ Diderot 1916[1746], pp. 43-44, §28.

²⁹⁰ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 44, §28.

²⁹¹ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 44, §28.

issues, such as the existence of God.²⁹² Since satisfactory answers to these questions cannot be found, they are ‘unnecessary’ to the sceptic, who lives tranquilly in ignorance.²⁹³ In a very similar manner, as we will see in Section 4.2, Nietzsche recommends indifference towards this sort of ultimate theoretical questions, linking uncertainty in this area not only to the thinker’s tranquillity but also to humanity’s well-being and flourishing (WS 7; WS 16).

I now turn to the second characteristic of the Enlightenment sceptic in the *Philosophical Thoughts*. This, I suggest, could help to further ease the tension between Nietzsche’s emphasis on the pathos of search and his estimation of scientific discovery. Free and honest sceptics, for Diderot, are also acquainted with the grounds of credibility: that is to say, they assent to beliefs adequately supported. This form of assent, it is important to note, is not merely dogmatic or unquestioning but maintains a sceptical aspect, in that it remains conditioned by the sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation, by the re-examination of the sceptics’ beliefs and the search for new reason and evidence. Diderot warns us against the excesses of unbelief in addition to that of belief – both excesses are construed as intellectual defects or vices:²⁹⁴ ‘it is as hazardous to believe too much as too little [...]; now scepticism is the only defence, in any period and in any place, against these two opposite extremes’.²⁹⁵ Scepticism, here, is not conceived as a complete lack of belief but rather as an antidote to it.²⁹⁶ Hence, Diderot distinguishes his scepticism from extreme forms of doubt that ignore or deny – at least in principle – the grounds of credibility. Likewise, in his middle writings Nietzsche favours a moderate use of scepticism in the context of his philosophy of the ‘small doses’ in opposition to fanaticism (D 534).²⁹⁷ In HH 614, Nietzsche praises the intellectual character of free spirits as one that ‘claims no privilege of being alone in recognizing truth, but is instead filled with a modest mistrust’ (HH 614).²⁹⁸ Similarly, in D 207,

²⁹² Diderot defines the sceptics’ position in relation to deism and atheism: ‘The deist maintains the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and its consequences; the sceptic has not decided on these points; the atheist denies them’ (Diderot 1916[1746], p. 40, §23).

²⁹³ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 44, §28.

²⁹⁴ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §32.

²⁹⁵ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §33. Moreover, Diderot condemns illegitimate uses of scepticism. As Mannies 2015a notes, Diderot disapproves of an unmitigated scepticism about morality, one resulting in a mere form of nihilism; and he also disapproves of artificial sceptical arguments directed at beliefs which, after genuine sceptical consideration, we have adequate reasons and empirical evidence to believe (pp. 178-179) – in particular, he would be dismissive of contemporary epistemology’s attempts to demonstrate that external reality exists. See also Lom 2001, pp. 61-62.

²⁹⁶ This, for Diderot, differs from ‘a half-hearted scepticism’ which lacks the intellectual honesty and courage to investigate some sort of privileged beliefs, such as those that one considered necessary for one’s way of life (Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §34).

²⁹⁷ On Nietzsche’s philosophy of the small doses see Ansell-Pearson 2015.

²⁹⁸ In the 1886 preface to HH, Nietzsche states that the suspicion raised in his writings is deep and unprecedented: no one ‘has ever looked into the world with as deep a suspicion, not only as an occasional devil’s advocate, but every

siding with the ancient Greeks and Romans in contrast to the modern Germans, Nietzsche promotes ‘a *little bit* of skepticism for each and every thing’.²⁹⁹ And, as we will see in Chapter 5, in WS 213 Nietzsche characterises Pyrrho as a ‘fanatic of mistrust’, perhaps, for his practicing an excessive, even fanatical form of scepticism.

As mentioned above, for Diderot, scepticism is deeply linked to intellectual honesty in the context of an ethics of belief. Not only does intellectual honesty require that one questions one’s belief, but it requires that one is acquainted with the grounds of credibility, too. In other words, Diderotian sceptics, as honest thinkers, are both able to question and believe. Nevertheless, they hold beliefs as sceptics, that is, as questioners and enquirers: first, they acknowledge the right to believe on the condition that in their investigations they find adequate reasons and empirical evidence in support of their beliefs; and second, they continue searching – in a sceptical, zetetic manner – for the truth, moved by the conscience that ‘truth has nothing to lose by examination’, both by re-examination of their beliefs and by further investigation.³⁰⁰ Diderot’s scepticism, then, has not only a negative, questioning side but also a positive, constructive one.³⁰¹ It illustrates a sense in which the commitment to continuous investigation typical of the ancient sceptical tradition may be compatible with certain beliefs. I will say more about the positive side of scepticism in a moment, but first let me briefly comment on the third characteristic of Diderotian sceptics.

Diderot distinguishes genuine sceptics from the Pyrrhonists on account of latter’s lack of intellectual honesty: the Pyrrhonists fail to acknowledge the grounds of credibility in a completely sincere manner. As Peter Lom notes, ‘Diderot faults the Pyrrhonists [...] for their inadequate intellectual honesty. He criticizes the Sceptics’ dogmatic assumption that all inquiry will necessary lead to an impasse [...]. He also realizes that the Pyrrhonist’s method is at times disingenuous, that the ancient Sceptic was more concerned with tranquillity than truth’.³⁰² This appears to be a major difference with Nietzsche who, instead, praises the sceptics, including the Pyrrhonists, precisely for their intellectual honesty or integrity (A 12; EH ‘Clever’ §3, p. 90). Nonetheless, in

bit as much, theologically speaking, as an enemy and challenger of God’ (HH ‘Preface’ §1, p. 5). This statement, I think, is not necessarily in tension with Nietzsche’s philosophy of the small doses: suspicion can be radical, in certain areas, without resulting in complete unbelief. As we will see in the Conclusion, this is an important feature of Nietzsche’s commitment to scepticism in the late writings, too.

²⁹⁹ My emphasis.

³⁰⁰ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §34.

³⁰¹ See Schwartz 1966, p. 63.

³⁰² Lom 2001, p. 63. On the same line, Whitney Mannies adds that for Diderot the Pyrrhonian ‘pretention to find equal reasons on each side of an issue is itself dogmatic, since it assumes the ability to accurately weigh the worth of those reason’ (Mannies 2015a, p. 179). See Diderot 1916[1746], p. 41, §24. See also Schwartz 1966, p. 63.

Chapter 3 I will try to show that it is possible to extrapolate from Nietzsche's text an intriguing criticism of the Pyrrhonists based on their partly lacking intellectual honesty, especially with respect to their way of life.

I have noted that Diderot's scepticism has a positive, constructive side. In Diderot's eyes, Enlightenment sceptics are committed to continuous investigation; they question, examine, and re-examine their beliefs beyond superstition, prejudice, dogmatism, and fanaticism; they doubt and critique beliefs which are not based on adequate reasons and empirical evidence; but they also form beliefs on the basis of convincing proof they find in their open, ongoing enquiries. Diderot favours a mitigated and constructive sceptical practice which differs from both Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment and a certain revival of it as a form of fideism in Renaissance and Modernity. Diderot does not use scepticism for suspensive or fideistic purposes; rather, he aligns doubt with the philosophical, scientific search for truth and knowledge.³⁰³ This, I suggest, is comparable with Nietzsche's aligning scepticism with philosophical, scientific enquiry in HH and HH II.

As Lom observes, Diderot is part of a tradition in which 'scepticism was [...] used to strengthen reason rather than undermine it: doubt was now to be a point of departure rather than a destination'.³⁰⁴ Diderot conceives of scepticism as the first step towards truth: 'What has never been put in question has not been demonstrated. What people have not examined without prepossession has never been examined thoroughly. Scepticism is thus the first step towards truth. It must be applied generally, for it is the touchstone'.³⁰⁵ The practices of scepticism as the first step towards truth and of a sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation feed off each other: philosophical, scientific investigation does not cease to enquire once the first step is made (step backwards or forwards are always possible).³⁰⁶ One might argue that scepticism, for Diderot, is a practice of continuous beginning.

Similarly, in HH 21 Nietzsche construes scepticism precisely as a starting point or point of departure. Indeed, I think, Diderot's conception of scepticism as the first step towards truth is somehow echoed across the two volumes of Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*:

³⁰³ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 28, §5.

³⁰⁴ Lom 2001, p. 60.

³⁰⁵ Diderot 1916[1746], p. 45, §31.

³⁰⁶ In his 1875 *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (§23) Diderot even calls his philosophical practice, based on the search for reasons and empirical evidence as well as on a commitment to continuous investigation, 'experimental philosophy': 'Experimental philosophy does not know what its work will yield or fail to yield; but it works without pause. On the contrary, rational philosophy weighs the possibilities, makes pronouncements, and stops there. It boldly declares, *light cannot be decomposed*; experimental philosophy listens, and remains silent for centuries; then suddenly shows us the prism, and declares, *light is decomposed*' (translated in Wolfe & Shank 2019, p. 11).

the sum of incontestable truths, that is, truths that have outlasted all the storms of skepticism and all disintegration, can in time become so great... (HH 22)

Truth wants no gods beside it. – The belief in truth begins with doubting all the ‘truths’ that have previously been believed. (MOM 20)

Mistrust is the touchstone for the gold of certainty.³⁰⁷ (WS 145)

In both Diderot and Nietzsche, the practice of scepticism is directed at truth in both senses of truth-searching methodology and truth-producing methodology. Lom observes that Diderot’s conception of scepticism as the point of departure of philosophy is somehow indebted to ‘the Cartesian approach to philosophical method’, albeit with a fundamental difference: Descartes’s methodological doubt is strategically devised in order to reaffirm the absolute certainty of the beliefs that were initially called into question, whereas ‘[Diderot’s] skepticism reminded him of the limited powers of reason, and, at times, also made him pessimistic about the possibility of moral improvement. [...] Diderot affirmed both faith and pessimism about the progress of science’.³⁰⁸ Diderot’s sceptical investigation, Lom goes on to say, ‘will be based upon probability not Cartesian certainty’: it is aware of the limits of the human mind but ‘can also hope for a conjectural or probabilistic knowledge’ based on historical and naturalistic explanations.³⁰⁹ Like Nietzsche, Diderot is committed to the sceptical side of scientific enquiry and wants to avoid metaphysical speculation, on the one hand, and scientific reductionism, on the other.³¹⁰ Diderot and Nietzsche are both committed to what we may call a sceptical form of naturalism traceable back to ancient physical or materialist traditions, particularly to Epicurus. Whitney Mannies shows that ‘Diderot is situated within a materialist tradition that includes, among others, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Montaigne and which posits an eternally dynamic, imperfectly knowable universe and fallible sense perception’.³¹¹ She highlights that ‘[t]his

³⁰⁷ In the enigmatic dialogue in WS 213, Nietzsche makes Pyrrho even say that ‘mistrust is the only path to truth’.

³⁰⁸ Lom 2001, p. 61. Moreover, Lom notes that ‘Diderot was not interested in epistemological scepticism because he claimed these questions too far removed from practical life’ (p. 61). This is yet another affinity with Nietzsche’s interest in scepticism.

³⁰⁹ Lom 2001, p. 62. Lom also claims that ‘Diderot reminds us that rather than following Nietzschean despair, a constructive skepticism should caution us against dogmatically denying the possibility of morality at all’ (p. 71). However, it seems to me that Lom is not doing full justice to the middle Nietzsche: this mixture between ‘optimism’ and ‘pessimism’ is, in fact, characteristic also of Nietzsche’s appropriation of the Enlightenment project in the middle writings.

³¹⁰ As Lom 2001 reports, Diderot’s ‘hope for only probability rather than certainty [...] made him suspicious of scientific reductionism or any kind of attempt at philosophical system building’ (p. 64).

³¹¹ Mannies 2015a, p. 177. See also Schwartz 1966, pp. 68-79.

Epicurean materialist tradition is [...] compatible with and even implies a form of skepticism',³¹² for human beings can only gain limited and hypothetical knowledge of nature.

In conclusion, the comparison with Diderot illustrates a fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's free-spirited practice of scepticism, in the context of his commitment to scientific enquiry and to the French Enlightenment in HH. Nietzsche, like Diderot, is a moderate sceptic. His scepticism is not the final goal of philosophical investigation, rather it is its point of departure (and continuous beginning). Nietzsche's sceptical practice of philosophy has a positive, constructive side: it is the first step towards scientific discoveries (truths, certainties, and probabilities) and towards higher forms of culture. As we will see, Nietzsche's scepticism retains a constructive side also in the second part of the middle writings, where he remains deeply committed to scientific enquiry as a truth-searching methodology but, perhaps, less committed to the products of science. In *Dawn* and *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche conceives of scepticism as the first step towards experiments with new possibilities of thinking and living (D, 454; GS 51), with the incorporation of truth (GS 110), and with a fuller affirmation of life (D 477).

³¹² Mannies 2015a, p. 177.

Scepticism, Honesty, and the Intellectual Conscience

In the previous section, I showed that starting from *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche commits himself to a sceptical mode of philosophising in the context of his commitment to scientific enquiry and to the Enlightenment. In particular, we saw that, combining ancient and modern traditions, Nietzsche construes scepticism as a truth-searching and truth-producing methodology. My aim in this chapter is to show that, in the context of his commitment to science, methodical investigation, truth, and truthfulness, Nietzsche links, in different ways, scepticism to intellectual honesty and conscience. This link has emerged already from the comparison with Diderot. Moreover, as we will see, this chapter is linked to the previous one in another way: for Nietzsche, intellectual honesty and conscience are closely connected with the development of the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry.

The notions of intellectual honesty and conscience are inextricably intertwined in Nietzsche's writings;³¹³ so deeply that, in reality, they can even be considered the same thing – or at least two fundamental aspects of the same thing. Indeed, Nietzsche frequently uses the terms '*Redlichkeit*' or '*Rechtschaffenheit*' and '*intellectuale Gewissen*' not only in close proximity but even interchangeably.³¹⁴ For the purposes of presenting the issue with more precision, I discuss intellectual honesty and conscience in different sections – in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, respectively.

By way of introduction, I want to draw attention to the fact that the notions of intellectual honesty and conscience become central to Nietzsche's philosophy in his middle writings – in conjunction with his becoming a sceptic. This, I suggest, is no coincidence: in these writings (but, as we will see, also in the late writings) Nietzsche construes genuine scepticism as a practice of truthfulness, guided or motivated by the virtue of honesty and responding to the demands of the intellectual conscience. Starting from his middle writings, honesty and conscience are intellectual

³¹³ See Harper 2015, p. 372; Alfano 2019, p. 259.

³¹⁴ With regard to the proximity between *Redlichkeit* and the *intellectuale Gewissen*, see, for example, GS 335; BGE 227-230; A 47, 50. See Reginster 2013, p. 447; Page 2019, p. 353. As to the proximity between *Rechtschaffenheit* and *intellectuale Gewissen*, see, for example, GS 357; A 12, 38; EH 'CW' §2, p. 140; NF-1888,22[7].

- or even epistemic (that is, relating to the search for truth and knowledge) - norms that ought to guide how we form beliefs and pursue free-spirited investigation.

In this chapter, I put forward two major claims. First, scepticism plays an important role in Nietzsche's commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience starting from the middle writings. Or, more specifically, intellectual honesty and conscience require the deployment of a number of sceptical practices. Second, Nietzsche endorses forms of scepticism only in so far as they are fully motivated by intellectual honesty, whereas he disapproves of uses of scepticism which do not respond to the demands of intellectual conscience. In Sections 3.3-4, I show that Nietzsche is critical of certain uses of scepticism that, according to him, are not fully committed to intellectual honesty and conscience and result in 'dishonest' forms of practical conservatism. In particular, I consider his (interconnected) criticisms of the Pyrrhonian way of life (Section 3.3) and of a fideistic use of scepticism that he associates with Kantian philosophy (Section 3.4).

3.1 Scepticism and (Forms of) Honesty

Let me begin by clarifying Nietzsche's notion of intellectual honesty. The focus of my attention is specifically on two, interrelated senses in which Nietzsche understands honesty: *Redlichkeit* (also translatable as 'sincerity', 'integrity', 'probity, or 'fairness') and *Rechtschaffenheit* (literally translatable as 'righteousness'). The two are often used as synonyms, but in certain contexts - especially, in the late works - *Rechtschaffenheit* has a specific meaning concerning Nietzsche's notion of the self-overcoming of morality. I want to show that honesty, both in the senses of *Redlichkeit* and *Rechtschaffenheit*, is linked to forms of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle and late writings

Honesty, in its multiple senses, is a central notion in Nietzsche's philosophy starting at least from the middle writings. Nietzsche begins to ponder more deeply and frequently about intellectual honesty in 1880. In the posthumous fragments, he even declares that his philosophical task is fundamentally moved by 'the drive for integrity [*Redlichkeit*] towards [himself],³¹⁵ justice towards things' (NF-1880,6[67]).³¹⁶ Although Nietzsche does not significantly

³¹⁵ See also NF-1880,19[53].

³¹⁶ In PLI 2014, pp. 3-4. In the 'Editor's Afterword' to *Dawn*, Keith Ansell-Pearson notes that Nietzsche was even planning a series of writings under the title *Die Leidenschaft der Redlichkeit*, translatable as the passion of honesty or integrity (D, p. 378, n. 24). In Chapter 5, I will address the link between scepticism and intellectual justice in Nietzsche's middle writings.

use the terms ‘*Redlichkeit*’ and ‘*Rechtschaffenheit*’ before 1880, we will see that the notion of honesty conceived as an intellectual practice of truthfulness directed towards oneself is important also in *Human, All Too Human* - and, to an extent, already in the *Unfashionable Observations*.³¹⁷ Indeed, Nietzsche’s turn from the early to the middle writings can be explained as his endeavour to cultivate a more honest and truthful relation with himself and the world. In another posthumous fragment, he openly distances himself from the first period of his philosophy which he regards as a form of Jesuitism, that is, ‘the conscious adherence to the illusion and forced incorporation of it as the basis of culture’ (NF-1883,16[23]).³¹⁸ In the transition to his middle writings, Nietzsche draws the conclusion that is not possible to establish higher forms of culture in modernity by means of a forced incorporation of illusion, in isolation from the modern need for truth and truthfulness (HH 24, 109). (This is one of the reasons why in HH 21-22 Nietzsche foresees the probable victory of a sceptical way of thinking in modernity and envisages that future cultural edification will be based on scientific enquiry and scepticism - rather than on illusion.)

Moreover, Nietzsche’s commitment to intellectual honesty and scepticism occurs at the same time that he adopts a new philosophical style: the aphorism. Nietzsche’s largely aphoristic style of writing and thinking, I suggest, is closely linked to his commitment to a honest and sceptical practice of philosophy.³¹⁹ Later, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche famously expresses his distrust of systematic philosophy, especially within the German tradition, characterising the

³¹⁷ In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche considers the ‘hardships [of] unconditional honesty [*Ehrlichkeit*]’ necessary for the pursuit of more authentic ways of thinking and living (SE §1, p. 71). He attributes to the true philosopher, exemplified by the Schopenhauerian human being, a heroic form of ‘truthfulness’ (*Wahrhaftigkeit*) which negates everything false or illusory, in spite of the suffering inherent in this intellectual activity (SE §4, pp. 203-207). Truthfulness, for the early Nietzsche, means ‘to stop deceiving ourselves about the nature of existence’ (NF-1874, 32[67]) and must be pursued as a philosophical goal in order to bring about an ‘higher [form of] life’ (SE §4, pp. 204). See also BT §18, pp. 87-88; NF-1872,23[14]; HL §10, pp.166-167; SE §8, pp. 254-255. It is surprising and surprisingly neglected that in the conclusion of SE §4 Nietzsche associates the pursuit of truthfulness in all things not only to the suffering inherent in disillusionment but also to a new dawn, prefiguring the philosophy of the morning in the middle writings (p. 207). Moreover, in the notebooks from the period of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche even describes this kind of truthfulness in terms of scepticism: ‘*The Schopenhauerian human being* drove me to skepticism toward everything respected, exalted, defended up to now (and also toward the Greeks Schopenhauer Wagner) genius, saint - pessimism of knowledge. Via this detour, I reached the heights with the freshest winds. - The writing about Bayreuth was only a pause, a sinking back, of recuperation. There, the *unnecessariness* of Bayreuth became clear to me’ (NF-1878,27[80], translation modified). Here Nietzsche ascribes a significant role in his intellectual development to the Schopenhauerian human being (*nota bene*, not Schopenhauer’s dogmatic philosophy). According to this retrospective account, it is a ruthless practice of truthfulness - the principal characteristic of the Schopenhauerian human being in SE §4 - that drove Nietzsche to abandon his early commitment to the Greeks, Schopenhauer, and Wagner.

³¹⁸ Nietzsche regards his early commitment to Schopenhauer, Wagner, the Greeks, and the Germans as a form of self-deception to which he ‘knowingly and willingly closed [his] eyes’, for the sake of his role as physician of German culture (HH ‘Preface’ §1, p. 6).

³¹⁹ I will address the link between Nietzsche’s aphoristic style and his practice of scepticism as a weapon against conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism in Chapter 5.

‘will to a system [as] a lack of integrity [*Rechtschaffenheit*]’ (TI ‘Arrows’ 26). In contrast to this will to a system, starting from HH Nietzsche feels the need to express his new mode of philosophising in aphorisms, maxims, and a variety of other styles deeply inspired by writers such as the French moralists. One could argue that this need – that is, the will to aphorisms – arises from Nietzsche’s commitment to intellectual honesty or integrity and fairmindedness. The choice of the aphorism, thus, would be motivated by the need to do justice to the multiple contexts, meanings, and directions of his thinking, its tensions and developments, as well as to the complexity of things.³²⁰

There is a considerable amount of literature on Nietzsche’s notion of honesty – especially as *Redlichkeit*; nevertheless, commentators largely disagree on its nature and role within Nietzsche’s philosophical projects.³²¹ In part, I think, this disagreement is due to the fact that

³²⁰ For example, a system such as Schopenhauer’s, for Nietzsche, fails to do justice to the complexity of things, reducing everything to a single principle. See Section 1.2. Moreover, the melancholic temperament of Schopenhauer’s philosophy fails to do justice to things, ‘[wanting] to view the world as more disharmonious than it is’ (D 4).

³²¹ Here is a brief review of recent literature on Nietzsche’s notion of honesty. Anderson 2005 emphasises Nietzsche’s tireless endorsement of intellectual honesty as a cruel practice of truthfulness directed at oneself for the purposes of the pursuit of truth. Anderson highlights the tension between Nietzsche’s endorsement honesty or truthfulness and his endorsement of artistry or illusion, fictionalism, creativity, especially starting from *The Gay Science*. Anderson proposes that honesty and artistry functions as regulative ideals in Nietzsche’s philosophy whose balance is conducive to a full affirmation of life. Reginster 2013 helpfully individuates different forms of truthfulness in Nietzsche’s writings, including intellectual honesty or integrity, truthfulness as a form of ascetism, and curiosity or the passion of knowledge. Reginster argues that curiosity, as opposed to honesty, is the form of truthfulness distinctive of Nietzsche’s free spirit. Reginster notes that on the one hand Nietzsche articulates deep reservations about truthfulness, especially as a form of ascetism, on the other he embraces and praises truthfulness as an ideal in relation to freedom of spirit. It seems to me that Reginster’s account of truthfulness, in spite of its admirable precision, somewhat lacks sensibility for Nietzsche’s intellectual development. It should be stressed more specifically that Nietzsche has serious reservations about the value of truthfulness in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in late writings, whereas in the middle period he largely endorses various practices of truthfulness, especially honesty – as I will show shortly – as an intellectual virtue and epistemic norm that ought to guide free-spirited philosophy. Starting from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche places limits to his commitment to truthfulness, albeit not necessarily in a disapproving sense. We will see that this limits directly concern Nietzsche’s notion of experimental scepticism in GS 51. In any case, Nietzsche remains deeply committed to intellectual honesty in his late writings, too. Alfano 2013 interprets honesty as an intellectual virtue in the context of Nietzsche’s moral psychology and in relation to the current debate in virtue epistemology. See also Alfano 2019. In particular, Alfano 2013 construes Nietzschean intellectual virtues as sophistication of drives and attempts to attribute a theory of the unity of virtue to Nietzsche, identifying curiosity as the cardinal Nietzschean virtue – that unifying and presupposing all the other virtues. I will further discuss Reginster and Alfano with respect to the link between honesty, curiosity, and suspension of judgment in Section 4.3. According to Harper 2015, the virtue of honesty is not much a practice of truthfulness in the pursuit of truth; rather, he understands honesty in relation to Nietzsche’s ethical and metaethical conceptions of value and the activity of valuing itself. Harper largely focuses on the late writings and, I think, he does not do justice to some important senses of Nietzsche’s commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience in the middle writings. More precisely, Harper underestimates questions concerning the ethics of belief and enquiry that Nietzsche poses when he discusses honesty in the middle writings but also in late writings such as *The Anti-Christ*. Drawing on Alfano’s suggestion (a Nietzschean virtue is a sophisticated drive), Jeremy Page 2019 places honesty in the context of Nietzsche’s drive psychology, interpreting it as the virtuous disposition to seek out and try to correct the subterranean, indeed unconscious, epistemically suspect influence of the drives on the cognitive-evaluative orientation of the individual. Unlike Alfano and Reginster, Page seeks to reaffirm the centrality of honesty in Nietzsche’s philosophy. In this section, I do not consider the link between honesty and the drives or unconscious processes; rather, I focus on the role Nietzsche attributes to honesty in reflective processes of belief formation and philosophical investigation in

Nietzsche does not work with a single conception of honesty and that, in addition, his thinking about the nature and role of practices of truthfulness changes throughout his intellectual development. (The interpretative situation, then, is analogous to that of Nietzsche's notion of scepticism. Likewise, a close attention to the context is imperative for a proper understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche's statements about honesty.)

The majority of commentators agree that Nietzsche generally conceives of intellectual honesty, in the sense of *Redlichkeit*, as a form of truthfulness specifically directed at oneself.³²² As Bernard Reginster points out, this is different from 'the virtue of truth-telling, that is, of disclosing truthfully one's states of mind to others'.³²³ Nietzschean honesty is not much about telling the truth to others; it is rather about being truthful – or, more literally, 'speaking' (*reden*) frankly – to oneself.³²⁴ Commentators also agree that Nietzsche's discussion of honesty generally addresses questions concerning the ethics of belief and enquiry, as well as virtue epistemology. They recognise that honesty is frequently construed by Nietzsche as an intellectual virtue and epistemic standard of belief and enquiry. For example, Reginster summarises the notion of honesty or truthfulness most frequently discussed in the secondary literature as follows: 'a commitment to holding only beliefs for which one has sufficient epistemic reasons, or reasons that bear on the truth of the beliefs'.³²⁵ This commitment is guided by the following epistemic norm: '[beliefs] should be formed in accord with appropriate standards of epistemic rationality such as evidence and argument'.³²⁶ Another point of agreement is that, at least from *The Gay*

relation to scepticism. In the same direction of Page, though, in Chapter 4 I will show that at least in certain circumstances Nietzsche values intellectual honesty more than unfettered curiosity (in relation to a form of suspension of judgment).

³²² An exception is Harper 2015 that attempts to distinguish honesty from truthfulness (p. 368).

³²³ Reginster 2013, p. 447, n. 10.

³²⁴ Although Nietzsche frequently assigns greater importance to honesty as a practice of truthfulness directed towards oneself rather than to truth-telling, he also values forms of truthfulness directed towards others, such as *parrēsia*, that is, a mode of free speech typical of Greek rhetoric. *Parrēsia* is a frank, courageous discourse that tells unwelcome truth to the public. (One could even argue that Nietzschean *Redlichkeit* is, in fact, a form of self-directed *parrēsia*.) I want to draw attention to two passages, one in which Nietzsche values *parrēsia* and another in which he deploys a parrhesiastic mode of speech. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche extols *parrēsia* as a virtue of the philosopher exemplified by the Schopenhauerian human being: one of the key feature of the unfashionable philosopher – that in opposition to the age – is an 'outspoken truthfulness' which is perceived by others as an 'outpouring of malice' (SE §4, p. 204). Furthermore, a Cynic-inspired practice of *parrēsia* is staged in the famous parable about death of God in *The Gay Science*. Bambach 2010 convincingly demonstrates that the figure of the madman in GS 125 is modelled on Diogenes the Cynic or the dog. In particular, Bambach highlights that Nietzsche's narrative in the parable and in *The Gay Science* is tinged with Diogenes' '*parrhesia*, an unadulterated "freedom of speech" pushed to the limits of blasphemy, obscenity, and subversion' (p. 444). Cf. Diogenes Laertius 1931, p. 43, DL 2.6, 41; BT §14, p. 69; WS 18; BGE 26.

³²⁵ Reginster 2013, p. 446.

³²⁶ Reginster 2013, p. 446.

Science, Nietzsche's notion of honesty is not only limited to intellectual or epistemic standards; nevertheless, as mentioned above, commentators disagree on what exactly constitutes Nietzschean honesty in addition to these standards of belief and enquiry. For the purposes of this and the subsequent sections, I do not enter into the scholarly debate on the nature of honesty. I draw on the points of agreement in the secondary literature and base my reading upon a selection of Nietzsche's statements about honesty that are also directly relevant to his notion of scepticism. Hence, I mostly consider honesty as an intellectual virtue, that is, as a praiseworthy intellectual practice of free spirits. I also consider it as a form of truthfulness which is not only directed at oneself but also at truth, functioning as an epistemic norm that ought to guide free-spirited investigation.

In Nietzsche's middle (and late) writings, I suggest, intellectual honesty is closely linked to scepticism, construed as a truth-searching methodology (Section 2.1). Honesty is one of the intellectual virtues that Nietzsche praises throughout his middle writing. In D 556, Nietzsche construes honesty towards oneself as a cardinal virtue alongside courage, magnanimity, and politeness. In Section 2.2, we saw some of the intellectual practices that Nietzsche considers worth of praise on account of their being conducive to rigorous investigation: modesty, mistrust, circumspection, and caution – as well as magnanimity (Section 1.2).³²⁷ We also saw that, for Nietzsche, these practices are developed and required in free-spirited philosophy as an hermeneutic of suspicion in order to avoid error, self-deception, and the disturbance of mental and emotional excesses. If self-directed honesty is construed as an intellectual virtue, self-deception is construed as its correspondent intellectual vice (NF-1880,7[53]). Honesty, then, acquires a fundamental importance for counteracting self-deception, one of the worst intellectual vices for Nietzsche (HH 9). In Section 3.2, I will highlight a number of sceptical practices that, for the middle Nietzsche, are entailed in a commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience and ought to guide free-spirited thinking and investigation. In what follows, I suggest that in his middle and late writings Nietzsche links intellectual honesty to scepticism as two fundamental characteristics of (free-spirited) philosophers. Moreover, I stress the often neglected historical-cultural dimension of both honesty and scepticism.

The link between honesty and scepticism in the late writings has been well established in the secondary literature, especially by those commentators working on Nietzsche and the ancient sceptical tradition.³²⁸ It is well known that in the late published works Nietzsche praises the

³²⁷ In Chapter 5, I will draw attention to Nietzsche's largely neglected estimation of justice or fairmindedness in relation to scepticism (HH 634).

³²⁸ See, for example, Bett 2000; Berry 2011.

sceptics precisely for their intellectual honesty or integrity (A 12). In Section 3.3, I will focus on the link between intellectual honesty and scepticism in the context of Nietzsche's reception of Pyrrhonism. Furthermore, as we will see in the Conclusion, in *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche claims that 'great spirits are sceptics' – among whom he includes his Zarathustra (and, in a sense, himself) – linking their scepticism to intellectual honesty and conscience; he opposes honest scepticism to faith (A 47, 50) and conviction (A 54), regarding them as instances of self-deception or embryonic forms of lying in which one lies to oneself: 'I call lies *not* wanting to see what you see, not wanting to see it the way you do: it makes no difference whether the likes take place in front of a witness; lying to other people is a relatively exceptional case' (A 55).³²⁹

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche regards all non-sceptical, dogmatic philosophers 'half suspiciously, half mockingly' precisely because, in his view, they are not honest [*redlich*] enough: they advocate their views finding reasons a posteriori to justify them as opposed to truthfully question their prejudices (BGE 5). Correspondingly, in a preparatory note Nietzsche writes that

Nothing is rarer among philosophers than *intellectual integrity* [*Rechtschaffenheit*]: perhaps they say the opposite, perhaps they even believe it. But a condition of their entire occupation is that only certain truths are admitted; [...] [t]here are, e.g., moral truths. But a faith in morals is not a proof of morality... (NF-1888, 15[25])³³⁰

(We will see in Section 3.4 that Nietzsche includes Kant among these philosophers who lack intellectual integrity on account of their faith in morality.)

Still in BGE, Nietzsche famously proclaims that honesty is the only virtue remaining to free spirits, indeed one they cannot escape – if they want to think freely (BGE 227).³³¹ (I will return shortly on the inescapability of intellectual honesty.) The link between honesty and freedom of spirit, though, is established at least starting from HH where Nietzsche characterises the free-minded investigator as driven by the 'spirit of truthful inquiry', one based on the search for reasons, rather than on faith or unquestioning acceptance of traditional opinions (HH 225).³³²

Commentators have paid much less attention to the link between honesty and scepticism in the middle writings; and those who have paid some attention to it have largely limited themselves to notice Nietzsche's famous conception of scepticism as an experimental practice of

³²⁹ In HH 483, as we will see in Section 5.1, Nietzsche opposed convictions to lies.

³³⁰ In WP 445.

³³¹ In the 1885 notebooks Nietzsche clearly defines our honesty (or truthfulness) as 'our will not to deceive *ourselves*' (NF-1885,2[191]), construing it as one of the 'foreground virtues' required by the philosopher (NF-1885,34[200]).

³³² See also MOM 11.

truthfulness in GS 51.³³³ Here, not only does Nietzsche commit himself to forms of scepticism as practices of truthfulness, but he also establishes the limits of his commitment. More specifically, he favours any form of sceptical investigation that permits experiments (GS 51). Hence, starting from 1881, Nietzsche values scepticism as a practice of truthfulness as long as it is limited by two conditions: first, that it allows and fosters new daring attempts with thinking; second, that it tries these out by putting them into practice. I will say more about Nietzsche's peculiar notion of experimental scepticism in Section 4.2, for now let me continue examining the link between scepticism and forms of honesty.

At various times in the middle writings, honesty is described as a truth-directed intellectual practice. For example, in D 370 Nietzsche says that honesty is a 'matter of truth' not of personally winning or losing an argument; and in D 456 he goes on to say that it is a high perhaps the highest form of truthfulness, one that takes truth more seriously. But in what sense does Nietzschean honesty take truth seriously?³³⁴ As Bernard Williams points out, 'truthfulness

³³³ Reginster 2013 partially explores Nietzsche's notion of scepticism as an experimental practice of truthfulness in GS 51 in the context of his article on honesty and curiosity. Bernard Reginster argues that intellectual curiosity as opposed to intellectual honesty is the distinctive trait of Nietzsche's free spirit. See also Alfano 2013. With regard to GS 51, Reginster claims that Nietzsche's experimental scepticism is linked to curiosity (and the passion of knowledge), rather than with honesty understood as a standard of belief and enquiry. In my view, Reginster captures a fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism in *The Gay Science* and in the late writings: intellectual (and emotional) attraction to uncertainty. In Section 4.4, I will show that in GS 375 (1887) Nietzsche characterises this form of scepticism as Epicurean-like. However, due to a lack of sensitivity for Nietzsche's intellectual development Reginster somewhat undervalues the importance of honesty in the middle writings, especially prior to GS, failing to bring to focus some important aspects of its link with scepticism. In these writings, I argue, scepticism as a practice of truthfulness is not yet – or at least not only – linked with experimentalism but also with a commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience, which is largely construed as an intellectual virtue, a standard of belief, and in a sense even as an epistemic norm that ought to guide free-spirited philosophy. Mitcheson 2017, too, focuses on Nietzsche's experimental scepticism in D and GS; nevertheless, she does not pay much attention to its link with honesty. Mitcheson interprets Nietzsche's scepticism as an experimental practice that entails a radical transformation of the self, arguing that its self-transformative nature is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonism. I think Mitcheson highlights an essential aspect of Nietzsche's scepticism as well as its fundamental difference with the Pyrrhonian, non-transformative practice of suspension of judgment. However, Mitcheson's study suffers from three major weaknesses. First, it somehow neglects other aspects of Nietzsche's experimentalism. One of these is the daring intellectual curiosity individuated by Reginster 2003: self-transformation is the practical consequence of an honest, curious, and courageous search for knowledge (that is, what Nietzsche calls 'the passion of knowledge'). Another is the socio-cultural dimension of Nietzsche's commitment to experimentality. This aspect is particularly emphasised in D 453 and in BGE 205, 210. Nietzsche's experimental practice of scepticism seeks to transform not only the self but also society. Second, Mitcheson overlooks other senses of Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism. Third and in relation to second, she undervalues the important role of forms of suspension of judgment in Nietzsche's middle writings.

³³⁴ Nietzsche is notorious for his critical remarks about (forms of) truth throughout his oeuvre and even for his questioning – albeit experimentally (see Reginster 2013) – the value of truth in the *Genealogy*. Despite all of this, I think, we should resist the temptation to leap to the conclusion that Nietzsche is a denier of the possibility of truth altogether or of its importance in our lives. Jumping to this conclusion would be an oversimplification of Nietzsche's thinking, one doing grave injustice to it. Unfortunately, many interpreters have not resisted this temptation. As we saw in Chapter 2, there are in fact several senses in which Nietzsche takes truth seriously in his philosophical investigations, especially in the middle writings. First, free-spirited philosophy is conceived as a search for truth. Second, free-spirited investigation is directed at truth in that it aims to avoid and combat error, self-deception, and the disturbance of mental and emotional excesses such as conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. Third, Nietzsche is specifically critical of religious and metaphysical forms of truth, whereas – at least in HH and HH II – he esteems

implies a respect for the truth'.³³⁵ In contention against those readers who take Nietzsche as a denier of the value of truth altogether, Williams notes that '[o]ne of Nietzsche's most striking qualities is the obstinacy with which he held to an ideal of truthfulness that would not allow us to falsify or forget the horrors of the world', and for him 'the value of truthfulness embraces the need to find out the truth, to hold on to it, and to tell it – in particular, to oneself'.³³⁶

But how does Nietzsche's estimation of honesty and truthfulness square with his attaching great significance to illusion, appearance, and error in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in the late writings (but at least starting from GS)?³³⁷ The early and the late Nietzsche thinks that forms of untruth are necessary for the health and flourishing of human life – of individuals and culture. If this is so, why should one be honest? In the middle writings up to *Dawn* (but, with some limits, also in GS and the late writings), he maintains that one should be honest for two major reasons. First, honesty is an intellectual and even epistemic standard for those who want to engage in free-spirited philosophy – not necessarily for everybody. Those who pursue freedom of spirit, as Nietzsche understands it, ought to enquire truthfully and search for adequate reasons and evidence in favour or against their beliefs. Free spirits ought to liberate themselves from error, self-deception, mental and emotional excesses, and from faith or unquestioning reliance on traditional opinions – whatever may come from this process of liberation.³³⁸ Second, not only is honesty a virtuous intellectual practice to enquire and form beliefs well and freely, but it has become a historical-cultural need. According to Nietzsche's observation, the advancement of knowledge and especially the sharpening of rigorous, scientific methods in modernity has generated a pressing, indeed inescapable, need for intellectual honesty (HH 109; NF-1880,6[261]; D 167; GS 357; BGE 227; A 59). Nietzsche links scepticism with honesty in *The Gay Science*. Here, he speaks of the 'subtler development of honesty and scepticism' (GS 110). During this development, Nietzsche observes, 'scrutiny, denial, mistrust, and contradiction became a *power*' (GS 110). Nietzsche's pursuit of honesty as an intellectual and socio-cultural

modest, empirical truths discovered by means of the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry. Four, Nietzsche is interested in the significance of truth for human life: even in *The Gay Science* – where he re-evaluates the significance of appearance and even of error, too – he remains concerned with the extent to which truth can endure incorporation through experimentation (GS 110).

³³⁵ Williams 2002, p. 11.

³³⁶ Williams 2002, p. 13.

³³⁷ This question is addressed by Anderson 2005.

³³⁸ Freedom of spirit is often associated with the relinquishment of specific beliefs, especially concerning religious and metaphysical questions. Nevertheless, it is important to note, in the middle writings honesty, as a standard of belief and enquiry, is not only linked to disillusionment, belief-relinquishment, and suffering; it is also linked to a positive, constructive side such as the discovery of empirical truths (at least in HH and HH II), the achievement of some forms of peace of mind, happiness, and joy and with the pursuit of wisdom.

goal of philosophical investigation marks a turning point in his intellectual development from the early to the middle writings.³³⁹

In D 456, Nietzsche observes that honesty, especially psychological probity, is ‘one of the youngest virtues’,³⁴⁰ indeed a virtue still ‘in the making’, which was largely ignored by previous philosophers and theologians – especially by Christian scholars (D 84) and founders of religions (GS 319). As in the case of scepticism, it should be noted that, according to Nietzsche, the virtue of honesty has an important historical and cultural dimension – it is an intellectual practice in development that can be promoted or prevented by individual thinkers.³⁴¹

As in HH 21-22, the development of honesty or integrity is deeply connected with an unmetaphysical way of thinking: ‘Our honesty’, Nietzsche states, ‘*compels* us to turn to physics’ (GS 335) – and, thus, away from the comforting errors of religion and meta-physics (HH 109).³⁴² In *Dawn*, Nietzsche states that ‘contemplative natures who keep a tight check on all types of fantasizing [...] are satisfied only with rigorous, realistic theories: their reach for them [...] without, in so doing, losing their honesty’ (D 328). In what sense do they not lose their honesty in their turn to physics or naturalism? In the sense that honest thinkers remain deeply committed the spirit of truthful enquiry and, as we will see shortly, to the intellectual conscience: they continue to sceptically search for reasons in favour or against their beliefs, even those concerning the physical world.³⁴³ It is precisely on account of this genuine commitment to intellectual honesty and scepticism that, I think, it is possible to distinguish Nietzsche’s praises of physics from his suspicion about science in the later writings and, especially, in the fifth book of GS.

In GS 357, Nietzsche associates this physics-oriented honesty with a genuine atheism³⁴⁴ – which he recognises even in Schopenhauer, in spite of his metaphysical dogmatism: ‘This is the locus of [Schopenhauer’s] whole integrity [*Rechtschaffenheit*]; unconditional and honest [*redliche*] atheism [...], being a triumph achieved finally and with great difficulty by the European conscience, being the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the ends forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God’ (GS 357). For Nietzsche, then, a full commitment to

³³⁹ Moreover, in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche asks ‘a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience [...] “why knowledge at all?”’ (BGE 230) In the subsequent section, he also provides the following answer: “Learning transforms us” (BGE 231).

³⁴⁰ See also GS 159.

³⁴¹ See also D 167.

³⁴² Cf. BGE 230.

³⁴³ See Section 2.3.

³⁴⁴ As opposed to the degenerate, blind atheism Nietzsche attributes to the crowd at the marketplace in GS 125, which is unable to see the profound consequences of the death of God. See Pippin 2010, pp. 52-54.

intellectual honesty ultimately forbids one to believe in the existence of God and the like. Moreover, this highest level of honesty, according to Nietzsche, is reached thanks to the refinement of the disciplined or methodical search for truth which is started by a sort of internal ‘logic’³⁴⁵ within Christianity:

Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously, the father confessor’s refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price [...]. In this severity, if anywhere, we are *good* Europeans and heirs of Europe’s longest and most courageous self-overcoming. (GS 357)

We are now in the position to understand and appreciate the difference between *Redlichkeit* and *Rechtschaffenheit*. Both senses of honesty are self-directed form of truthfulness, but, unlike the former, the latter is directly linked to the self-overcoming of Christian morality. Righteousness, as Nietzsche understands it, is the sublimation of the moral conscience into an intellectual or scientific conscience.³⁴⁶ Surely, *Rechtschaffenheit* is deeply connected to *Redlichkeit*, in that it has to do with intellectual and epistemic standards of belief and enquiry as well as with their historical-cultural dimension, but it is not equivalent to the latter. More specifically, righteousness entails facing up to the full consequences of one’s commitment to a form of honesty typical of Christian confession – one that demands that believers plumb the profundity of their soul in search of potential sins to eradicate, that condemns lying.³⁴⁷ The full consequences of the moral commitment to honesty, for Nietzsche, sublimates into an intellectual conscience, leading to the overcoming – or more precisely – the self-overcoming of Christian morality: the beliefs at the basis of Christianity (such as the belief in the existence of God) have become unbelievable – at least from a scientific standpoint; and they become unbelievable precisely on account of the commitment to the honesty required by Christian morality. This sublimation, from a moral to an intellectual conscience, is at the centre of Nietzsche’s notion of honesty or truthfulness, especially in the late writings (GM 3.27; A 59; EH ‘Destiny’ §3, p. 145).

What is interesting is that in the first edition of GS, Nietzsche explains this ‘logic’ in terms of scepticism. In the middle writings, he generally opposes Christianity and scepticism: he notes that ‘increasing enlightenment has shaken the dogmas of religion and instilled a thorough mistrust of them’ (HH 150); similarly, in GS 5 he regards Christianity as one of ‘the opponents of moral

³⁴⁵ Nietzsche even calls this the ‘*the self-sublation [Selbstaufhebung] of morality*’ (D ‘Preface’ §4, p. 6).

³⁴⁶ On Nietzsche’s notion of *Rechtschaffenheit* see Ansell-Pearson 2009, pp. 108-114.

³⁴⁷ See, for example, BGE 229. In his lecture on *parresia* Michel Foucault retraces a similar genealogy of ‘the obligation to manifest the truth about oneself’ starting from the Christian tradition (Foucault 2019, p. 3).

enlightenment and skepticism’ on account of its creating the need for unconditional duties. Nietzsche largely believes that Christianity forbids genuine philosophical doubt and critique. This is because, he states, Christianity has ‘declared doubt a sin’: ‘any need to substantiate faith and all reflection upon its emergence have also been foreclosed as sinful. What is wanted are blindness and delirium and an eternal psalm above the waves in which reason has drowned’ (D 89). According to his observation about the psychological origin of religions, when one experiences their own opinion about things as a divine revelation, ‘one withdraws it from critique, indeed from doubt, one makes it holy’ (D 62). Moreover, Nietzsche maintains that in Christianity we can find a use of scepticism as a strategy to make room for faith:

The skepticism of Christians. – Pilate, with his question: what is truth!, is readily introduced now as an advocate for Christ in order to foster the suspicion that everything known and knowable is mere appearance and to raise the cross against the terrifying background of our inability to know.³⁴⁸ (MOM 8)

According to this aphorism, Christian thinkers use scepticism, as a form of fideism, in order to demonstrate the powerlessness of reason and, simultaneously, to establish a ‘true truth’ or a ‘real reality’ by means of faith.³⁴⁹ (We will see in Section 3.4 that Nietzsche attributes such a fideistic use of scepticism to Kantian philosophy.)

Conversely, and as further proof of his taste for nuances, in GS 122 Nietzsche strikingly suggests that even ‘Christianity has made a great contribution to the enlightenment, and taught

³⁴⁸ Compare Nietzsche’s critique of the Christian use of scepticism with his critique of poets’ ‘skeptical extravagance’ in *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*: ‘Poets, who are *conscious* of this power of theirs, intentionally aim to disparage what is generally called reality and to transform it into something uncertain, apparent, counterfeit, full of sin, sorrow and deceit; they make use of every doubt about the limits of knowledge and every sceptical extravagance in order to spread the crumpled veil of uncertainty over things: so that, after spreading this obscurity, their sorcery and magic of the soul will be understood undeservedly as the way to the “true truth”, to the “real reality” (MOM 32). A previous draft of this aphorism concludes as following: ‘Even today, poetic people (for example, Emerson and Lipiner) prefer to seek the limits of knowledge, indeed, skepticism in order to withdraw from the pathos of logic. They want uncertainty because then the magician, intuition, and great effects upon the soul become possible once again’ (HH II, pp. 451-52, n. 51). Lipiner, especially, is seen as the example of a subtler obscurantist (NF-1878,42[4]), whereas – as we will see in the Conclusion – Emerson might be an important influence on Nietzsche’s conception of scepticism from *The Gay Science* onwards.

³⁴⁹ Nietzsche explains the psychological and intellectual process underlying the suspicion fostered by Christianity as follows: those phenomena are still unexplained, to the great satisfaction of the [...] devotees of the morally miraculous. For generally speaking: the unexplained should be thoroughly inexplicable, the inexplicable thoroughly unnatural, supernatural, miraculous – so goes the demand in the soul of all religious people and metaphysicians (artists, too, should they be thinkers as well)’ (HH 136). What is not yet explained is rashly judged as not explainable; what is taken to be inexplicable is, in turn, considered as supernatural. This process takes place with the aid of the imagination, which is stirred by what Nietzsche calls in *Dawn* ‘the fear of the unintelligible’ (D 40). In addition, Nietzsche speculates, the jump from the unexplained into the supernatural is also facilitated by the psychological fact that the majority of the people are, in reality, ‘[hostile] to light’: they have a certain preference for a degree of ‘uncertainty in their spiritual horizon’ because it could be the case that ‘they are all secretly afraid that someday the light of truth might fall too brightly upon them’ (MOM 7). In other words, not only do people fear the unintelligible, but they might also fear the certainty of truth, especially when it does not correspond to their needs – when it is not what they would like it to be.

moral skepticism very trenchantly and effectively, accusing and embittering men, yet with untiring patience and subtlety'. As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford notes, for Nietzsche, Christianity contributes to the enlightenment 'by teaching "moral skepticism" in the form of a patient and subtle questioning of human motivation and behaviour, and in the process, it has accused and embittered human beings, so provoking them into conscientious self-reflection. [...] It is necessary, then, that modern free spirits acknowledge their training in the Christian school of scepticism. [...] Nietzsche, then, wished us to continue and finesse further this tradition of Christian moral scepticism'.³⁵⁰ Nietzsche goes on to say that '[i]n the end, however, we [modern free spirits] have applied this same skepticism to all *religious* states and processes, such as sin, repentance, grace, sanctification (GS 122).

3.2 Scepticism and the Intellectual Conscience

In his oeuvre, Nietzsche discusses different forms of conscience.³⁵¹ Here, I focus on the close link between what he calls 'the intellectual conscience', honesty, and scepticism. The notion of the intellectual conscience becomes central in Nietzsche's philosophy at least starting from *Human, All Too Human*,³⁵² where it is introduced in direct relation to the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry: 'we cannot *believe* those dogmas of religion and metaphysics if we have the strict methods of truth in our hearts and heads [...]. For in the present state of knowledge, we

³⁵⁰ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. See also Garrard 2008, p. 601; Franco 2011, pp. 132-133; Alfano 2019, p. 277; Meyer 2019, pp. 207-208.

³⁵¹ Alfano 2019 helpfully distinguishes four ways in which Nietzsche speaks about conscience: first, first-order conscience or herd instinct; second, good conscience; third, bad conscience; four, the intellectual conscience (pp. 262-283). Alfano's account of Nietzschean intellectual conscience is intriguing: '[t]he intellectual conscience is a manifestation of the bad conscience, but it is better targeted and more productive' (p. 277). He argues that for Nietzsche the intellectual conscience is a fruitful expression of the bad conscience, a form of conscience that induces negative self-directed emotions and evaluations. Whereas in most cases, Alfano suggests, the bad conscience is unhelpful and badly targeted because it condemns and rejects essential and even ineliminable aspect of the self, in the specific case of the intellectual conscience its negative self-directedness is helpful because it expresses itself by condemning and rejecting anything 'unworthy of belief' such as 'the comforting falsehoods we tell ourselves and our communities' (p. 275). Alfano goes on to say that in Nietzschean free spirits the intellectual conscience comes to be associated also with a fruitful expression of the good conscience. If the latter, is normally associated with the 'good' or positive emotions and evaluations induced by thinking and acting in conformity with the herd instinct, in free-minded individuals it is associated with thinking and acting on the basis of integrity and the intellectual conscience.

³⁵² In reality, a prototype of the intellectual conscience, in connection with a form of honesty, can be already found in *Schopenhauer as Educator* in the context of Nietzsche's discussion of self-education as a way to liberate oneself from conventional ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling. There, he speaks of a conscience that demands from the individual to search for more authentic ways of thinking and living in opposition to what is fashionable (SE §1, p. 171-174).

simply cannot have anything to do with [an accommodation to any form of Christianity] anymore without irredeemably soiling our *intellectual conscience*' (HH 109).

Nietzsche remains deeply committed to the intellectual conscience, as well as to rigorous methods of investigation, until the end of his philosophical production. In *The Anti-Christ*, he continues to oppose other-worldly religions such as Christianity to science – which he regards as ‘the wisdom of this life’ – and, more specifically, to the ‘discipline of spirit, integrity or spiritual rigour of conscience, or noble assurance and freedom of spirit’ (A 47).³⁵³ In this passage, too, Nietzsche links the scientific training in a rigorous, methodical mode of thinking to honesty or integrity, assimilating the latter with the intellectual conscience and freedom of spirit.³⁵⁴ What is relevant here is that Nietzsche links intellectual conscience and honesty to philology – which, as we saw in Section 2.1, functions as the paradigm for an ephectic or suspensive mode of interpretation (A 52) and a free, cautious, patient, and serious mode of investigation (A 59): ‘you cannot be a philologist or doctor without being *anti-Christian* at the same times [...]: the doctor says “incurable”, the philologist says “fraud”’ (A 47).

In particular, Nietzsche goes on to say, to be honest in spiritual matters means ‘[t]hat you are strict with your heart, that you look down on “beautiful feelings”, that you make every yes or no judgment a question of the intellectual conscience (A 50). Hence, honesty demands that every judgment be submitted to the intellectual conscience for a free, cautious, and rigorous – or philological – consideration. (Unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, as we will see in Chapter 4, Nietzschean honesty also demands that, in certain circumstances, we make yes or no judgments.) In A 54, Nietzsche directly links intellectual honesty and conscience to scepticism, opposing the ‘faithful person’³⁵⁵ to the sceptic – or the free, truthful thinker: the person of faith ‘is not free to have any sort of conscience for the question “true” or “untrue”’: honesty on this point would be his immediate downfall’. Intellectual conscience and honesty would be harmful to people of faith and fanatics, leading them to see many things which do not confirm their faith and undermining beliefs which are in fact needed within their ‘strict and necessary optic’ (A 54).

But what is exactly the intellectual conscience? In the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche famously defines it as ‘[a] conscience behind your “conscience”’, that is, behind your moral sense of what is right or wrong (GS 335). To be honest, in a Nietzschean sense, thus means

³⁵³ Cf. GS 335.

³⁵⁴ See also A 59.

³⁵⁵ By ‘faith’, here, Nietzsche does not mean exclusively Christian faith; he means the intellectual attitude to believe or have faith without a truthful search for adequate reasons and evidence. Christians are only a type of faithful people.

to submit our judgments – especially the moral ones – to a second-order conscience, whose voice asks: ‘what gives you the right to consider such a judgment true and infallible?’, ‘[h]ow did it originate?’, ‘[w]hat is that impels me to listen to it’ (GS 335):³⁵⁶ The intellectual conscience, as construed by Nietzsche, largely poses questions concerning the ethics of belief and enquiry.³⁵⁷ Throughout his writings, Nietzsche evaluates thinkers’ commitment to intellectual conscience and honesty, assessing their thoughts in terms of praiseworthy or blameworthy intellectual practices: these are worthy of praise if they meet the demands of the intellectual conscience, whereas they are worthy of blame if they do not. As we will see in Section 3.3, for instance, Nietzsche praises the sceptics as the only decent or respectable types of philosophers for their honesty. And as we will see shortly, he blames the majority of people for their lacking commitment to the intellectual conscience; the intellectual conscience itself is construed as form of contempt for vicious intellectual practices (GS 2).

As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford rightly note, ‘Nietzsche’s commitment to the intellectual conscience first comes to the fore in his middle writings, and it is linked to the manner in which he conceives scepticism as an essential component of the authentic practice of philosophy. This conscience is about having and developing intellectual integrity’.³⁵⁸ More specifically, they individuate the link to scepticism, understood as a practice of truthfulness, in GS 2 where Nietzsche makes it explicit that the intellectual conscience ‘demands from us that we do not accept anything on trust and that we are willing to question existence and in terms of a commitment to certain intellectual virtues such as honesty or probity. [...] [T]his superior form of conscience requires from us the exercise of doubt and the search for more and more adequate reasons in what we take to be true and certain’.³⁵⁹

To complement Ansell-Pearson and Bamford’s remark, let me spell out the numerous sceptical practices that, for Nietzsche, are entailed in the commitment to the intellectual conscience, at least as it is explained in GS 2. In the first place, as Ansell-Pearson and Bamford observe, the intellectual conscience is linked to the exercise of doubt. Let me say something more about this. According to Nietzsche, the majority of people lack commitment to the intellectual

³⁵⁶ In this sense, intellectual honesty can be interpreted as the most urgent demand pressed by the intellectual conscience and, simultaneously, as a virtuous intellectual practice – one that is praiseworthy precisely because it meets the demands of the intellectual conscience.

³⁵⁷ In *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, for example, Nietzsche describes the innermost experience of the thinker, construing the interactions between the thinker and their thoughts as ethical-political relations between individuals; and, in doing so, he suggests that the intellectual conscience is rooted ‘in associating with [our own thoughts, concepts and words] as we would with free, spiritual persons, with independent powers, as equals with equals’ (MOM 26).

³⁵⁸ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

³⁵⁹ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

conscience: ‘Nobody even blushes when you intimate that their weights are under weight; nor do people feel outraged; they merely laugh at your doubts’ (GS 2). Intellectual honesty and conscience demand that one ‘weighs’ one’s judgments as well as the weights of their judging: this activity requires a self-directed exercise of doubt about one’s judgments and weights, or at least a genuine consideration of doubts expressed by other people.

Nietzsche goes on to explain a bad intellectual conscience as follows: ‘the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reason afterwards’ (GS 2). The second important sense in which intellectual conscience and honesty are linked to scepticism lies in the search for certain reasons pro and con one’s beliefs³⁶⁰ – which, as Ansell-Pearson and Bamford allude, echoes Diderot’s scepticism.³⁶¹ Third, it is important to emphasise that, for Nietzsche, a deep commitment to the intellectual conscience entails a commitment to *scepsis* and *zetesis*, that is, to a continuous activity of investigation: honest and conscientious investigators ought to continue troubling themselves about the certain reasons found in their researchers and ought not to cease searching for new ones.³⁶²

Fourth, scepticism is also construed as a genuine and fruitful intellectual stance in the midst of disagreement – which, as we saw in Chapter 1, for Nietzsche is a key feature of modernity – and of ‘this whole marvellous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence’ (GS 2). As we saw in Chapter 2, in HH and HH II Nietzsche largely regards scepticism as a first step towards new certainties, while at least starting from GS – and especially in its second edition (1887) – he emphasises the link between scepticism and uncertainty. In the preface and book five of GS, as we will see in Section 4.3, Nietzsche favours an Epicurean-like form scepticism which assumes the form of an intellectual and emotional delight in ‘the questionable character of things’ (GS 375). Despite this, in GS 2 ‘*the desire for certainty*’, in cooperation with the honest, restless search for reasons, is still considered the ‘inmost craving and deepest distress’ inherent in the intellectual conscience of higher human beings (GS 2).³⁶³ What is remarkable and remarkably unnoticed is that in this aphorism the honest and in many senses sceptical desire for (empirical)

³⁶⁰ Cf. HH 225.

³⁶¹ I addressed this sceptical practice in relation to Diderot and Enlightenment scepticism in Section 2.4.

³⁶² See Sections 2.3-4.

³⁶³ Note the difference with GS 347 (book five).

certainty coexists – more or less pacifically – with the other, emerging form of Epicurean-like scepticism which will become prominent in Nietzsche’s in 1887.

So far I have shown that, for Nietzsche, a number of sceptical practices are entailed in the commitment to intellectual conscience and honesty. Now, I move to the second claim I want to make in this chapter: Nietzsche favours forms of scepticism as long as they are motivated by intellectual honesty, whereas he disapproves of uses of scepticism that do not respond to the demands of the intellectual conscience. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford have the great merit of noticing that Nietzsche embraces specific kinds of scepticism, while he is critical of others. In particular, they identify two scepticisms Nietzsche is highly critical of: first, the excessive unbelief of the ‘fanatic of mistrust’ exemplified by Nietzsche’s figuration of Pyrrho in WS 213; and second, the way in which certain metaphysicians use scepticism as a tool for a subtler obscurantism (MOM 27). I will address and problematise Nietzsche’s ambivalent figuration of Pyrrho as a ‘fanatic of mistrust’ in Section 5.3, while I will focus on Nietzsche’s criticism of an obscurantist use of scepticism in Section 3.4. I draw on Ansell-Pearson and Bamford’s argument, further claiming that the reason for Nietzsche’s criticism of certain kinds of scepticism is that, in his view, these do not meet the requirements of intellectual honesty and conscience. In other words, Nietzsche distinguishes virtuous sceptical practices from vicious ones depending on their commitment – or lack of it – to intellectual honesty and conscience.

I want to highlight two additional aspects of the link Nietzsche establishes between the intellectual conscience and scepticism. The first is that, as I have just mentioned, Nietzsche is well aware that scepticism is not always used in accordance with the demands of the intellectual conscience: certain sceptical practices may, in fact, be the expression of subtle forms of intellectual dishonesty. If in GS 2 a lack of commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience is contrasted to a genuine exercise of doubt and to a sceptical search for reasons, elsewhere Nietzsche suggests that intellectual dishonesty may take a subtler form: it can make use of and appropriate scepticism, too.

Doubt can be used in a not completely honest way in order to justify some beliefs one needs or wishes to believe: it can be motivated by the drive for wanting only religious and metaphysical certainties, that is, by ‘a concealed and only seemingly sceptical form of the “metaphysical need”’ (WS 16). As we saw in Section 2.3, this can be the case of the Cartesian radical doubt which, for Nietzsche, devises sceptical arguments to demonstrate the certainty of the cogito and the existence of God, without ever genuinely questioning it. And, as we will see in Section 3.4, Nietzsche worries that Kantian philosophy could be used as a form of obscurantist fideism which denies knowledge in order to make room for moral and religious faith.

Moreover, as Nietzsche observes in HH 226 and GS 29, the search for reasons can be conducted dishonestly. A lack of intellectual honesty may also express itself as a process of rationalisation which mendaciously produces or invents reasons, *a posteriori* and *ad hoc*, to explain and justify one's beliefs and ways of life. This subtler form of intellectual dishonesty is construed as a psychological mechanism for adding lies in response to and as a defence from sceptical questioning: 'These reasons and purposes for habits [of believing and acting]', Nietzsche states, 'are always lies that are added only after some people begin to attack these habits and *ask* for reasons and purposes' (GS 29). This rationalisation, then, is triggered by the heteronomous demands of intellectual honesty and conscience. Intellectually dishonest people such as constrained spirits and fanatics, who are not autonomously committed to the intellectual conscience, use rationalisation (generating self-deception and lies) when they are compelled to provide reasons for their beliefs and behaviours.³⁶⁴ In this way, they attempt to respond to and even appropriate sceptical questioning for their dishonest ends. They still believe in something without *first* having searched for reasons pro and con. As Bernard Reginster notes, 'even though the person who engages in rationalization may *have* good reasons for his belief, he does not hold it *on the basis* of these reasons – a feature of his belief made manifest by the fact that he would continue to hold it even if those reasons were "refuted"'.³⁶⁵ We will see in Section 3.4 and Chapter 5 that Nietzsche links this intellectually dishonest – and thus vicious – mode of belief or faith to forms of fanaticism.

The second aspect I want to highlight about the link between intellectual conscience and scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings can be found once again in GS 2 and, as we will see shortly, in D 149. Not only does Nietzsche consider contemptible to believe in something without firstly subjecting it to doubt and investigation, but he also maintains that it is blameworthy *to live according to* beliefs which are not preliminary questioned, or which do not outlive sceptical scrutiny. In addition to an ethics of belief and enquiry, then, intellectual honesty and conscience, for Nietzsche, demand an ethics of action. The latter requires one to live in accordance with beliefs one has certain reasons to believe and – especially starting from D and GS – with daring hypotheses one seeks to experimentally put into practice.³⁶⁶ This ethics of action requires, first, not to separate theory and practice.³⁶⁷ Second, not only do intellectual conscience and honesty

³⁶⁴ See also D 543.

³⁶⁵ Reginster 2013, p. 443.

³⁶⁶ See D 453; GS 51, 110.

³⁶⁷ Lom 2001 notes the same about Diderot's conception of intellectual honesty (p. 64).

require that one searches for more autonomous, independent, and authentic modes of thinking, but they also require that one searches and experiments with more autonomous, independent, and authentic modes of living.³⁶⁸ This commitment forbids honest, conscientious thinkers to accept and rely on conventional opinions and practices as criteria of action – at least not merely on account of their being conventional or traditional. The intellectual conscience that Nietzsche has in mind demands that philosophers live according to their theories and relinquish habits of behaviour and practices based on beliefs that do not withstand their sceptical questioning. As Ansell-Pearson and Bamford rightly note, '[t]o live by the intellectual conscience, as the calling of one's superior self, is, then, to commit oneself to quite a severe way of living' (see also D 298).³⁶⁹ A number of commentators have noted that the philosophical way of life promoted by Nietzsche is incompatible with the Pyrrhonian.³⁷⁰ In the following section, I try to construe Nietzsche's criticism of the Pyrrhonian way of life as a dishonest ethics of action.

3.3 Pyrrhonian Scepticism Between Intellectual Honesty and Dishonesty

The link between honesty and scepticism in the late writings has been well established in the secondary literature, especially by those commentators working on Nietzsche and the ancient sceptical tradition.³⁷¹ It is well known that in the late published works Nietzsche praises the sceptics precisely for their intellectual honesty or integrity.³⁷² In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche mentions his reading of Victor Brochard's 'excellent book' about Greek scepticism, commenting that '[t]he sceptics were the only respectable types among the philosophical tribes, tribes that generally talk out of both sides of their mouth (they would talk out of five sides if they could)!' (EH 'Clever' §3, p. 90). Among these respectable sceptics, it is plausible to assume, there are also the Pyrrhonists, and perhaps their talking out of both sides of their mouths refers to the Pyrrhonian 'ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all',

³⁶⁸ Cf. SE §1, p. 173.

³⁶⁹ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

³⁷⁰ See, especially, Parush 1976, Mitcheson 2017, and Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

³⁷¹ See, especially, Bett 2000; Berry 2004a; Berry 2011.

³⁷² In the unpublished notes of 1888, instead, Nietzsche interprets Pyrrho, along with Epicurus, as a decadent and a nihilist, that is as a weak, weary and sick spirit, on account of his need to seek *ataraxia*, calm, and repose. See especially NF-1888,14[99]. Moreover, as we will see in this section, in NF-1888,14[107] Nietzsche criticises the sceptics of antiquity, together with Kant, for their dangerous distinction between theory and practice which lead them to live in accordance with traditional laws and customs.

which leads to equipollence and, in turn, to suspension of judgment.³⁷³ Indeed, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche considers the ‘ephectic drive’ – that is, the drive to suspend judgment – one of the virtues of the philosopher (GM 3.9). To complicate the picture he also adds that sceptics and ephectics, in spite of their commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience, are not completely liberated from the ascetic ideal because they still believe there is a truth about which to be sceptical or suspend judgment (GM 3.24).³⁷⁴ Here, of course, I cannot deal with the problem of the ascetic ideal posed in the late writings, but I want to draw attention to the fact that Nietzsche distinguishes sceptics from ephectics or thinkers who suspend judgment, as well as the ‘drive to doubt’ from the ‘ephectic drive’ (GM 3.9). This frequently overlooked distinction, I think, is another piece of evidence for what I have been arguing throughout this thesis: Nietzsche works with multiple conceptions of scepticism and sceptical practices.

In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche expands on his remark on the respectability of the sceptics: they are ‘the decent types in the history of philosophy’ on account of their ‘conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity [*Rechtschaffenheit*]’ (A 12). Sceptics are considered the only respectable or at least decent type of philosophers precisely because they are honest: they have an intellectual ‘conscience for the question “true” or “untrue”’ (A 54).³⁷⁵ In A 12, it is important to note, Nietzsche is not specifically referring to the Pyrrhonian sceptics; in reality, he is referring more in general to the sceptical types in the history of philosophy. In parallel with EH, it is very likely that in A 12 Nietzsche has in mind the Pyrrhonists, too; nevertheless, the possibility that he is thinking also about other sceptics from antiquity and modernity cannot simply be excluded.

With regard to the middle writings, Jessica Berry notices that in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche speaks of a ‘subtler honesty and skepticism [that] came into being wherever two contradictory sentences appear to be *applicable* to life’ (GS 110); she reads this statement as a clear indication that when Nietzsche links honesty to scepticism he has Pyrrhonism in view.³⁷⁶ As proof of this, Berry highlights Nietzsche’s praise of the sceptics – whom she, perhaps too readily, identifies exclusively as Pyrrhonists – for their intellectual honesty and conscience in *Ecce Homo* and *The Anti-Christ*.³⁷⁷ Furthermore, according to Berry, Nietzsche’s praise of Montagne’s

³⁷³ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 4, PH 1.8.

³⁷⁴ Cf. NF-1873,29[8].

³⁷⁵ As we will see, Nietzsche includes Zarathustra, too, in this type of sceptics (A 54).

³⁷⁶ Berry 2011, pp. 29.

³⁷⁷ Berry 2011, pp. 9, 197, 210.

honesty – whom she, perhaps too simplistically, sees as a Pyrrhonist³⁷⁸ – is another indication that Nietzsche links honesty with Pyrrhonian scepticism.³⁷⁹ Against Berry, I have been arguing in this thesis that Nietzsche links honesty not only to Pyrrhonism but also to other, modern sceptical practices. (In Section 2.4, for example, we saw the affinity of the way Nietzsche and Diderot link scepticism to honesty.)

Although GS 110 clearly echoes the Pyrrhonian practice of equipollence, Nietzsche's discussion in the aphorism highlights historical and developmental aspects of honesty and scepticism which are not present in Pyrrhonism. Berry understands scepticism, in cooperation with honesty, in GS 110 as the activity of 'raising and maintaining doubt [...] in direct contrast to the tendency toward self-deception'.³⁸⁰ I too think that this sceptical activity informs Nietzsche's commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience,³⁸¹ but it seems to me that this cannot be simply reduced to Pyrrhonian scepticism. In her study, in fact, Berry tends to interpret the Pyrrhonists as philosophers who doubt, whereas, as Katja Maria Vogt notes, 'the ancient skeptics do not describe themselves as making an active effort at doubting'.³⁸² Rather, they oppose conflicting arguments and suspend judgment in the hope to become tranquil. Unlike Berry, I want to show how Nietzsche precisely links honesty with two practices typical of the ancient sceptical tradition: self-refutation (*peritrope*) and suspension of judgment (*ephexis* and *epoché*).³⁸³ Moreover, towards the end of the section I will try to argue that Nietzsche would see some aspects of Pyrrhonism and especially its way of life as representative of a lack of intellectual honesty and conscience.

First, let me say something about suspension of judgment. We should recall that Nietzsche construes philology as *ephexis* or temporary suspension of interpretation (A 52) and uses it as a paradigm for science as a methodical investigation.³⁸⁴ This, in turn, is linked to intellectual honesty and conscience: 'all the scientific *methods* were already [in ancient Greek

³⁷⁸ Jessica Berry seems to interpret Montaigne simply as a Pyrrhonian sceptic. This interpretation, however, is not as unproblematic as Berry makes it. Although Montaigne is largely sympathetic with the Pyrrhonists there are numerous aspects of Montaigne's intellectual project and of his scepticism, too, that are not compatible with the ancient sceptical tradition. It is a prominent argument in the secondary literature that Montaigne largely transforms and innovates ancient forms of scepticism – not only Pyrrhonism. See, especially, Hartle 2003, pp. 12-25; Paganini 2018a, pp. 238-243.

³⁷⁹ Berry 2011, pp. 29, 32, 79-80. Cf. SE §2, p. 181.

³⁸⁰ Berry 2011, p. 105. See also Berry 2011, pp. 130, 196-197.

³⁸¹ See, for example, GS 2.

³⁸² Vogt 2018, p. 3.

³⁸³ In Chapter 5, we will see that, in a number of senses, Nietzsche also reinterprets Pyrrhonian *aphasia* or silence, linking it to intellectual honesty.

³⁸⁴ See Section 2.1.

and Roman culture], the great, incomparable art of reading well had already been established [...], a free view of reality, a cautious hand, the patience and the seriousness for the smallest things, all the *integrity* of knowledge' (A 59).³⁸⁵ The ancient practice of *ephexis* is recommended as a general tool for good enquiry. For Nietzsche, this practice of temporarily refraining from judgment and slowing thinking down is key to promoting intellectual honesty or integrity – to avoiding self-deception, drawing erroneous conclusions, and making rushed judgments. As we will see in Chapter 5, it is also key to cooling down a human mind prone to mental and emotional excesses such as conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. We will see in Chapter 4 that Nietzsche also recommends and deploys forms of suspension of judgment – akin to Pyrrhonian *epoché*, albeit with substantial differences – about religious and metaphysical questions concerning the first and last things. As we will see, according to Nietzsche, suspension of judgment on this issue is the inevitable consequence of intellectual honesty and conscience: free spirits ought to suspend judgment about matters of which they cannot obtain rigorous, scientific knowledge. The general *ephectic* mode or method of investigation leads them to an indefinite suspension of judgment about these specific matters as the appropriate response to the demands of intellectual honesty and conscience in free-spirited philosophy.

I now turn to the ancient sceptical practice of self-refutation.³⁸⁶ In D 370, Nietzsche spells out what he thinks is the 'first requirement for honesty of thought': 'Never hold back or conceal from yourself anything that can be thought against your thoughts! [...] Each and everyday you must also conduct a campaign against yourself' (D 370). First and foremost, then, honesty requires the strenuous intellectual effort to question one's own beliefs, to ponder divergent views, and even to think against one's own thoughts. This is an important sense in which honesty is closely linked to a self-directed form of scepticism which, like suspension of judgment, functions as a tool to think well. To be honest in this sense, for Nietzsche, one must engage in a daily practice of mistrust towards oneself, one that takes the shape of a continuous attempt at self-criticism and even at self-refutation. This practice, in cooperation with suspension of judgment, is key to avoiding self-deception, error, and rashness, as well as forms of fanaticism.

Moreover, I think, the practice of self-refutation, in relation to honesty, plays an important role in Nietzsche's philosophy. We will see shortly that this self-directed form of mistrust is one of the reasons why in the late writings Nietzsche shows deep respect for the sceptics, including the Pyrrhonists, as the only types of philosophers committed to intellectual

³⁸⁵ Cf. HH 109.

³⁸⁶ On *peritrope* in Sextus Empiricus and Nietzsche see Conway & Ward 1992. Conway and Ward do not draw attention to the close link between *peritrope* and honesty in Nietzsche's middle writings.

honesty or integrity. In the Conclusion, I will suggest that this practice is one of the senses in which, for Nietzsche, Zarathustra is sceptic. One might even speculate that the 1886 prefaces to the second editions of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the middle works can, in fact, be regarded as a development of this practice.

In concluding this section, I want to take up Diderot's suggestion that the Pyrrhonists are not completely sincere sceptics,³⁸⁷ and verify whether we might find in Nietzsche – who, as we saw, is similarly committed to Enlightenment scepticism – an analogous criticism of the Pyrrhonists, in spite of the fact that he praises the sceptics in the late writings, and most likely the Pyrrhonists too, for their intellectual integrity. What follows, I endeavour to carve out, starting from Nietzsche's texts, a critique of Pyrrhonism due to its imperfect commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience. Although I will, in a sense, need to do this in spite of Nietzsche's explicit statements about the sceptics, I nonetheless think that this interpretative endeavour is important and justified for two reasons. First, because I suspect that some of the key features of Nietzsche's notions of intellectual honesty and conscience are not fully compatible with Pyrrhonian scepticism. Second, because it provides further evidence to support my argument that Nietzsche's scepticism is not restricted to Pyrrhonism and is incompatible with a number of its practices. In this section, I am particularly concerned with the Pyrrhonian way of suspending judgment about everything and living in conformity with customs and laws. I want to show that in the middle writings Nietzsche regards practical conformism as lacking intellectual honesty and conscience because it separates theory from practice. According to Nietzsche, I propose, the Pyrrhonists suffer from this defect. Although this criticism is not expressly intended for the Pyrrhonists in the middle writings, I want to defend my interpretation by showing that in the 1888 notebooks Nietzsche explicitly criticises the Pyrrhonian way of life precisely on account of their separating theory and practice. In the meantime, I highlight two additional senses in which, I think, Nietzsche might regard the Pyrrhonian scepticism as lacking commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience: first, the danger of its degenerating into a fanatical mistrust; and second, its subjecting philosophical investigation to the search for tranquillity.

I noted at the beginning of this section that the link between scepticism and honesty has been well established in the secondary literature on Nietzsche and the ancient sceptical tradition; nevertheless, commentators have not fully spelled out in what exact sense Nietzsche praises the Pyrrhonian sceptics for their honesty. Let me begin by specifying two senses in which Nietzsche might consider the Pyrrhonists honest.

³⁸⁷ See Section 2.4.

As I have anticipated, in EH Nietzsche considers the Pyrrhonian sceptics respectable for their talking out of both sides of their mouth. In all probability, as I have mentioned, Nietzsche is referring to their ability to investigate contrasting views.³⁸⁸ This ability is worth of praise, in his view, for it fosters a honest consideration of the matter under investigation, one that is more honest than dogmatic, one-sided accounts, for it carefully considers multiple sides of the issue at stake. This ability, for Nietzsche, seems to have been lost in the tremendous acceleration of modern life and ought to be regained (HH 282).

There is another important sense in which Nietzsche might consider the Pyrrhonists honest. This concerns the requirement of honesty that, as we have just seen, he lays down in D 370: the ancient sceptical practice of self-refutation or *peritrope* largely deployed by Sextus Empiricus. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, Nietzsche flirts with this strategy in his ambivalent figuration of Pyrrho in WS 213. As construed in D 370, honesty requires that investigators regard themselves as their own adversaries, attempting to refute themselves in order to test their opinions and cultivate their sceptical ability.³⁸⁹ However, I suggest, this practice remains virtuous for Nietzsche as long as it is required or motivated by intellectual honesty; otherwise, it may even degenerate into a form of fanaticism,³⁹⁰ which seeks self-refutation as an end in itself, rather than as a means for a truthful enquiry. In Chapter 5, we will see that Nietzsche seems to attribute this dishonest, fanatical form of self-refutation to the figure of Pyrrho in WS 213. Honesty, as Nietzsche conceives it, requires not only thinking against one's thoughts but also an openness to the possibility of being convinced or persuaded: 'Everything good, fine, or great [people] do is first of all an argument against the skeptic inside them. They have to convince or persuade *him*, and that almost requires genius' (GS 284). (This is an important affinity between Nietzsche and Diderot.)

So far I have indicated two senses in which Nietzsche might consider the Pyrrhonian sceptics honest. We have also begun to see a potential limitation of their honesty, one that Nietzsche expresses in WS 213, characterising Pyrrho as a fanatic of mistrust. Now, I want to show that we can find *implicit* in the middle writings another serious limitation to the Pyrrhonists' commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience. This has to do, more specifically, with their way of life.

³⁸⁸ To the link between honesty and this ability with respect to the drives see NF-1880,6[234].

³⁸⁹ On the honest and just attitude of the Nietzschean investigator towards adversaries' opinions see D 431, 449. See also Z 1 'Of War and Warriors', p. 74.

³⁹⁰ On the opposition between honesty and fanaticism see, for example, D 511.

In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche distinguishes free spirits from constrained spirits on the basis of their different commitment to honesty and truthfulness: ‘The constrained spirit adopts his position not due to reason, but out of habit’ (HH 226). For Nietzsche, adopting a position in this way, without a truthful enquiry of the reasons pro or con, is an intellectually vicious mode of holding an opinion – one that does not meet the demands of the intellectual conscience; he calls this faith (HH 225-226). Nietzsche finds it problematic ‘[t]o accept a faith merely because it is the custom’; this, he goes on to say, ‘is certainly tantamount to: being dishonest, being cowardly, being lazy’ (D 101). It should be clear that, unlike constrained spirits, the Pyrrhonists are tireless sceptical investigators and have no presumptions that conventional opinions get things right. But although in theory they suspend judgment about traditional views, in practice they do rely on customs and laws as a standard of action. Nietzsche’s texts, I propose, allows us to construe the Pyrrhonian standard of action as a form of dishonesty.

This, I think, can be best seen in D 149 where Nietzsche highlights the need for tiny deviant actions³⁹¹ – as opposed to both practical conservatism and revolutionary actions (as well as to inactivity): ‘Sometimes in matters of *custom*’, it is not only considered unproblematic but also “tolerant”, ‘to act contrary to your better judgment, to give in now and then outwardly, in praxis, and yet retain one’s inner integrity, to do as everyone else does and thus to render everyone else a courteous good turn as compensation, as it were, for the deviance of our opinions’. All of this, in fact, is a way to ‘lull the intellectual conscience to sleep’. In this aphorism, Nietzsche is in polemic with ‘many tolerably liberal-minded people’ who do not act in accordance with their liberal-minded opinions – not with the Pyrrhonian sceptics. Despite this, it is easy to see how this criticism could be extended to the Pyrrhonian way of living in conformity with customs and laws, too.

This extension is legitimate, since Nietzsche himself applies the same criticism to the sceptics of antiquity and to Kant³⁹² in a largely neglected unpublished fragment of 1888, warning against the ‘[d]angerous distinction between “theoretical” and “practical” (NF-1888,14[107]).³⁹³ The Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche states, ‘act as if practice must be judged by its own measure, whatever the answer of theory may be’.³⁹⁴ Against them, he maintains that theory is the only ‘method for judging a way of life’, for we do not know ‘any other method of acting well than always thinking

³⁹¹ See also D 103.

³⁹² In Section 3.4, I will address Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical as a form of dishonesty in relation to Nietzsche’s criticism of a fideistic use of scepticism for obscurantist ends.

³⁹³ In WP 458.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 9, PH 1.21-24; Brochard 1887, p. 59.

well; the latter *is* an action, and the former presupposes thought' (NF-1888,14[107]). '[E]ven the skeptics of antiquity', Nietzsche goes on to say, accept as a faith the moral principle that "One must act, *consequently* rules of conduct are needed" (NF-1888,14[107]). Intriguingly, Nietzsche compares the Pyrrhonists with the Buddhists, their 'brothers':³⁹⁵ he considers the latter ones more consistent or more honest because, starting from an analogous form of theoretical suspension, they say "One must *not* act" [...] and conceived a rule of conduct to liberate one from actions' (NF-1888,14[107]). Nietzsche concludes that

To accommodate oneself, to live as the "common man" lives, to hold right and good what he holds right: this is to submit to the herd instinct. One must take one's courage and severity so far as to feel such a submission as a *disgrace*. Not to live with two different standards! – Not to separate theory and practice! –' (NF-1888, 14[107]).

As in D 149, 'not to live with two different standards', one for theory and the other for practice, is set out as a requirement of intellectual honesty and conscience. If on the theoretical side Nietzsche praises the Pyrrhonists for their honesty, on the practical side at each and every stage of his intellectual development he ought to be critical of their way of life. In particular, I think, Nietzsche would have condemned their practical conformism as a lack of intellectual honesty and conscience.

Moreover, in D 164 Nietzsche states that 'all honest people in search of truth' shall recognise and further the basic goal of undertaking 'numerous new attempts at living life and creating community'.³⁹⁶ The aim of a Nietzschean honest and sceptical practice of philosophy is to introduce innovation in ethical thinking and to bring about a transformation in the individual as well as in culture or society (D 98, 167). As noted by Ansell-Pearson and Bamford, 'there is an important dimension to Nietzsche's project that is not present in [ancient] modes or forms of scepticism, namely, a commitment to experimentalism with respect to both individual and social modes of living'.³⁹⁷ For Nietzsche, then, the outward conformism of the Pyrrhonists would not only be a form of intellectual dishonesty but, by resulting in practical conservatism, it would also be completely incompatible with his philosophical commitment to experimentalism in the middle writings, and especially in *Dawn* and *The Gay Science*. I shall say more about Nietzsche's experimental scepticism in Chapter 4.

³⁹⁵ Cf. Diogenes Laertius 1931, p. 475, DL 9.11.61

³⁹⁶ See also D 453.

³⁹⁷ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. See Section 2.3.

Another potential limitation of the Pyrrhonists' honesty would be that, ultimately, the aim of their sceptical investigation is tranquillity,³⁹⁸ rather than truthfulness and truth. As I have mentioned, in the middle writing Nietzsche's commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience is in an important sense truth directed. Although he is himself interested in the search for happiness and joy, throughout his writings Nietzsche often contrasts the pursuit of tranquillity with that of truthfulness and truth. This can be seen in potence already in a remarkable letter of 1865 where Nietzsche describes his commitment to philosophy:

Do we after all seek rest, peace, and pleasure in our inquiries? No, only truth – even if it be most abhorrent and ugly [...]. Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire. (BVN-1865,469)³⁹⁹

Pyrrhonian scepticism is the strange philosophical case in which open, ongoing investigation more or less accidentally meets the hope of becoming tranquil. Nevertheless, the suspicion remains for the late Nietzsche about whether their wish for *ataraxia* might be a limit of their devotion to truth and enquiry: 'What inspires the skeptic? *Hatred* of the dogmatist – or a need for rest, a weariness, as in the case of Pyrrho' (NF-1888,15[58]).⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, in the late notebooks the Pyrrho's need for tranquillity is diagnosed as a form of psychological weakness or disease and associated with nihilism and decadence (NF-1888,14[99], 14[107]).

3.4 Kant, Fideism, and Obscurantism

In the previous section, we saw that in NF-1888,14[107] Nietzsche criticises Kant, along with the sceptics of antiquity, for dangerously distinguishing between a theoretical and a practical dimension. We saw how this distinction with respect to the Pyrrhonists, for the middle and late Nietzsche amounts to a lack of intellectual honesty and conscience. In this section, I want to show that Nietzsche criticises a specific kind of scepticism, which he associates with Kantian philosophy, for lacking commitment to intellectual honesty.

We saw in Chapter 1 that in *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche associated a form of scepticism with Kantian philosophy on account of its having demonstrated the limits of human knowledge. In the period of the *Unfashionable Observations*, I showed, Nietzsche regarded the

³⁹⁸ See Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.30.

³⁹⁹ Translated in Kaufmann 2013, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁰⁰ In WP 455.

scepticism engendered by Kant as a danger for German culture and young intellectuals. Nietzsche worried that Kantian philosophy, by showing that we can have no theoretical, scientific knowledge of things in themselves, could lead to intellectual, as well as personal, disorientation and even despair. In Section 1.2, I also highlighted that, in accordance with his becoming a sceptic, starting from *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche embarks himself on a Kantian-inspired programme of deflating the pretension to absolute truth and knowledge of traditional metaphysics. A large part of his middle philosophy, as we saw, aims to show that dogmatic metaphysical and religious claims about first and last things such as God are not based on rigorous, scientific knowledge (up to here Nietzsche is going in the same direction of Kant) but on error, self-deception, passion, and need (here Nietzsche begins to depart from Kantian criticism). In this sense, I stressed that in the middle writings Nietzsche seeks to generate the very form of scepticism he had considered dangerous (but true) in SE.

In *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, however, Nietzsche begins to associate Kantian philosophy with a different, suspicious form of scepticism, one that does not endanger intellectual and cultural securities but that can be used as a tool ‘for a subtler obscurantism’ (MOM 27). This scepticism has to do with Kant’s famous strategy to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith in the domain of practical reason.⁴⁰¹ From the middle writings onwards,⁴⁰² I suggest, Nietzsche is strongly critical of this use of scepticism which he sees as an obscurantist form of fideism poorly committed to intellectual honesty or integrity.

Before I turn to Nietzsche’s middle and late critique of Kant’s strategy to make room for faith, I need to make one further clarification. As in the early writings, Nietzsche is not seeking to provide a close, scholarly reading of Kant, but rather, assuming the role of the philosopher as physician of culture, he is largely concerned with the influence of Kantian philosophy on German and European culture. That is to say, Nietzsche’s observations about Kant might not do full justice to the complexity of Kantian philosophy and, at times, might even force the interpretation. This is the case when Nietzsche claims that Kant – who regarded himself as an Enlightenment thinker and who is commonly regarded as such by commentators – might be employed for

⁴⁰¹ Kant 1998[1781/1787], Bxxx. As Guyer 2006 spells out, ‘[a]lthough knowledge of the existence of God and our own freedom and immortality cannot be theoretically demonstrated, Kant argues, neither can they be disproven, and they are necessary presuppositions of moral conduct – objects of moral belief or faith although not knowledge. This is what Kant meant by his famous statement in the Preface to the second edition of the Critique that he found it necessary “to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (p. 34).

⁴⁰² If in the middle and later writings Nietzsche is strongly critical of Kant’s strategy to deny knowledge to make room for faith, in the early writings – as we saw in Section 1.1 – he was in part sympathetic towards it.

obscurantist purposes.⁴⁰³ Hence, in this section I am not much concerned with whether Nietzsche gets Kant right, but rather with his critique of a fideistic form of scepticism that he associates with Kantian philosophy, a subtler obscurantism, and a lack of intellectual honesty in the context of his observation of modern European culture.

In MOM 27, Nietzsche introduces an interesting conception of obscurantism which has been frequently neglected in the secondary literature.⁴⁰⁴ Traditionally, obscurantism is considered as an enemy of the Enlightenment. If the latter is the process of shedding light on things in order to acquire a clearer understanding of them, the former is the opposite process that, voluntarily or involuntarily, clouds the mind and confuses our views on things. Enlightenment philosophers find obscurantism objectionable because it obstructs the search for truth and its dissemination. To an extent, Nietzsche remains faithful to the Enlightenment idea that obscurantism is an obstacle to knowledge, but he also develops a more nuanced conception of it: '[w]hat is essential to the dark art of obscurantism is not that it wishes to cloud the mind, but that it wishes to darken the image of the world and to *cloud our representation of existence*' (MOM 27).

Although in most cases obscurantism does get in the way of knowledge, in Nietzsche's view, its essential characteristic is that it makes the image of the world gloomier, eviller, and more frightening. He observes that obscurantism, as the art of darkening our representation of existence, 'does often serve as its means for hindering illumination of the spirit: but sometimes it uses precisely the opposite means and attempts to have the highest refinement of the intellect produce a weariness with its fruits' (MOM 27).⁴⁰⁵ In other words, Nietzsche claims that obscurantism does not *always* present itself as an enemy of the Enlightenment, but at times it uses knowledge and – I want to stress – scepticism, too, for its dark ends.

For Nietzsche, this is the case of hair-splitting metaphysicians and of a certain use of Kantian philosophy:

Hair-splitting metaphysicians, who prepare the way for scepticism and in their excessive mental acuity invite us to mistrust acuity, make good tools for a subtler obscurantism. – Is it possible that even Kant can be employed for this purpose? indeed, that he, according to his own notorious explanation, *wished for* some such thing at least part of the time: to pave the way for *faith* by showing *knowledge* its limits? (MOM 27)

⁴⁰³ Moreover, as we will see, Nietzsche associates Kant to a form of moral fanaticism (D 'Preface', §3), failing to do justice to the latter's Enlightenment campaign against *Schwärmerei*. See Ansell-Pearson 2019a, pp. 58-29.

⁴⁰⁴ An exception is Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

⁴⁰⁵ Translation modified.

This passage is somehow reminiscent of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, suggesting that brooding over metaphysical matters could generate a particularly unhelpful form of scepticism that, fuelling excessive mistrust towards our mental powers, can be used as a tool for ‘[a] most refined and dangerous obscurantism, indeed, the most dangerous of all: for the dark art appears here underneath a cloak of light’ (MOM 27).⁴⁰⁶

To illustrate the link between obscurantism and the unhelpful scepticism produced by such metaphysicians, Nietzsche provides the example of Kant and more precisely of his notorious strategy to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith. In MOM 27, he asks whether it is possible that even Kant, who was deeply committed to the Enlightenment and especially to its maxim of always thinking for oneself, could be employed for obscurantist purposes. Nietzsche also insinuates that, at times, Kant himself, presumably referring to his practical philosophy, is not immune from the charge of obscurantism.⁴⁰⁷ According to Nietzsche, the Kantian doctrine of practical faith can be used as a subtler form of obscurantism in two principal senses: first, it may obstruct the advancement of knowledge in moral matters; and second, it may darken our image of the world.

As mentioned above, Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are perhaps the only commentators who draw attention to Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysicians’ obscurantist use of scepticism in MOM 27.⁴⁰⁸ They follow the criticism of metaphysical obscurantism from MOM 27 to D 142, where Nietzsche takes issue with Kant and Schopenhauer: ‘Nietzsche refers explicitly to Kant’s obscurity in *Dawn* 142, citing from the *Nachlass* of Schopenhauer, in which Schopenhauer esteems as Kant’s “greatest gift” his demonstration of the limits of the concepts of the Understanding, and in the process lending value to Kant’s view about the “incomprehensible” character of the categorical imperative’.⁴⁰⁹ Ansell-Pearson and Bamford specifically focus on

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. SE §3, p. 189. See Section 1.1. On the one hand, Nietzsche observes that the ‘fogs of a metaphysical-mystical philosophy [...] [makes] aesthetic phenomena *opaque*’ and ‘inexplicable’, finally resulting in ‘a total *non-critique* [*Unkritik*]’ – in a negation of criticism (MOM 28). On the other, a way in which metaphysicians produce a subtler form of obscurantism, as Nietzsche specifies in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, is by trying to ‘clarify’ nature through meta-physical, supernatural, or other-worldly explanations: ‘Anyone who “explains” an author’s passage “more profoundly” than it was meant has not explained the author, but *obscured* [*verdunkelt*] him. This is the position of our metaphysicians toward the text of nature: indeed, even worse. For in order to bring their profound explanations to bear, they frequently first adjust the text in preparation: that is to say, they *corrupt* it’ (WS 17). Not only does Nietzsche accuse these metaphysicians of bad philology on account of their failing to understand the text of nature; he also charges them for blackening our image of the world and for making it worse with their profound explanations – which, for example, end up instilling unnecessary guilt, fear, contempt, and misery in our life. See also HH 8, 15, 17, and 270.

⁴⁰⁷ This charge will become more direct and serious in the late writings.

⁴⁰⁸ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

⁴⁰⁹ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. See also GM 3.12. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford identify the source of this view in the concluding remarks of Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1786): ‘we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, yet we do comprehend its

Nietzsche's objection to the mystical character of Schopenhauer's ethics. The direct target in D 142, indeed, seems to be Schopenhauer as opposed to Kant: Nietzsche dismisses Schopenhauer's mysticism about the metaphysical significance of empathy as 'incomprehensible nonsense',⁴¹⁰ caustically observing that '[o]ne ought to consider whether someone who, from the outset, is perfectly happy to believe in the *incomprehensibility* of things moral can be interested in acquiring knowledge of such things' (D 142).⁴¹¹

I want to develop Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's suggestion by explaining with greater precision the link between Nietzsche's conception of a subtler obscurantism and his critique of the form of scepticism that he associates with the Kantian strategy to make room for faith. In what follows, I propose, Nietzsche construes this scepticism as a form of fideism which, if taken to its extremes, might even degenerate into obscurantism (in its two senses) and even into fanaticism.

In the context of his observation of European culture, Nietzsche sees Kant's enlightenment as inextricably bound up with an 'older morality' (HH 25), since Kant is still attaching moral significance to the beliefs in the existence of God and of an immortal soul that he had demonstrated to be theoretically or scientifically unprovable in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In contrast, Nietzsche maintains that the hypothesis of a god - which he considers as 'a purely fictitious being' (HH 629) - is no longer required either to explain the natural world or to justify morality (HH 28). He believes that modernity, as a sceptical age, 'no longer believes in God' and certainly not in the God of Christianity (HH 143). More specifically, Nietzsche argues, although the majority of people in the West might as well still be believers, there is no '*consensus omnium sapientium*' on the existence of God (HH 110), therefore 'in the present state of knowledge, we simply cannot have anything to do with [Christianity] any more without irredeemably soiling our *intellectual conscience*' (HH 109).⁴¹² As will become clear shortly, Nietzsche suspects that Kant is not sufficiently committed to intellectual honesty and conscience, for he is not willing to question the presumptions of the 'old morality'.

incomprehensibility, and this is all that can be reasonably be required of a philosophy that in its principles strives up to the boundary of human reason' (Kant 2012[1785], p. 155). See also Ansell-Pearson 1987.

⁴¹⁰ See HH 26 and MOM 5.

⁴¹¹ For Nietzsche, it is important to note, not only does Schopenhauer's obscurantist metaphysics of compassion obstruct our knowledge of moral things, but it also darkens our representation of existence. The latter is because, as Nietzsche argues in *Dawn*, compassion 'really creates suffering' and thus '*increases* the amount of suffering in the world'; if people had to live pursuing it as their only or ultimate ethical goal, they would 'turn sick and melancholic' (D 134).

⁴¹² See also HH 272.

At various times in the middle writings, Nietzsche sees Kantian philosophy as symptomatic of a ‘*German approach to morality*’, which has the proclivity to demand subordination to some form of unconditional trust, such as the categorical imperative (D 207). Nietzsche opposes this German approach to morality to both ancient and French varieties of enlightenment. ‘The moralism of Kant’, according to Nietzsche’s cultural diagnosis, is the expression of the German moral-religious sensibility that ‘produced only disadvantages and regressive movements for the *knowledge* of moral appearances’ (WS 216). Nietzsche sees in ‘German moral philosophy, counting from Kant onward’ a ‘half-theological assault upon Helvétius, a rejection of the laboriously acquired clear views or indications of the right path, which he did in the end articulate and bring together well’ (WS 216). Helvétius was a philosopher of the French Enlightenment who became famous precisely for his attack on the religious foundations of morality, reviving a hedonistic, Epicurean-inspired ethics based on pleasure and physical sensations. A large part of Nietzsche’s philosophical project in the middle writings is precisely devoted to bringing moral philosophy back on the ‘right path’ indicated by Helvétius, one of a naturalistic ethics that does not rely on metaphysical explanations. As Keith Ansell-Pearson notes, in these works Nietzsche is indeed committed to ‘the application of naturalistic modes of demystification’ and especially to ‘an ethos of Epicurean enlightenment’.⁴¹³

In D 197, Nietzsche once again discusses the ‘*Germans’ hostility to the Enlightenment*’, putting forward a criticism of German philosophy, art, and natural science.⁴¹⁴ In this aphorism Nietzsche is critical of the German ‘cult of feeling’ that ‘was erected in place of the cult of reason’ in the age of the Enlightenment, arousing the ‘the spirit of rapturous obscurantism and reaction’. This obscurantist tendency of the German spirit, in Nietzsche’s view, takes the shape of a fanatic enthusiasm in which ‘knowledge itself was being suppressed beneath feeling’ (D 197).

But what exactly is the link between the Kantian strategy to make room for faith and scepticism, obscurantism, intellectual honesty, and fanaticism? To answer this question, I will need to consider a number of published and unpublished writings from the late period in which Nietzsche is more explicit about these issues. Much of what Nietzsche says about Kant there, I think, can help us better understand the opposition between enlightenment scepticism and

⁴¹³ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 2-3, see also pp. 35-45, 135-150.

⁴¹⁴ First, he criticises the German metaphysicians for resuscitating a ‘prescientific type of philosophy’ engaged in speculation about supernatural entities and in conceptual analysis rather than in explanations of natural phenomena and of human things. Second, he attacks especially the German Romantics for evoking ‘older, primitive sensibility, especially Christianity’. Third, he disapproves of German natural scientists – among whom he includes Goethe and Schopenhauer – on account of their lacking the genuine scientific spirit displayed by Newton and Voltaire (D 197).

sceptical obscurantism in the middle writings. Let me begin from an important posthumous fragment of 1887:

Kant: makes the epistemological skepticism of the English possible for Germans:⁴¹⁵ 1. by enlisting for it the sympathy of the moral and religious needs of the Germans; just as the later philosophers of the Academy used skepticism for the same reason, as a preparation for Platonism (*vide* Agustin); and as Pascal used even moralistic skepticism in order to excite the need for faith ('to justify it'); 2. by scholastically involuting and curlicuing it and thus making it acceptable for the German taste. (NF-1887,9[3])⁴¹⁶

The second point made by Nietzsche does not require further explanation: in continuity with SE §3 and MOM 27, the scepticism produced by Kantian philosophy is once again linked to German scholasticism (and metaphysics). The first point, instead, requires a more in-depth consideration. In a posthumous fragment of 1885, Nietzsche helpfully spells out what he means by epistemological scepticism or 'scepticism of knowledge': 'From the world known to us the humanitarian God cannot be *proven*: today you can be compelled and driven this far (NF-1885,2[153]). According to Nietzsche's observation, Kant re-interprets this epistemological scepticism - which demonstrates that the God of Christianity cannot be theoretically or scientifically proven - adapting it to the German moral and religious sensibility. (Nietzsche is still analysing the case of Kant from the standpoint of the cultural physician rather than from that of the epistemologist or the metaphysician.)

What is important is that Kant's use of scepticism is characterised as a form of fideism analogous to that of Augustine and Pascal.⁴¹⁷ Like them, Nietzsche suggests, Kant uses scepticism to excite and justify the need for faith. Fideism is generally understood as a mode of justifying beliefs that relies on *faith* rather than reason. It is important to note that such a fideistic mode of justification aims at truth: thinkers such as Augustine and Pascal claims that certain truths, especially in matters of theology and religion, can be grasped only by renouncing rational enquiry and the search for reasons and evidence to justify our beliefs. We should recall that precisely this search is at the centre of Nietzsche's conception of the intellectual conscience. Moreover, it is important to note that, for these thinkers, the reliance on faith is not at all incompatible with reason but, in fact, the ultimate consequence of it: it is rational enquiry itself that arrives at the conclusion that we must abandon the search for reasons and evidence in certain matters in order to grasp their truth.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Here, perhaps, Nietzsche is referring to Kant's response to the *Scottish* scepticism of David Hume.

⁴¹⁶ In WP 101.

⁴¹⁷ The term 'fideism' derives from the Latin word *fides* that literally means faith.

⁴¹⁸ For Nietzsche, instead, it is a form of irrationality (D 99).

In particular, Nietzsche identifies in both Kant and Pascal the same spiritual tendency ‘to dethrone the intellect, to decapitate knowledge – in favour of the Christian faith!’ (NF-1880,7[34]).⁴¹⁹ In his *Pensées* (1670), Pascal writes sentences like ‘[r]eason’s last step is the recognition that there are infinite number of things [both natural and supernatural] which are beyond it’,⁴²⁰ and ‘there is nothing so consistent with reason as this denial of reason’.⁴²¹ Nietzsche wants to suggest that the Kantian strategy to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith is a form of fideism somewhat analogous to Pascal’s – one in which critical reason itself paves the way for a fideistic justification of a number of beliefs in the moral realm, such as those in the existence of God and of the immortal soul.

NF-1887,9[3] continues as follows: ‘*Kant*: [...] a moral fanatic à la Rousseau; a subterranean Christianity in his values; a dogmatist through and through, but ponderously sick of this inclination, to such an extent that he wishes to tyrannize it, but also weary right away of skepticism.’⁴²² Taking on the role of the psychologist in addition to that of the physician of culture, Nietzsche observes that Kant’s mind exhibits a conflict between dogmatism and scepticism, even though it is dogmatic in its profundity: on the one hand, Kant seeks to combat dogmatism – especially theological⁴²³ – turning to scepticism, but on the other he is weary of the latter, failing to bring it to its ultimate consequences for morality. We should recall that bringing morality to its ultimate consequence is a fundamental aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of *Rechtschaffenheit*. Hence, for Nietzsche, Kant returns to dogmatism, preserving his subterranean commitment to Christianity, in spite of – but also because of – the epistemological scepticism he advanced in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Moreover, as we shall see in a moment this form of dogmatism, somehow enhanced by scepticism, is associated with moral fanaticism.)

In the published works, this line of thought emerges in the 1886 preface to *Dawn* and continues in *Twilight of the Idols* and in *The Anti-Christ*. Although Nietzsche still finds valuable ‘the healthy sensualism of [the Kantian] theory of knowledge’⁴²⁴ – which demonstrated that the existence of supersensible things such as God and the immortal soul cannot be proven theoretically or scientifically, he associates Kant with the moral fanaticism of Rousseau and

⁴¹⁹ My translation.

⁴²⁰ Pascal 1995[1670], p. 56.

⁴²¹ Pascal 1995[1670], p. 55.

⁴²² In WP 101.

⁴²³ See GM 3.25.

⁴²⁴ This is an important sign that even the mature Nietzsche still values, at least in part, Kant’s criticism of traditional metaphysics.

Robespierre (D ‘Preface’ §3). This association, it should be acknowledged, does not do justice to Kant’s own critique of fanaticism.⁴²⁵ One of the reasons why Nietzsche links Kant to moral fanaticism, nevertheless, is that, in spite of the scepticism produced by his critique of reason, he is not willing to genuinely question his belief in morality: ‘Kant believed in morality’ and wished to justify it: ‘in order to make room for *his* “moral realm”, he found himself obliged to posit a nondemonstrable world, a logical “Beyond” – expressly to this end did he need the *Critique of Pure Reason!*’ (D ‘Preface’ §3). The most important thing for Kant, according to Nietzsche’s observation, was ‘to make the “moral realm” unassailable, better yet inapprehensible by reason’ (D ‘Preface’ §3). Hence, Nietzsche observes, Kant’s use of scepticism as a form of fideism is motivated by his unquestioning belief in morality – not by his commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience: ‘the sceptical-epochistic attitude’ of Kant has moral origins (NF-1885,2[161]);⁴²⁶ ‘[t]his initially skeptical movement is indeed directed against skepticism, *it takes pleasure in subservience*’ (NF-1885,34[82]) . It is in this sense that Nietzsche regards Kant’s attempt at critique as half-hearted, for it does not extend to the domain of morality (GM 3.25)⁴²⁷ – which remains unquestioned and even unquestionable.⁴²⁸

As Nietzsche puts it, Kant reaffirms the old ideal of a true, supersensible world and, more specifically, Christian morality ‘through fog and scepticism’ (TL ‘Fable’ 3). Hence, for Nietzsche, Kant’s deployment of scepticism as a form of fideism, and to justify the belief in the older morality, might engender a subtler obscurantism. As we have seen, this obscurantism is subtler because it uses critique and scepticism to cloud the mind and even darken the world. In one sense, the obscurantist use of Kantian philosophy obstructs the genuine search for truth and knowledge about moral phenomena; in the other sense, it preserves the unnecessary fears,

⁴²⁵ On Nietzsche, Kant, and fanaticism see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 47-61 (see, especially, p. 58). See also Garrard 2008, p. 603; Ansell-Pearson 2018b.

⁴²⁶ In WP 410.

⁴²⁷ Nietzsche considers Kantian criticism the ‘[s]ubtlest way of escape’: ‘The intellect disputes its right to make interpretations of this sort as well as to reject interpretations of this sort. One contents oneself with an increase in one’s trust and faith, with a renunciation of all provability in matters of faith, with an unconceivable and superior “ideal” (God) as a stopgap’ (NF-1885,2[165], in WP 253).

⁴²⁸ Compare this with the Diderot’s critique of half-hearted scepticism in the following passage from his *Philosophical Thoughts*: ‘A half-hearted scepticism is the mark of a feeble understanding which reveals a pusillanimous reasoner who permits himself to be alarmed by consequences, a superstitious creature who thinks to honour God by imposing fetters on his reason, a species of unbeliever who is afraid of unmasking himself to himself. For if truth has nothing to lose by examination, as is the demi-sceptic’s conviction, what does he think in the bottom of his heart of those privileged notions which he fears to investigate, and which are hidden in a recess of his brain, as in a sanctuary which he dares not approach?’ (Diderot 1916[1746], p. 46, §34).

anxieties, unconditional duties that, according to Nietzsche, Christianity has created for human beings.⁴²⁹

In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche establishes a direct link between the German moral and religious sensibility, the Kantian strategy to make room for faith, a foggy or obscurantist use of scepticism, and a precarious sense of intellectual integrity: the belief in morality was ‘(thanks to an exceedingly canny scepticism) if not provable, then at least no longer *refutable*... Reason, the *right* of reason, does not extend that far [...] Kant’s success is just a theological success: Kant [...] was one more drag on an already precarious German sense of integrity [*Rechtschaffenheit*] (A 10).⁴³⁰ By means of what Nietzsche calls ‘an exceedingly canny scepticism’, Kant attempts to justify the belief in morality – and, more precisely, in Christian morality – on account of its being not provable and, therefore, no longer refutable.⁴³¹

Nietzsche considers Kant’s attempt a sign of the need for faith characteristic of the German moral and religious sensibility and of a poor commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience. Kant uses epistemological scepticism and critical reason to demonstrate that the beliefs in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul – which lie at the centre of Christian morality – are not provable from the standpoint of theoretical, scientific enquiry. At this point, for Nietzsche, Kant dogmatically discards the following conclusion: if those central beliefs are unprovable, they are untenable; we need to find other explanations of moral phenomena and fashion an unmetaphysical ethics capable of offering guidance for how to live without God, immortality, or any other supernatural point of reference. As mentioned above, Nietzsche himself wants to take this direction.

Instead of going there, as Nietzsche sees it, Kant wishes to vindicate the unprovable belief in morality. To do so, he pursues the strategy to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith: if we cannot scientifically prove these beliefs to be true, then we cannot prove them to be

⁴²⁹ See, for example, HH 108, 117, 119, 141, 244; D 59. Abbey 2020 has efficaciously summarised some of the ways in which, by Nietzsche’s reckoning in HH, Christianity burdens the hearth and darkens the world: ‘[Christianity] tells people that they are sinful from the start, it makes them feel intrinsically and persistently unworthy, it renders many natural inclinations, such as eating and sex, suspect and shameful, and it locates release and redemption from this condition outside them. It loudly proclaims “the complete unworthiness, sinfulness, and contemptibility of humanity” (HH 117)’ (p. 62). Another way in which, for Nietzsche, Christianity darkens our image of the world is by making the passions evil (D 76). In contrast, one of Nietzsche’s philosophical projects in the middle writings is aimed at ‘transforming passions into delights’ (WS 37). On this see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 34-35. In my view, as part of this project, Nietzsche also tries to transform the negative passions, emotions, and moods attached to scepticism into delights and joys. See Section 1.4 and Chapter 4.

⁴³⁰ See also EH ‘CW’ §2, p. 140.

⁴³¹ See the following posthumous fragment: ‘The problem of truth can slip away into hiding places of all kinds; and the greatest believers may finally avail themselves of the logic of the greatest believers may finally avail themselves a right to affirm certain things as irrefutable – namely, as *beyond* the means of all refutation – (this artifice is today called “Kantian Criticism”)’ (NF-1888,15[19], in WP 251).

wrong either; they are neither provable nor refutable; and qua non-refutable or irrefutable we can and should believe them, through a specific kind of practical faith, in order to satisfy our moral and religious needs. On the one hand, Nietzsche contends, the importance of these beliefs and needs for human life is never seriously put into question. On the other, as we saw in Section 3.3, he believes that Kant, like the Pyrrhonists, lacks intellectual honesty and conscience in separating the theoretical and practical domains (NF-1888,14[107]). In the specific case of Kant, the conclusions reached in theoretical domain are not brought to their ultimate consequences for the practical one: the belief in morality is in fact removed from the jurisdiction of scientific enquiry, from its sceptical and critical suspicion. Kant wants to preserve the old Christian morality, justifying the beliefs in God and in the immortal soul on the basis of a kind faith – in absence of adequate theoretical, scientific reasons and evidence. To this end, Nietzsche suggests, Kant even ‘invented as specific form of reason [namely, practical reason]’ (A 12).

According to Nietzsche’s observation, then, Kant’s practical fideism is a backward movement, one that fail to respond to the demands of intellectual honesty – in the two senses of *Redlichkeit* and *Rechtschaffenheit*: on the one sense, at least for Nietzsche, it promotes a mode of belief – and a way of life – based on faith rather than on scientific reasons and evidence; on the other sense, it obstructs the movement of Christian morality towards its ultimate consequences, that is, to its self-overcoming. In GS 335 – where, as we have seen, Nietzsche introduces his notion of the intellectual conscience as a conscience behind our moral conscience stating that intellectual honesty compels us to turn to physics – Kant’s practical philosophy is criticised for its lack of intellectual honesty and conscience: Kant was led astray ‘back to “God”, “soul”, “freedom,” and “immortality”’. Like a fox who loses his way and goes astray back into his cage’. This is what in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche calls Kant’s ‘backdoor philosophy’, reaffirming that the latter ‘is *not* a sign of intellectual integrity [*Rechtschaffenheit*]’ (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 16).

In his profession of immoralism in the 1886 preface to D, Nietzsche makes it clear that, as people of intellectual conscience, ‘we do not want to go back once again into *what* we deem outlived and decayed, into anything at all “unworthy of belief”’ such as the idea that there is a God (D ‘Preface’ §4). The philosophical project of *Dawn* is retrospectively regarded as ‘a valorous suspicion’, one that penetrates into and seeks to go beyond ‘the trust in morality’, such as that shown by Kant (D ‘Preface’ §4). In the preface to the second edition of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche similarly regards his philosophical outlook as a form of deep, unprecedented suspicion characterised by courage and audacity and directed towards morality and, particularly, towards the theological notion of God (HH ‘Preface’, §1).

In his middle writings, too, Nietzsche opposes the German moral and religious sensibility – based on unconditional trust – to ‘moral enlightenment and skepticism’ (GS 5) and, more specifically, to the ancient Greek and Roman sensibility for a ‘little bit of skepticism for each and every thing be it god, human, or concept’ (D 207). In opposition to the German taste for fideism (reliance on faith rather than reason), Nietzsche praises the ancient sensibility based on the principle of ‘*[n]il admirari* [marvel at nothing]!’ (D 207). Having said that, as we will see shortly, Nietzsche is sceptical about the absolute powerlessness of reason, too: indeed, he associates the total rejection of reason with the most extreme form of fanaticism.

Nietzsche considers fideism a degenerate use of scepticism that expresses a subtle form of obscurantism: ‘We take something unexplained and obscure to be more important than something that has been explained and made clear’ (HH 532). The reason for attaching more importance to something unexplained and obscure conceals a form of wishful thinking, that is, an unscientific mode of justifying beliefs on the basis of wishes or wants, needs, and passions rather than on critical, evidence-based thinking. The obscurantism concealed in fideistic, wishful modes of believing, throughout Nietzsche’s writings, is contrasted with the demands of intellectual honesty and conscience and with the courage to face the consequences of one’s thinking (such as the self-overcoming of morality). Hence, for Nietzsche, Kant’s fideistic use of scepticism is highly questionable because, making the belief in morality unassailable by philosophical doubt, mistrust, and critique, ultimately gives way to dogmatism and to moral and religious assurance. All of these reasons are at the bases of Nietzsche’s claim in MOM 27 that Kantian philosophy can be used as a form of subtler obscurantism masked by enlightenment. To conclude, let me to say something more about the link between fideism and fanaticism – which I will take up again in Chapter 5.

I have already stressed that Nietzsche’s associating Kant with a moral fanatical stance does not do justice to Kant’s own campaign against fanaticism. But Nietzsche’s observation is more in general directed at German culture. At different stages of his intellectual development Nietzsche associates the German taste for fideism with ‘the most dangerous of all conclusions’, that is, ‘*credo quia absurdum est* [I believe because it is absurd]’ (D ‘Preface’ 3).⁴³² This conclusion is characterised as a degenerate form of intellectual humility that should be sharply distinguished from Nietzschean modesty in the middle writings (D 417). In the former case, the awareness of the limits of human knowledge – which, as we saw in Section 2.1, also characterises the intellectual virtue of modesty – degenerates into a sacrifice of reason altogether (D 417): I am

⁴³² See also D Preface 4. This conclusion is attributed to Tertullian, an early Christian author.

aware that I do not have reasons and evidence to believe something, but I do believe it nonetheless precisely *because* it is absurd or contrary to reason. Nietzsche clarifies the link between scepticism and *credo quia absurdum est* in an early notebook: 'But even scepticism contains a belief: the belief in logic. Thus the extreme is the abandonment of logic, the *credo quia absurdum est*, doubts about reason and the denial of reason. This is what asceticism brings in its wake' (NF-1873,29[8]).

*Nietzsche and Suspension of Judgment:
Between Pyrrho and Epicurus*

A controversy exists in the secondary literature on Nietzsche and Pyrrhonian scepticism as to whether Nietzsche deploys the ancient sceptical practice of suspension of judgment. On the one hand, Jessica Berry attributes a Pyrrhonian-like form of suspension of judgment to Nietzsche in the context of his critique of metaphysics, his naturalism, his perspectivism, and his immoralism.⁴³³ Berry goes as far as to say that in Nietzsche's philosophy suspension of judgment 'is not a means to an end; it is the end'.⁴³⁴ On the other, the majority of commentators tends to agree that Nietzsche, especially in the late writings, is largely critical of Pyrrhonian *epoché*. For example, Richard Bett notes that the attitude of suspension of judgment 'seems sometimes to be interpreted by Nietzsche as itself a symptom of decline, as a kind of disengagement revealing that one is fundamentally ill at ease with one's place in the world, or even with one's existing in the world at all'.⁴³⁵ Furthermore, Bett stresses, Nietzsche would not accept a philosophy that consists in or ends up with suspension of judgment because he is ultimately concerned with the creation of values.⁴³⁶ Katrina Mitcheson is more determined than every other commentator that for Nietzsche suspension of judgment is neither possible nor desirable.⁴³⁷ Suspension of judgment, Mitcheson states, is not possible 'if this is understood as living without any beliefs or values, or adequate if it is understood less radically'.⁴³⁸ According to Mitcheson, this is not possible because for Nietzsche value judgements are inherent in living and acting: 'Nietzsche's claim is that choosing a course of action, in being a certain kind of person, we both express and are driven by

⁴³³ Berry 2011.

⁴³⁴ Berry 2011, p. 179.

⁴³⁵ Bett 2000, p. 77.

⁴³⁶ Bett 2000, p. 79.

⁴³⁷ Mitcheson 2017, p. 72.

⁴³⁸ Mitcheson 2017, p. 72.

an evaluative standpoint that is fundamental to who we are'.⁴³⁹ To substantiate this reading, Mitcheson largely selects passages from the middle writings, especially *Dawn* and *The Gay Science*. Moreover, she argues that suspension of judgment is not a desirable end in Nietzsche's philosophical project, since for him scepticism is part of a radical reevaluation of values and transformation in who we are. This radical aim is lost if we go too far in reducing Nietzsche's scepticism to Pyrrhonian scepticism, and with it the character of Nietzsche's skeptical practice is also misunderstood.⁴⁴⁰

I agree with Mitcheson, and disagree with Berry, that suspension of judgment is not the goal or the end of Nietzsche's philosophical projects. However, I disagree with the majority of commentators that Nietzsche is fundamentally critical of the practice of suspension of judgment. And, in particular, I disagree with Mitcheson that, for Nietzsche, suspension of judgment is neither possible nor adequate. In this and the following chapters, I individuate a number of passages in which Nietzsche deploys and recommends forms of suspension of judgment: HH 9, 21; WS 7, 16; MOM 33; D 82; A 52. My aim, here, is to show that Nietzsche endorses certain uses of suspension of judgment, while rejecting others. For Nietzsche, in line with what he saw in Chapter 3, suspension of judgment is genuinely used only insofar it is motivated by intellectual honesty and conscience and does not exclude the possibility of credibility.

I think Mitcheson heavily overlooks Nietzsche's appreciation for suspension because she has in mind a very precise notion of value judgments, that is, judgments, beliefs, and values that for Nietzsche are incorporated in our ways of being and living. This is certainly one sense in which Nietzsche understands judgments,⁴⁴¹ but it is not the only one. In my view, Nietzsche also works with a notion of an ethics of belief in philosophical investigation that is not altogether dissimilar to the Pyrrhonian one – according to which we should not assent to an unclear object of investigation in the sciences.⁴⁴² Here, I want to show that Nietzsche selects, appropriates, and transforms ancient sceptical practices, including Pyrrhonian *epoché* or *ephexis*, for his own philosophical ends.

We already saw in Section 2.1 that in A 52 Nietzsche characterises 'philology as *ephexis* in interpretation', recommending a temporary use of suspension of judgment as a method for thinking and enquiring well. I also want to highlight the differences between Nietzsche's use of

⁴³⁹ Mitcheson 2017, p. 74.

⁴⁴⁰ Mitcheson 2017, p. 72.

⁴⁴¹ See D 9.

⁴⁴² Cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 6. PH 1.13.

suspension of judgment and Pyrrhonian scepticism. In Sections 4.1 and 4.2, I contend that in the middle writings Nietzsche recommends an *issue-specific* use of suspension of judgment about religious and metaphysical questions – rather than a Pyrrhonian *epoché* on all matters. I further contend that Nietzsche links his uses of suspension of judgment to forms of tranquillity, joy, and cheerfulness that are largely incompatible with Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*. In particular, in Section 4.2, I show how Nietzsche links his sceptical practice to Socrates-Montaigne’s cheerfulness and, in Section 4.3., to his re-appropriation of Epicurean *ataraxia*. Moreover, it is my contention in Section 4.3 that Nietzsche associates two forms of scepticism with the figure of Epicurus. I will return to suspension of judgment in Chapter 5, where I will show that Nietzsche also recommends a temporary use of suspension of judgment as an antidote or weapon against the intellectual rashness inherent in conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism.

4.1 Suspension of Judgement in *Human, All Too Human* and Pyrrhonian Scepticism

We saw in Chapter 1 that in HH 21 Nietzsche suggests that ‘the sceptical starting point’ has to do with the supposition or hypothesis that ‘there were no other metaphysical world’ and that the probable victory of scepticism will lead to an ‘unmetaphysical disposition’, namely, to a way of thinking and living in modernity that does no longer rely on religious and metaphysical explanations of the world – such as on the existence of God and of an immortal soul. In what sense does Nietzsche qualify this supposition as a sceptical point of departure?

To begin answering this question, it is important to preliminary note that the notion of metaphysics, like that of scepticism, has a plurality of senses or meanings in the history of philosophy. It is clear that, starting from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche uses the term ‘metaphysics’ in a pejorative sense, largely defining his free-spirited philosophical project in contrast to it.⁴⁴³ It is also clear that Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysical philosophy starts from a roughly Kantian or post-Kantian context.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, I think, the primary target of Nietzsche’s attack in the first chapter of HH is Schopenhauer’s understanding of metaphysics.⁴⁴⁵ In spite of

⁴⁴³ On Nietzsche’s criticism of metaphysics see, especially Houlgate 1986, pp. 28-95.

⁴⁴⁴ See, especially, Hill 2013; Constâncio 2017. See Section 1.2.

⁴⁴⁵ In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer writes that by metaphysics he understands ‘all the so-called knowledge that goes beyond the possibility of experience, and so beyond nature or the given phenomenal appearance of things, in order to give information about that by which, in some sense or other, this experience or nature is conditioned, or in popular language, about that which is hidden behind nature, and renders nature

this, Nietzsche's criticism has wider implication for traditional metaphysical philosophy which, according to him, posits and claims to know '*a second real world*' beyond the world of experience and life (HH 5). In this metaphysical tradition, for Nietzsche, the notion of a second, metaphysical world is used to explain and provide meaning to the lifeworld. Hence, he largely understands metaphysics as an immodest speculation beyond the limits of human knowledge about the first and last things, which is driven by the religious-metaphysical need for existential certainties and securities. As we have seen, according to Nietzsche's cultural observation, religious and metaphysical explanations are incompatible with the modern status of knowledge, with the sciences and their methods, and, therefore, no longer meet the requirements of intellectual honesty and conscience (HH 109). And, accordingly, a large part of his intellectual-cultural-therapeutic project is aimed at freeing the human mind from the errors of religion and metaphysics and to weakening and extirpating the religious-metaphysical need.⁴⁴⁶

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that Nietzsche's sceptical point of departure merely negates the existence of a metaphysical world. The first sense in which Nietzsche's supposition can be said sceptical is, in fact, its hypothetical nature. From a theoretical standpoint, Nietzsche is not assertively or dogmatically claiming that there is no metaphysical world; rather, he presents the sceptical starting point as a supposition or hypothesis and even formulates it as a question. Throughout the aphorism, indeed, he makes use of a particularly sceptical or, more in general, moderate, cautious, and conjectural language. This sceptical use of language is not limited to this aphorism but is widespread in Nietzsche's middle writings – to such an extent that can be considered a distinctive stylistic feature of his practice of scepticism in this period.⁴⁴⁷

Nietzsche's sceptical mode of expression reveals another sense of scepticism in HH 21. This is best understood if read in connection with HH 9. In the latter aphorism, Nietzsche commits himself to a form of 'metaphysical agnosticism'⁴⁴⁸ which is common to various sceptical

possible', (1969[1819/1844] WWR 2.17, p. 164). See Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. Nietzsche had already begun criticising Schopenhauer's metaphysics in his 1868 notes 'On Schopenhauer'.

⁴⁴⁶ It is important to note that, although Nietzsche may make metaphysical or ontological claims, he is not himself engaged in a metaphysics or first philosophy but, in his criticism of metaphysical notions, such as that of God, he largely turns to historical and psychological modes of refutation (HH 9; D 95). See Pippin 2010.

⁴⁴⁷ I will say more about this stylistic feature in Section 5.3.

⁴⁴⁸ By 'metaphysical agnosticism' I simply mean, trying to remain faithful to the Greek etymology, a philosophical position according to which we are, for various reasons, 'without knowledge' about a metaphysical reality. Although Nietzsche himself does not use this terminology, I think, the denomination 'metaphysical agnosticism' accurately captures his position on the metaphysical world in *Human, All Too Human*: we cannot know anything about a metaphysical reality. Moreover, it has become quite common in Nietzsche studies to speak of metaphysical agnosticism in this sense with specific reference to Kant (see, for example, Hill 2003, p. 25) and the Pyrrhonian scepticism (see, for example, Berry 2011, p. 76). It is important to note that, nevertheless, Nietzsche is critical of

thinkers, including the Pyrrhonists, Montaigne, and Diderot, as well as to Kant: ‘It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it can hardly be contested. We see all things through the human head and cannot cut this head off’ (HH 9).⁴⁴⁹ In HH 21, Nietzsche is scrupulously careful to avoid dogmatically claiming that the metaphysical world does not exist because, in his view, from a strictly scientific standpoint we simply cannot have knowledge about a world beyond that of life and experience: we lack convincing proof of its existence as well as of its non-existence. Adopting the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry, Nietzsche implies, we can neither demonstrate the existence nor determine the nature of a metaphysical reality; but, in the same way, the theoretical possibility of there being such a reality cannot be ruled out. Excluding this possibility would entail a negative form of metaphysical dogmatism which, for Nietzsche, would be equally unscientific as the claims made by religion and traditional metaphysics in their attempts to positively characterise something that is unknown to us and lies without the limits of our cognitive powers. In other words, we are so ignorant about the metaphysical world that we cannot even deny its existence.⁴⁵⁰

agnostics ‘as votaries of the unknown and the mysterious in itself, [who] now worship *the question mark itself as God*’ GM 3.25. In this regard, Nietzsche quotes a sentence by Xaver Doudan: ‘the habit of *admiring* the unintelligible instead of remaining quite simply in the unknown’ (GM 3.25, translated in BGE & GM, p. 421, n. 92). What I call ‘metaphysical agnosticism’, is not the mere worshipping of the unintelligible but the remaining in the unknown with respect to metaphysical questions.

⁴⁴⁹ Simultaneously placing himself within and without a Kantian context, Nietzsche states that ‘we could assert nothing at all about the metaphysical world except its otherness, an otherness inaccessible to and inconceivable for us; it would be a thing with negative characteristics’ (HH 9). (For example, the metaphysical world would *not* be the world of life and experience.) On the one hand, this statement echoes Kant 1998[1781/1787]’s famous conception of the ‘noumenon in the negative sense’, that is, ‘a thing insofar it is not an object of our sensible intuition’ (B307-B309). On the other, as we saw in Section 3.4, it highlights a radical difference between Nietzsche and Kant, especially with respect to their practical philosophies. Kant maintains that the concept of noumenon remains not only admissible but necessary for us: we can and must still think about supersensible things even though we can have no empirical knowledge of them. For Kant noumena such as God, immortality, and freedom remain natural and unavoidable demands or needs of reason and we cannot avoid thinking about these things – they concern our most important aspirations; although we cannot have knowledge of these noumenal things, they assume the greatest significance in another area of human rationality: practical reason. In contrast, for Nietzsche – and, as we saw in Section 3.4, on account of our commitment to the intellectual conscience – they can no longer serve as coordinates to orientate our thinking and life. For Nietzsche, the noumenal world in a positive sense remains both unknowable and unthinkable: the thing-in-itself is, for us, ‘actually empty, namely, empty in meaning’ (HH 16). Cf. Kant 1998[1781/1787], B310. Unlike Kant, Nietzsche believes we can only think of the thing-in-itself as devoid of any positive determination: the only ‘positive’ thing we can say about thing-in-itself is that it is indeterminable for us – it is nothing more than an x. Positive characterisations of the thing-in-itself as ‘will’ (like Schopenhauer) or ‘God’ (as in the Christian religious and theological tradition) are only poetic inventions, imaginative projections, or, in any case, unscientific ways to determine the value of something unknown. See ‘On Schopenhauer’, in WEN, pp. 3-4; TL §1, p. 257. Moreover, Nietzsche claims that presuming that the thing-in-itself is profoundly meaningful for human life would be a form of optimism or even of wishful thinking (HH 6); to this presumption Nietzsche opposes the argument that ‘[e]ven if the existence of [a metaphysical] world were to be proven so well, any knowledge of it would certainly still be the most irrelevant of all knowledge; even more irrelevant than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor endangered by storm’ (HH 9).

⁴⁵⁰ In GS 354 (1887), Nietzsche will go further than this, claiming that ‘we do not “know” nearly enough to be entitled to [the distinction between the “thing-in-itself” and appearance]’. See also BGE 16.

Jessica Berry suggests that Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism in HH 9 and HH 21 can be interpreted as a reprise of the Pyrrhonian practice of suspension of judgement or *epoché*. As Sextus Empiricus reports, for the Pyrrhonists suspension of judgment follows the equipollence of conflicting philosophical arguments about things which appears or are thought of – these arguments are equipollent because they have equal power or weight in terms of credibility and lack of credibility.⁴⁵¹ Finding themselves unable to assent or reject either of the conflicting arguments on virtually any matter, the Pyrrhonian sceptics suspend judgment and continue investigating.⁴⁵² By suspending judgment, they hope or more or less accidentally aim to achieve *ataraxia* – the absence of mental trouble arising from philosophical disputes.⁴⁵³ In this way, they live a tranquil life without holding any belief – understood as ‘assent to an unclear object of investigation in the sciences’⁴⁵⁴ – in conformity with traditional customs and laws.⁴⁵⁵ I want to make it explicit from now that, as in the case of Kant's metaphysical agnosticism, Pyrrhonian *epoché* about all matters leads to a form of practical conformism and conservatism which is not acceptable to Nietzsche.⁴⁵⁶

I think Berry is right when she writes that ‘in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche explicitly avoids the dogmatic denial of supra-sensible entities and instead adopts a skeptical [by which she means suspensive] attitude about the existence of purely metaphysical posits [...]. The point is that Nietzsche's critique demands that he remain agnostic on this issue and maintain that the most sensible thing to do is to suspend judgment about such idle and speculative matters’.⁴⁵⁷ I agree with Berry that in HH 9 and HH 21 Nietzsche recommends and deploys a form of suspension judgment about the metaphysical world which is somewhat akin to Pyrrhonian *epoché*. This is the second sense in which Nietzsche's supposition is sceptical: metaphysical

⁴⁵¹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 4-5, PH 1.8-10.

⁴⁵² Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 3, PH 1.1-4.

⁴⁵³ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 10-11, PH 1.25-30

⁴⁵⁴ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 6, PH 1.13.

⁴⁵⁵ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 9, PH 1.23-24.

⁴⁵⁶ In the case of Kant, as we saw in Section 3.4, the beliefs in God, immortality, and freedom have a necessary, positive use in Kant's account of pure practical reasons: they function as presuppositions that cannot be theoretically demonstrated, but that must be practically postulated in order to enable moral conduct and especially the hope that that morality converges with happiness. As Kant famously writes in the B-Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the primary goal of his critical project is to deny theoretical, scientific knowledge about traditional, dogmatic metaphysics in order to ‘make room for faith [*Glaube*]’ in the practical or moral domain (Bxxx). Making room for the moral faith in God, immortality, and freedom, the Kantian project can be read as an attempt to reconcile theoretical, scientific knowledge with traditional morality and religion – and certainly Nietzsche reads it this way. In Nietzsche's reading, then, Kant's metaphysical agnosticism ultimately leads to a form of practical conservatism.

⁴⁵⁷ Berry 2011, p. 76.

agnosticism – that is, the recognition that we lack scientific knowledge of a world beyond that of life and experience – requires that we suspend judgment about the existence of the metaphysical world.

I want to try to make Berry’s suggestion stronger by drawing attention to a preparatory note for HH – which she unfortunately overlooks – where Nietzsche establishes a direct link between his metaphysical agnosticism and the ancient sceptical tradition: ‘It is the way of constrained spirit [*gebundenen Geister*] to prefer *any explanation* to none: in this they are easily satisfied. High culture demands that some things should be left unexplained: ἐπέχω [I withhold (judgement)]’ (NF-1876,19[107]).⁴⁵⁸ This passage is important because it contains one of the few explicit references to *ephexis* (restraint or holding back) in Nietzsche’s corpus,⁴⁵⁹ and one of the very few direct allusions to the ancient sceptical tradition across his early and middle writings. As we have seen, *ephexis* is ‘a close etymological correlate of *epoché*’.⁴⁶⁰ Some of the things that, for Nietzsche, should be left unexplained – precisely because they are unknown and unknowable to us – are the first and last things of metaphysics.

The link between Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism and Pyrrhonian *ephexis* or *epoché* becomes clearer if we read NF-1876,19[107] alongside HH 13. In the latter, Nietzsche speaks of the psychological origin of metaphysics in very similar terms: ‘just as even today people draw conclusions while dreaming, so for many millennia, humanity drew conclusions *while awake*: the first *causa* that occurred to the spirit explaining anything that needed explanation was sufficient for it and counted as truth (HH 13).’⁴⁶¹ Both passages refer to a spiritual or intellectual attitude to prefer any explanation to none or to rush into taking the first available cause as the best explanation for a given phenomenon.⁴⁶² According to Nietzsche’s psychological observation, certain metaphysical explanations originate in this attitude of the mind which rushes us into conclusions, especially under the pressure of the metaphysical need and of passions such as the fear of death. These conclusions, for Nietzsche, are not only rushed but also ‘wishful’ – in the sense that the wish to respond to the pressure of needs and passions (mis)lead the mind to explain

⁴⁵⁸ In WEN, p. 223, translation modified.

⁴⁵⁹ Other explicit references to *ephexis* can be found in NF-1885,35[29]; GM III §9; A 52.

⁴⁶⁰ Bett 2000, p. 73.

⁴⁶¹ See also HH 5.

⁴⁶² See also HH 635. In Section 5.1, we will see that this intellectual attitude is also associated with a form of fanaticism.

things in a convenient way, preferring beneficial errors over carefully acquired evidence and truth.⁴⁶³

In his study on Nietzsche and Montaigne, Robert Miner, too, agrees with Berry on the fact that ‘in HH 9, Nietzsche suspends judgment on the reality/appearance distinction’.⁴⁶⁴ In contrast to Berry, nevertheless, Miner notes that ‘[t]hrough Sextus suspends judgment regarding any statement about *what* the metaphysical world is, he does not appear to suspend judgment about the claim *that* such a world exists’:⁴⁶⁵ on his reading, Nietzsche’s ‘suspension of judgement arguably makes him a *better* sceptic than those who profess scepticism while speaking as if the reality/appearance distinction were somehow clear in itself’.⁴⁶⁶ In reality, Miner himself concedes that if confronted with arguments pro and con the existence of the metaphysical world the Pyrrhonist would suspend judgment about them to attain *ataraxia*. Here, I cannot delve into the theoretical intricacies of Nietzsche’s position on reality/appearance, nor into the details of Pyrrhonism.⁴⁶⁷ In the same direction taken by Miner, I want to suggest that there are some important differences between Nietzsche’s suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world and Pyrrhonian *epoché*. However, in my view, these have less to do with theoretical aspects – such as the reality/appearance distinction – and much more with practical ones, including intellectual practices and ways of life.

In contrast to the Pyrrhonists (and Kant), for Nietzsche, metaphysical agnosticism and suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world lead to a practical rejection of metaphysical

⁴⁶³ We will in Section 5.1 that for Nietzsche conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism arise from this mode of explaining things. On the one hand, Nietzsche believes that a Pyrrhonian-like form of suspension of judgment is required on the specific issue of the existence of the metaphysical world, on the other he also recommends the general use of *ephexis* on any issue under investigation to avoid rushed, wishful, and erroneous explanations. According to this recommendation, restraint in judging is construed as a method or tool to think and enquire well – not as the final goal of philosophical investigation; it ought to be used by free spirits as an intellectual practice to temporarily suspend judgment, slow down thinking, and cool down the emotions in order to draw better, more careful conclusions. We saw in Section 2.1 that Nietzsche bases this methodological use of suspension on the model of philology as *ephexis* of interpretation and in connection with other sceptical intellectual practices such as mistrust, circumspection, and caution which, for him, ought to guide free-spirited philosophy. The practice of *ephexis* in judging is, furthermore, linked to intellectual honesty and conscience – and, as we will see in Chapter 5, to intellectual justice. Of course, the issue-specific and temporary uses of suspension of judgment are intertwined. Examining the issues of the metaphysical world’s existence, free spirits would use temporary *ephexis* – along with mistrust, circumspection, and caution – to think and enquire well; due to the lack of scientific knowledge on the issue of whether the metaphysical world exist or not, their intellectual honesty – and justice – would require that they indefinitely suspend judgment. (On other issues, instead, the use of temporary *ephexis* in connection with honesty and justice might require that free spirits make a judgment.) I shall say more about this in a moment; for now, I take forward my discussion of the link between Nietzsche’s suspension of judgment and Pyrrhonian *epoché*.

⁴⁶⁴ Miner 2017, p. 23.

⁴⁶⁵ Miner 2017, p. 22.

⁴⁶⁶ Miner 2017, p. 23. Cf. NF-1886,6[23].

⁴⁶⁷ Miner 2017, pp. 22-23.

ways of thinking and living. If, on the theoretical side, Nietzsche is agnostic and suspends judgment about the metaphysical world, on the practical side, he is rather assertive in rejecting metaphysics as a guide for human life: ‘Perhaps the *scientific proof* that the metaphysical world exists is already so *difficult* that humanity will never get rid of mistrust for it. And if we mistrust metaphysics, this has by and large the same consequences as if it had been directly refuted and we were no longer *allowed* to believe in it’ (HH 21). Nietzsche is asserting that the practical consequences of mistrust for metaphysics are substantially the same as a theoretical refutation: that is, we are no longer allowed to believe in metaphysical explanations; we are no longer allowed to rely on them to justify our knowledge claims, to found morality, and to orientate our lives; and, ultimately, we are no longer allowed to live according to them.⁴⁶⁸

The theoretical possibility that a metaphysical world exists remains but (unlike the Pyrrhonists and, especially, unlike Kant), Nietzsche concludes that ‘we cannot even begin to do anything with it, much less to allow happiness, salvation, and life to hang from the spider threads of such a possibility’ (HH 9). As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, for Nietzsche, ‘we cannot *believe* those dogmas of religion and metaphysics if we have the strict method of truth in our hearts and heads’ (HH 109). The modern developments of scientific enquiry (especially, history, natural science, psychological observation, and philology) and of its rigorous methods have revealed that religious and metaphysical assumptions are largely engendered by need, ‘passion, error, and self-deception’:⁴⁶⁹ the ‘worst of all methods of knowledge, not the best, have taught us to believe in them’; ‘When we have revealed these methods to be the foundation of all existing religions and metaphysics we have refuted them’ (HH 9). Free spirits, who are committed to truthfulness and to the scientific search for truth, are not allowed to believe in beliefs which have been revealed to be erroneous or untrue, nor to live according to them: ‘in the present state of knowledge, we simply cannot have anything to do with [religious and metaphysical ways of thinking and living] without irredeemably soiling our *intellectual conscience*’ (HH 109).

But this is not all. Nietzsche is well aware that ‘[b]y overthrowing a *belief* one does not overthrow the *consequences* that have grown out of it. These live on by virtue of tradition’ (NF-1876,19[97]).⁴⁷⁰ It is for this reason that he places special emphasis on free spirits’ opposition to

⁴⁶⁸ We saw in Section 1.1. that for this precise reason Nietzsche observed that Kant could lead to a destructive form of scepticism, especially with respect to German culture. See Section 3.3-4.

⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, for Nietzsche, philosophers (including, in part, Kant) and scientific thinkers have demonstrated that we lack scientific knowledge about the metaphysical world and that, ultimately, we cannot have a genuine epistemic access to a world beyond the limits of human experience. (It is for this reason that, as we have seen, Nietzsche insists that we can neither assent nor deny the existence of the metaphysical world.)

⁴⁷⁰ In WEN, p. 222.

traditional ways of thinking, feeling, and living (HH 225). The task of free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, is not simply to rationally discredit the no-longer-believable assumptions of religion and metaphysics but also and primarily to combat the practical consequences of these assumptions, such as the metaphysical need, the various sensations, feelings, and moods that we habitually associate with them (HH 16), and the ways of life informed and justified by them.

As we saw in Section 1.3, in HH 21 Nietzsche predicts that in the future a free-spirited, sceptical, and unmetaphysical way of thinking and living will in all probability have an impact on and transform the entire humanity. A large part of Nietzsche's philosophical programme in the middle writings is aimed at accelerating this transformation by overthrowing the practical consequences of religious and metaphysical beliefs. For example, as I argued in Section 1.4, he seeks to cultivate a positive emotional response to metaphysical agnosticism and scepticism, and, especially in *Dawn* and *The Gay Science*, he recommends that we gradually overthrow the old way of life by experimenting with new modes of living, both individual and societal.

Hence, the practical consequences of the sceptical starting point with respect to the metaphysical world are, for Nietzsche, fundamentally different from those of both Pyrrhonian scepticism (a way of life in conformity with customs and laws) and Kantian philosophy (a return to religious and metaphysical assumptions via fideism). In Section 3.4, we saw Nietzsche's critique of the fideism he associates with Kantian philosophy, in what follows I closely compare Nietzsche's use of suspension of judgment and Pyrrhonian scepticism.

I agree with Jessica Berry that Nietzsche's attitude to the metaphysical world in HH 9 and 21 can be construed as a Pyrrhonian-like form of suspension of judgment. However, I think, we must resist the temptation to conflate Nietzsche's use of suspension of judgment with the Pyrrhonists'. At times, Berry is perhaps too keen to show the affinities between Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists, especially concerning truth and knowledge, and overlooks a number of fundamental differences between their uses of suspension of judgment in the context of their respective philosophical practices. Although – as I noted in the introductory remarks of this chapter – Katrina Mitcheson neglects the importance of suspension of judgment for Nietzsche, she correctly remarks that there are uses and abuses of a comparison with Pyrrhonian scepticism.⁴⁷¹ It is possible to compare Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists with respect to *ephexis* or *epoché*, but we must bear in mind that Nietzsche largely selects, appropriates, and transforms these ancient sceptical practices for his own ends. To make the comparison precise and fruitful

⁴⁷¹ Mitcheson 2017.

then, I suggest, we should ask the following questions: How does Nietzsche arrive at suspension of judgment? What is its extent, and does he allow for some beliefs or judgments? To what ends does Nietzsche use suspension of judgment? And what are its practical consequences? In other words, what kind of life would we expect the Nietzschean sceptic to live? These specific questions are rarely posed in the literature on Nietzsche and ancient scepticism. In what follow, I seek to address each of them in order to highlight a number of affinities and differences with Pyrrhonism.

Let me begin by firstly pointing out that in HH Nietzsche does not arrive at suspending judgment about the metaphysical world exactly in the same way the Pyrrhonists would. In the text, Nietzsche is not directly engaged in the sceptical ability to set out opposition between conflicting accounts of the metaphysical world, inducing suspension of judgment in the hope of achieving tranquillity.⁴⁷² (Nor is he directly engaged in a theoretical analysis of antithetical metaphysical arguments about the world like Kant in the ‘Antinomies of Pure Reason’.⁴⁷³) In HH 9 and HH 21, Nietzsche limits himself to say that metaphysical agnosticism and suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world are a sceptical starting point of free spirited philosophy. This sceptical starting point, he goes on to say, ought to be conceded by free spirits, for both epistemic and cultural reasons, on account of the latest developments of scientific enquiry and intellectual honesty and conscience. Suspension of judgment in Nietzsche’s text, then, is reached out of a free-spirited commitment to scientific enquiry and to intellectual honesty and conscience. In other words, for Nietzsche, if one wants to think and enquire freely, one ought to suspend judgment about the existence of the metaphysical world. As we have seen above and will see again shortly, for Nietzsche, the honesty-motivated suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world leads to practical consequences which radically differs from the those of Pyrrhonian *epoché*.⁴⁷⁴

The second thing I want to highlight is that, although Nietzsche arrives – in his own way – at a Pyrrhonian-like suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world, unlike the Pyrrhonists, he does not reach *epoché* on all matters. When Berry claims that, for Nietzsche,

⁴⁷² Having said that, it is fair to note, Nietzsche does observe that on the issue of the existence of the metaphysical world – and, more specifically, on that of the existence of God – there is no consensus whatsoever among wise people (HH 110). This somehow suggests that there are conflicting accounts on the issue and that none of them overweighs the others in terms of convincingness or lack of convincingness. Cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 5, PH 1.10.

⁴⁷³ On the link between Kant’s antinomies and Pyrrhonian scepticism see, for example, Guyer 2006, pp. 8-13; and Forster 2008, pp. 16-20.

⁴⁷⁴ Although Nietzsche praises the sceptic, including the Pyrrhonists, for their commitment to intellectual honesty, as I endeavoured to show in Section 3.3, he also attributes a lack of intellectual honesty and conscience to the Pyrrhonian way of life, especially on account of their separating theory from practice.

‘suspension of judgment [...] is not a means to an end: it is the end’,⁴⁷⁵ she heavily neglects a great number of matters on which Nietzsche does not finally suspend judgment – on numerous issues, in fact, he assents or rejects beliefs in a way that would have been regarded as dogmatic by the Pyrrhonists. We have seen that, on the model of philology, Nietzsche construes *ephexis* – along with mistrust, circumspection, and caution – as a method or tool to think and enquiry well about any issue. For Nietzsche, though, this methodological use of suspension, in connection with intellectual honesty and conscience (and, as we will see, with intellectual justice), allows a number of beliefs to be assented or rejected on the basis of carefully made judgments. After all, for Nietzsche, free spirits ‘will generally have no opinions, but only certainties and precisely measured probabilities in [their] head’ (HH 637).

Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford notice another instance of Nietzsche’s promotion of suspension of judgment in *Dawn*: ‘Nietzsche stages in a mini-dramatic form a response to an exhortation from Luther and writes of the wisdom of withholding judgment with respect to some key existential matter as a way of freeing ourselves from “soul anxiety” (D 82)’,⁴⁷⁶

‘You have to sort that out on your own, for your life is at stake’: with this exhortation Luther springs upon us and thinks we feel the knife pressed to the throat. But we defend ourselves against him with the words of one higher and more reflective ‘We are free to form no opinion about this or that matter and thus to spare our soul anxiety. For by their very nature things themselves cannot *require* any judgment from us’. (D 82)

Earlier in *Dawn*, Nietzsche states that what all things are entitled to demand of us, instead, is intellectual justice (D 4). I will explore the precise link between suspension of judgment and justice in Section 5.2. For the time being, suffice it to say that in certain circumstances, for Nietzsche, judiciousness in evaluating things demands that we suspend judgment. The sceptical strategy of withholding judgment, here, is expressly construed as a therapeutic practice, one fundamentally opposed to a kind of fanaticism that Nietzsche attributes to Luther.⁴⁷⁷

What has not been often noticed is that the response staged by Nietzsche in D 82 is a direct quotation from Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*:⁴⁷⁸ ‘It is possible to form no opinion on this matter and not be troubled in one’s mind; for things themselves are not of such a nature that they

⁴⁷⁵ Berry 2011, p. 179.

⁴⁷⁶ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford, forthcoming.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. HH 630. Nietzsche more explicitly regards Luther as a fanatic in A 54.

⁴⁷⁸ An exception is Brusotti 1997, pp. 226-227. Marco Brusotti, however, does not focus on Nietzsche’s uses of suspension of judgment, nor he compares them to the Pyrrhonian tradition.

can create judgements within us'.⁴⁷⁹ (That in D Nietzsche was engaging with Marcus Aurelius becomes clear in aphorism 450 where he explicitly make reference to the latter.)

Bringing this implicit reference to light, I think, reveals an important characteristic of Nietzsche's reception and appropriation of *epoché*. Nietzsche could have easily quoted Sextus Empiricus or Diogenes Laertius with respect to suspension of judgment, but he chooses the 'higher and more reflective' Marcus Aurelius. D 82 is another compelling piece of evidence in favour of one of the principal arguments of my thesis, according to which we need a more varied and nuanced appreciation of the philosophical sources of Nietzsche's conceptions and practices of scepticism. In particular, we need to resist the temptation to reduce Nietzsche's scepticism to only Pyrrhonism – even when he speaks of suspension of judgment.

The reference to Stoicism as opposed to Scepticism is telling. Like the Sceptics,⁴⁸⁰ the Stoics, too, make use of a form *epoché*: to avoid falsehood, they withhold assent (the cognitive operation of taking something to be true) to impressions (things that strike the mind) which are unclear. Katja Maria Vogt helpfully compares the Stoic with the Sceptical epistemic preferences, noting that

[t]he Stoics put forward an ambitious criterion of truth, the cognitive impression. A cognitive impression arises from what is, and is stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is, thus being clear and distinct. The Stoics formulate the epistemic norm that one should only assent if one has a cognitive impression.⁴⁸¹ Otherwise one should suspend. That is, the Stoics think that, to adequately respond to the value of truth is to withhold judgment in every case where an impression could turn out to be false.⁴⁸²

For the Stoics, this is a matter of the most extreme importance in order to live a good life, one according to nature or how things really are. Unlike the Pyrrhonists, the Stoics do assent and make judgments, though only in the case of a cognitive impression (*phantasia katalêptikê*) – an impression that firmly grasps its object. The Stoic use of *epoché* then, unlike the Pyrrhonian, leaves room for a specific kind of assent and judgment.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Marcus Aurelius 2016, p. 56, 6.52.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 6-7, PH 1.13, 1.16.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Cicero 2006, pp. 45-46, 2.77-78. Nietzsche knows Cicero's *Academica* very well. See Busellato 2012, pp. 71-123. Busellato clearly shows that Cicero is an important source in Nietzsche's reception of scepticism. Nietzsche, I think, is particularly interested in Cicero's account of an ethics of belief.

⁴⁸² Vogt 2011, p. 44.

⁴⁸³ Vogt also notes a potential convergence between the Stoic and Pyrrhonian practices of suspension of judgment. She highlights that, for Sextus Empiricus and the Academics, the Stoics' epistemic injunctions would be so demanding that they 'should end up as sceptics: they should always suspend their judgment' (Vogt 2011, p. 44). According to this interpretation, having a cognitive (perfectly clear) impression would be more unique than rare, and if the Stoic sage were to be fully committed to their epistemic standards, they would withhold assent on virtually any impression, turning into a Pyrrhonian sceptic.

There is an important difference between the Stoic and Pyrrhonian practices of suspension. For the Stoics withholding assent to unclear matters is a volitional, cognitive operation – and in D 82 Nietzsche stresses precisely this aspect of the Stoic *epoché*. For the Sceptics, instead, suspension of judgment comes about through equipollence: it is the recurrent outcome of the Sceptical practice of opposing arguments about appearances and thoughts.⁴⁸⁴ The Pyrrhonists, at least according to Sextus Empiricus, do not directly aim at suspension of judgment but at *ataraxia*.⁴⁸⁵ They hope to become tranquil by investigating opposite accounts of things and, in the process, they accidentally – rather than wilfully – achieve tranquillity by finding themselves unable to establish the issue at stake and by arriving at *epoché*.⁴⁸⁶ Discovering the therapeutic effect of suspension of judgment, they try to induce it through various Sceptical tropes or modes of argument; but it results quite spontaneously from ‘a standstill of the intellect’.⁴⁸⁷

By quoting Marcus Aurelius, it should be noted, Nietzsche is not fully endorsing the Stoic criterion of truth. (In particular, the Stoic notion of cognitive impression – a kind of impression which clearly reveals to us the world as it really is – would be particularly problematic for Nietzsche.) What Nietzsche endorses is a specific use of suspension of judgment which, I want to stress, is in part different from the Pyrrhonian one. In D 82, he draws attention to the fact that it is always within our power to withhold judgment about unclear matters. Suspension of judgment is recommended as a virtuous intellectual practice to be exercised in order to avoid error, unnecessary anxiety, as well as fanaticism. Hence, I think, D 82 makes it clear that Nietzsche does not recommend using *epoché* exactly like the Pyrrhonists.

Nietzschean free spirits, who have developed a strong intellectual conscience, doubt, examine, and re-examine their beliefs searching for certain reasons in favour and against; and, weighting their pros and cons, they decide whether to assent, reject, or suspend judgment.⁴⁸⁸ If the Pyrrhonists in their investigations always find themselves in the condition of suspending judgment – or, on a possible reading, they even seek to induce *epoché* – in the hope of becoming tranquil, in HH Nietzsche displays all three doxastic attitudes. As we have seen, he suspends judgment about the existence of the metaphysical world (HH 9, 21); he rejects, as unbelievable, the dogmas of metaphysics and religion such as the belief in the existence of a benevolent God and of an immortal soul (HH 9, 109); and, to an extent, he assents to beliefs based on the

⁴⁸⁴ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.31.

⁴⁸⁵ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.30.

⁴⁸⁶ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 10-11, PH 1.28-29.

⁴⁸⁷ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 5, PH 1.10.

⁴⁸⁸ See Sections 2.4 and 3.2.

empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities discovered following the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry (HH 3, 22, 634, 637). I will argue in Section 5.3 that, in a sense, Nietzsche associates Pyrrho with a form of fanaticism on account of his excessive mistrust and of his always using only one philosophical strategy (*epoché*) in all circumstances and on all issues.

The third remark I want to make concerns the scope of Nietzsche's use of suspension of judgment. The principal and arguably the only aim of Pyrrhonian scepticism, as outlined by Sextus Empiricus, is *ataraxia* or tranquillity, that is, the 'freedom from disturbance' caused by philosophical dogmatism⁴⁸⁹ that 'follows' suspension of judgment.⁴⁹⁰ This form of peace of the mind for the Pyrrhonists is the aim of Pyrrhonian scepticism:⁴⁹¹ they largely engage in the sceptical ability to oppose arguments to bring about suspension of judgment in the hope of becoming tranquil.⁴⁹² Pyrrhonian scepticism, then, is first and foremost a philosophical therapy.⁴⁹³ As we have just seen with regard to D 82, like the Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche attaches a key therapeutic role to suspension of judgment in the context of his philosophical programme of cooling down the human mind prone to mental and emotional excesses. In particular, suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world works as a therapy for the anxieties of the soul, especially those produced by religious and metaphysical beliefs. Suspending these beliefs, for Nietzsche, removes

⁴⁸⁹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 5, PH 1.10.

⁴⁹⁰ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.31.

⁴⁹¹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 11, PH 1.29-30.

⁴⁹² It is controversial whether Pyrrhonian sceptics wilfully aim at suspensive tranquillity (the tranquillity arising from suspension of judgment) from the start or they find it accidentally in each of their investigations. According to Sextus Empiricus' account, proto sceptics begin to do philosophy in order to settle what is true or false in the hope to achieve dogmatic tranquillity (the tranquillity arising from holding beliefs). 'Sceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and in to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgment. And when they suspended judgment, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously' (Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 10, PH 1.26). The controversy is then the following: do the Pyrrhonists continuously undergo a transformation or conversion from Dogmatists to Sceptics, searching for dogmatic tranquillity and fortuitously finding suspensive tranquillity in each of their investigation? Or do the Pyrrhonists directly aim at suspensive tranquillity? In my reading, the Pyrrhonists realise that by suspending judgment they achieve a form of tranquillity different from the one they initially hoped for, and so they train their sceptical ability to set opposition between conflicting accounts of things in order to induce or bring about *epoché* and, with it, to achieve *ataraxia*. According to this reading, in their investigations, the Pyrrhonists would aim to achieve suspensive tranquillity, albeit in a quite indirect way. In this sense, I think, Pyrrhonian scepticism is first and foremost a form of philosophical therapy – to remove the troubles caused by dogmatism. What remains controversial is whether their investigations are in any sense aimed at the discovery of truth. See Vogt 2011.

⁴⁹³ The Pyrrhonian therapy, as Sextus describes it, is in the first place a therapy of the self, even though in a sense it is also directed at others: 'Sceptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists' (Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 216, PH 3.32). Their love of humanity consists in showing, by means of example, how to cure oneself from the mental troubles caused by dogmatism. However, it is not entirely clear whether the Pyrrhonian therapy is needed to cure other people, including dogmatist philosophers and in general whoever is not a Pyrrhonist. These people do not seem to be as troubled as the Pyrrhonists are by holding (dogmatic) beliefs. See Thorsrud 2009, pp. 198-200.

a number of mental and emotional troubles associated with them such as the fear of God and the repression and condemnation of many natural inclinations – but, as we will see shortly, it might also cause other kinds of spiritual troubles.

It is not often noticed that, in a similar way to the Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche directly links metaphysical agnosticism, which is at the basis of suspension, to forms of tranquillity. However, I think, Nietzsche's notions of tranquillity are not reducible to Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* – which follows suspension of judgment on all matter under investigation or discussion. Nietzsche envisions that free spirits will move away from religious and metaphysical explanations and turn to natural and historical ones '[w]ith complete tranquillity' (HH 10). But, unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, tranquillity or happiness is neither the primary nor the only aim of free-spirited philosophy for Nietzsche.⁴⁹⁴ Nietzsche severely criticises the Socratic schools, including the Hellenistic philosophies, because 'by keeping their eye upon *happiness*, they tied up the veins of scientific enquiry' (HH 7). In other words, for Nietzsche, the Hellenistic schools were excessively focused on the search for happiness at the expenses of the search for truth 'whatever may – come of it' (HH 6).⁴⁹⁵ It is not too difficult to see that Nietzsche would be at least suspicious of Pyrrhonian *epoché* – which, according to Sextus Empiricus, is primary aimed at *ataraxia*.⁴⁹⁶ It would seem to Nietzsche that the Pyrrhonists were more concerned with tranquillity than with truth and knowledge.⁴⁹⁷ In HH 56, Nietzsche states that the single goal pursued by free spirits is 'to *know* at all times as well as [they] possibly can' and that this 'will make [them] cool and will calm all the savagery in their disposition'. The cooling and tranquillity are thus construed as the effect of a spiritual exercise in intellectual purification from errors and 'false views of the world and of life': 'Anyone who does not desire much more from things than knowledge of them easily arrives at peace [*Ruhe*] of soul' (HH 56). Peace of the soul and even a form of joy are achieved

⁴⁹⁴ Nietzsche makes it abundantly clear in the following aphorism: 'whoever wants to harvest happiness and contentment from life need only keep away from higher culture' (HH 278); 'there is no preestablished harmony between the furthering of truth and the well-being of humanity' (HH 517).

⁴⁹⁵ As we will see in the following section, Nietzsche re-evaluates the Hellenistic schools and, with them, the search for happiness and joy in the second volume of HH, attaching special significance to Epicurean *ataraxia*. In the Section 4.3, too, I will show that the joy promoted in HH II is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonian tranquillity.

⁴⁹⁶ In the notebooks of 1888, as we have seen, Nietzsche will diagnose Pyrrho's need for *ataraxia* as the expression of a fundamental psychological weakness or weariness – and for this reason, he regards latter as a decadent and a nihilist (see especially NF-1888,14[87],14[99-100],15[58]).

⁴⁹⁷ Vogt 2011 defends the Pyrrhonists from the charge that their investigation is aimed at tranquillity rather than at the discovery of truth. She argues that the Pyrrhonian mode of investigation is guided by the value of truth at least in the sense of avoidance of falsehood.

- by specific temperaments - through the purification from errors, especially those of religion and metaphysics (HH 34).⁴⁹⁸

Indeed, for the Nietzsche, a therapy based on scientific enquiry will have dangerous and even harmful side effects upon the majority of the people as well as on free spirits: 'science gives us less and less pleasure by casting suspicion on the comfort provided by metaphysics, religion, and art' (HH 251). This means that, although both Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists use suspension of judgment for therapeutic scopes, their respective curative practices are different at least in one respect: Pyrrhonian *epoché* immediately leads to a *ataraxia* or to the absence of mental troubles, whereas Nietzsche's suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world can, at first and for some people, be troublesome. Although some individuals endowed with good temperaments and a cheerful disposition - such as Montaigne and perhaps the Pyrrhonists - would experience the renunciation of religious and metaphysical consolations with a form of joy in detachment (HH 34), the majority of the people can experience it with a degree of melancholy (HH 109) and even with despair (HH 34); and the most experienced spiritual wanderers, too, Nietzsche writes, 'will admittedly have bad nights' (HH 638).⁴⁹⁹

There is a further aspect of Nietzsche's link between suspension of judgment and tranquillity in HH. This concerns the temporary use of suspension of judgment as a tool to think and enquire well and has to do with the problem of culture. Modernity, according to Nietzsche's cultural diagnosis, is characterised by a 'tremendous acceleration of life' (HH 282) and by fundamental 'lack of tranquillity' (HH 285): 'time for thinking and tranquillity while thinking are lacking, we no longer ponder divergent views: we content ourselves with hating them' (HH 282). He laments that we live in a society in which there is no more time for thinking 'philologically', that is, carefully and slowly - not even in academia (HH 284). Assuming the role of the spiritual physician, Nietzsche observes that due to 'the agitation of the modern life [...] our civilization is heading towards a new barbarism' (HH 285)⁵⁰⁰ - one dominated by one-sidedness, dogmatism, fanaticism, heated passions, and violent actions. The practice of *ephexis* in judging, I suggest, plays a fundamental role in Nietzsche's spiritual therapy, cultivating the sceptical ability to ponder divergent views in order to avoid 'seeing and judging partially or falsely' (HH 282).⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ But tranquillity, for Nietzsche, does not seem to be merely the result of suspension of judgment; it might also be reached in forming beliefs based on the small, modest truths, certainties, and probabilities discovered through scientific enquiry.

⁴⁹⁹ This does not mean that, for Nietzsche, researchers and philosophers will not find any pleasure in knowing. In HH 252, for example, Nietzsche links the search for truth and knowledge to a number of pleasures.

⁵⁰⁰ See also HH 22, 244.

⁵⁰¹ I will return to this in Section 5.2 when discussing the link between scepticism and intellectual justice.

Although Nietzsche's suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world is in many ways linked to tranquillity (and even to joy), it is part of a wider philosophical programme in *Human, All Too Human* that goes far beyond the practice of self-therapy. As we have seen, Nietzsche seeks to reform the human mind and contribute to the transformation of the modern way of thinking, feeling, and living. The scopes of his suspension, then, are not only restricted to the achievement of personal serenity but extend further, acquiring transformative and socio-cultural dimensions which are alien to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Nietzsche's suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world aims to have a transformative impact upon free spirits' way of living as well as upon Western culture – and even upon the entire humanity.

The fourth and last point of comparison I want to discuss in this section concerns the practical consequences of Nietzsche's suspension of judgment. In what follows, I delve into the fundamental difference from the Pyrrhonian way of life I highlighted in the previous. For Nietzsche, suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world leads to a practical refutation of ways of thinking and living which rely on the notion of a world beyond life and experience. For the Pyrrhonists, the practice of *epoché* in all matters lead to a way of living in conformity with customs and laws. In the hope of becoming tranquil, Pyrrhonian sceptics oppose conflict arguments and, through continuous investigations, suspend judgment about everything in. In this way, they find themselves lacking a philosophical standard or criterion for action. For this reason, the Pyrrhonists live in conformity with customs and laws, without dogmatically holding beliefs, nor presuming that customary or lawful opinions and practices get things right.⁵⁰²

Throughout his middle writings and starting from HH Nietzsche defines his free spirits, who are motivated by 'the spirit of truthful inquiry', in contrast to traditional opinions and practices (HH 125). Free spirits, for Nietzsche, '[freely and *fearlessly* hover] above people, customs and law, and traditional appraisal of things' (HH 34): they will not continue to live in conformity with the beliefs they have suspended (such the belief in the existence of a metaphysical world) and have shown to be erroneous (such as the beliefs in a benevolent God and in an immortal soul); in particular, they will not continue to live in accordance with religious and metaphysical ways of thinking and living.

Here, I am in strong disagreement with Jessica Berry who tends to conflate the Pyrrhonian sceptic with the Nietzschean immoralist. Berry seems to interpret the Pyrrhonian sceptic as someone who *voluntary* 'challenges the presupposition of morality and the

⁵⁰² Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 9, PH 1.23-24.

reasonableness of religious and moral dogmas’.⁵⁰³ In contrast, as we have seen, the Pyrrhonists – as outlined by Sextus Empiricus – do not directly aim at *epoché*: suspension of judgment is not much a voluntarily activity but it comes about rather passively and spontaneously from a standstill of the intellect generated by the opposition of equally convincing and unconvincing arguments.⁵⁰⁴ Pyrrhonian sceptics excel at the largely therapeutic ability to find arguments in order to set oppositions, but, certainly, they are not challengers or critics of morality and religions – at least not in a Nietzschean sense. Indeed, according to Gianni Paganini, ‘the sceptical sage [as] someone who *fights* against an entire corpus of beliefs, [as] someone who *decides to doubt* and *seeks* for arguments to this effect’ is a modern figure that can be traced back to Charron (1541-1603).⁵⁰⁵

It seems to me that Berry is not successful in her attempt to compare Nietzsche’s immoralism with Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment about what is good and bad by nature and – as we will see shortly – about the existence of God. She rightly notes that we find in Nietzsche a doxastic scepticism – one that targets belief rather than knowledge: ‘And it does so not for academic or theoretical or epistemological reasons, but as a purely practical matter – withholding belief is what brings about psychological *health*’.⁵⁰⁶ Despite this, she bases the comparison on moral theories or positions (such as ‘moral scepticism,’ ‘moral disagreement,’ ‘moral antirealism’),⁵⁰⁷ heavily overlooking the radical differences between the practical consequences of Nietzsche’s suspension and Pyrrhonian *epoché* with respect to ways of life.

In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus Empiricus states that the Pyrrhonists ‘live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions – for [they] are not able to remain utterly inactive’.⁵⁰⁸ Sextus specifies that ‘[b]y the handing down of laws and customs [they] accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety is bad’.⁵⁰⁹ Although in their

⁵⁰³ Berry 2011, p. 47.

⁵⁰⁴ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 5, 49, PH 1.10, 197. See Barnes 1983, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Paganini 2018b, p. 246.

⁵⁰⁶ Berry 2011, p. 14.

⁵⁰⁷ Berry 2011, pp. 174-208.

⁵⁰⁸ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 9, PH 1.23. We saw in Section 3.3 that in the late notebooks Nietzsche criticises the Pyrrhonists for their separating theory (suspension of judgment in all matters) from practice (a way of living in conformity with the beliefs they suspend); we also saw that in the middle writings Nietzsche construed this separation as a lack of commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience; we finally saw that, if the Pyrrhonists were to be full committed to intellectual honesty and conscience, for Nietzsche, their suspension of judgment on all matters would have led them to a form of apraxia or inactivity, as in the case of the Buddhists, rather than to a way of life in conformity with the beliefs they suspend.

⁵⁰⁹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 9, PH 1.23.

investigations they ‘make no determination about what is good and bad by nature’,⁵¹⁰ the Pyrrhonists do accept, from a practical standpoint, the dominant moral and religious conventions of their society to preserve their tranquillity. Their acquiescence to customs is completely incompatible with Nietzsche’s immoralism. For Nietzsche, ‘morality is nothing other (therefore, above all *no more!*) than obedience to mores, no matter what ilk they might happen to be; mores, however, are merely the traditional manner of acting and evaluating’ (D 9);⁵¹¹ ‘The free human being is unaccustomed and immoral because, in all things, he wants to depend upon himself and not upon tradition’ (D 9). It is clear that Nietzsche would see the Pyrrhonists as dependent upon moral tradition in their way of living. Indeed, in the late notebooks Nietzsche accuses Pyrrho of practical conformism: ‘to living a lowly life among the lowly. [...] To live in the common way; to honor and believe what all believe’ (NF-1888,14[99]).⁵¹² Nietzsche also accuses Pyrrho of living a fundamentally unphilosophical life (and the Pyrrhonists):⁵¹³ ‘One cannot promote the right way of life through science: wisdom does not make “wise”’ (NF-1888,14[99]).⁵¹⁴

Adi Parush correctly identifies Nietzsche’s practical objection to Pyrrhonian scepticism: ‘Nietzsche is mockingly critical of the way of life he thinks Pyrrho prescribes’;⁵¹⁵ ‘the Pyrrhonists thought that the skeptic would be wise to accept the social conventions and norms of the society

⁵¹⁰ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 10, PH 1.27

⁵¹¹ It is important to note that Nietzsche does not deny that ‘it is best to avoid and to struggle against many actions that are considered immoral; likewise that it is best to perform and promote actions that are considered moral’ but he maintains that ‘the former should be avoided and the latter promoted *for different reasons than heretofore*. We must *learn to think differently* – in order finally, perhaps very late, to achieve even more: *to feel differently* [and act differently] (D 103).

⁵¹² In WP 437. See also (NF-1888,14[107],14[129]).

⁵¹³ Similarly, Hadot 2004 notes that ‘one may say that Scepticism is the choice of a philosophical life that is in fact a non-philosophical way of life’ (p. 145, translation heavily modified). The English translation fails to capture Hadot’s emphasis on the tension involved in the Sceptics’ *philosophical* choice to live in an *unphilosophical* way. See. In contrast, Cooper 2012 points out that ‘there is quite a large difference between the two [sceptical and common] ways of life, despite the similar outward appearances of the behaviours that might be found in each. Sceptics may follow the same traditional standards in moral, professions, and in all other respects, as the others, and like them, they will do so docilely and without question. But they remain smart and energetic, and the others are still dumb and lazy’ (p. 298). The life of the Pyrrhonists, according to Cooper, remains fundamentally different from that of common people: the former ones are devoted to philosophical investigation and have the ability to oppose conflicting arguments, the latter ones are not.

⁵¹⁴ For the Pyrrhonists, as Sextus Empiricus 2000 reports, ‘there can be no expertise in living’ (p. 205, PH 3.239). See also Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 205-216, PH 3.239-279. This is the reason why Sextus Empiricus is keen to specify that Pyrrhonism is not a philosophical school: it differs from of schools of the Dogmatists, such as the Stoics and the Epicureans, where philosophy students adhere to a set of beliefs (p. 7, PH 1.16-17). In a rather convoluted way, Sextus Empiricus explains that the Pyrrhonian school may be said a school in so far as it presents an undogmatic ‘account showing how it is possible to live’ well (p. 7, PH 1.16). Sceptical students do not adhere to any dogmatic belief, if by dogmatic belief one understands ‘assent to something unclear’ (p. 7, PH 1.16); rather, they receive the training in the Sceptical ability of opposing conflicting arguments for therapeutic purposes, on the one hand, and they follow traditional customs and laws, on the other (p. 7, PH 1.17). On Sextus Empiricus’ objection to the Dogmatists’ notion of an art of living see Sellars 2009, pp. 86-103.

⁵¹⁵ Parush 1976, p. 534.

in which he lived. For the Pyrrhonists, practical conservatism is a direct outgrowth of theoretical skepticism. Here, needless to say, Nietzsche took a radically different stand, for he advocated a revolutionary change both in the personal and the social sphere'.⁵¹⁶

Moreover, according to Katrina Mitcheson, in D and GS Nietzsche commits himself to an experimental form of scepticism which it is at odds with Pyrrhonian practical conformism: Pyrrhonian following of convention 'for Nietzsche [...] is incompatible with a critical scepticism [that] can uproot our entrenched beliefs and values. To continue to act as before fails to change the values that these acts instantiate, and the self that is defined by these actions and values. [Nietzsche's] transformative scepticism thus requires to act differently. [...] Acting differently means experimenting with alternative values'.⁵¹⁷ In my view, this is a key characteristic of Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism in the middle writings prior to D and the GS, too. We saw in Section 3.3 that the requirement to act differently in correspondence with that to think differently is inherent in a full commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience: if on the one hand Nietzsche regards the Pyrrhonists as honest philosophers on account of their investigating conflicting arguments, on the other their practical conformism remains fundamentally incompatible with the transformative dimension of his philosophical programmes at each of the stages of his intellectual development.

Although Pyrrhonian sceptics have no presumption that customary, common opinions and practices get things right, according to Nietzsche's argument, they still perpetuate a form of practical conservatism similar to that enacted by those with a faith in morality and a feeling for customs: '[the feeling for customs] acts to prevent one from having new experiences and correcting old mores: in other words, morality acts to prevent the rise of new and better mores: it stupefies' (D 19).

⁵¹⁶ Parush, 1976, p. 535. Ansell-Pearson 2018b rightly warns against qualifying Nietzsche's philosophical projects as revolutionary: 'It is often said that Nietzsche with a revolutionary agenda. It is important to appreciate, however, that he is decidedly anti-revolution, which he associates with the cultivation of fanaticism. What he prizes is what he finds in Voltaire: the highest freedom of spirit with an absolutely unrevolutionary disposition (HH 221)' (p. 11). Cf. D 197

⁵¹⁷ Mitcheson 2017, p. 66. In her article, Katrina Mitcheson primarily focuses on Nietzsche's experimental scepticism in D and GS. She correctly interprets Nietzsche's scepticism as an experimental practice that entails a radical transformation of the self, arguing that its self-transformative nature is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonism. I think Mitcheson highlights an essential aspect of Nietzsche's scepticism (experimentality as self-transformation) as well as its radical difference with Pyrrhonian, non-transformative *epoché*. However, she somehow neglects other aspects of Nietzsche's experimentalism. One of these aspects is its significance for the pursuit of knowledge. Nietzsche links experimentality to intellectual honesty and curiosity in the context what Nietzsche calls 'the passion of knowledge'. See Reginster 2003. Another aspect is the socio-cultural dimension of Nietzsche's commitment to experimentality. This is particularly emphasised in D 453 and in BGE 205, 210. Nietzsche's experimental practice of scepticism seeks to transform not only the self but also society at large. Moreover, Mitcheson overlooks other senses of Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism, especially his sceptical practices in HH and HH II. Finally, she heavily undervalues the important role Nietzsche attributes to forms of suspension of judgment in his middle writings.

In her comparison, Berry attempts to defend the Pyrrhonists from the charge that their scepticism results in a form of practical conformism and conservatism (in the context of scholarly debates both within and without the Nietzsche studies).⁵¹⁸ Her attempt is particularly unsuccessful when she too readily compares the Pyrrhonian sceptic with the madman in GS: ‘the genuine skeptic – far from being [a] ‘conservative and even reactive’ figure [...] – will rather appear as ‘that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around to the market place, crying incessantly: “I seek God! I seek God” (GS 125)’.⁵¹⁹ I find this comparison completely misleading, for it fails to do justice both to Nietzsche’s characterisation of the madman in GS 125 and to Sextus Empiricus’ outline of the Pyrrhonian way of life.

In the context of his consideration of God in book three, Sextus Empiricus returns on the Pyrrhonists’ way of living in conformity with customs and, more specifically, with traditional religion. Before discussing what the Dogmatists say about God, Sextus Empiricus adds the following remark by way of preface: ‘following ordinary life without opinions, we say that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say that they are provident: it is against the rashness of the Dogmatists that we make the following points’.⁵²⁰ If the Sceptics – in their dispute with the Dogmatists – suspend judgment about whether the gods exist or not,⁵²¹ Sextus Empiricus feels the need to preliminarily remark that they accept conventional religious beliefs and practices – though undogmatically – and even to say that there are gods and that they are pious towards them.⁵²²

The Pyrrhonists’ attitude towards customary religion could not be more different from that of the madman characterised by Nietzsche in GS 125. On the one hand, Sextus Empiricus’ preface reveals a degree of compliance with traditional religious views – or at least a certain precaution in speaking about them; on the other, the madman, who cries ‘God is dead!’ and

⁵¹⁸ Berry 2011, pp. 41-48.

⁵¹⁹ Berry 2011, p. 48

⁵²⁰ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 143-144, PH 3.2.

⁵²¹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 144-146, PH 3.6-12.

⁵²² The Pyrrhonists might have different reasons for accepting this or saying these things. In the first place, they accept and follow customs because they are left with no other standard of action. Second, it could also be that they say to accept moral and religious conventions for prudential reasons to avoid censorship or persecution so as to continue investigating and achieving tranquillity; third, we cannot exclude the possibility that they genuinely have respect for customs and laws, albeit without presuming that these get things right: for example, Victor Brochard notes that ‘one of [the Pyrrhonists’] principle occupations was in fact to not offend common sense’ Brochard 1887, p. 59, translated in Mitcheson 2017, p. 73. Brochard, we should recall, is one of the most important sources of Nietzsche’s 1888 thinking about ancient scepticism.

accuses the crowd at the marketplace of its murder, is impious and irreverent.⁵²³ His mode of utterance does not seem compatible with the Pyrrhonian one,⁵²⁴ nor with suspension of judgment: he announces the death of God in a rather assertive, obsessive, and morbid way. Moreover, the madman is mad (*toll*). He is clearly not in state of mental tranquillity. The madman is in fact profoundly melancholic: he is tormented by the idea that God is dead and constantly on the verge of despair.⁵²⁵ As Charles Bambach convincingly argues, Nietzsche models the madman on the figure of Diogenes the Cynic.⁵²⁶ Unlike the Sceptics, the Cynics vigorously reject convention (*nomos*) as a guide for human life. They refuse to live according to social, moral, religious, and political customary opinions and practices in order to live a good, healthy life in harmony with nature (*physis*).⁵²⁷ Seeking to liberate themselves from the yoke of laws and customs, the Cynics recur to an irreverent – and impious – mode of utterance marked by honesty and *parḗsia*.⁵²⁸

4.2 Scepticism as a Practice of Indifference in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*

In the previous section, we saw that in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche characterises scepticism as a an unmetaphysical way of thinking and living. One of the senses of this characterisation, I suggested, involves a Pyrrhonian-like practice of suspension of judgment about the existence of the metaphysical world. We also saw that there are affinities but also radical differences between Nietzsche’s use of suspension of judgment in HH and Pyrrhonian *epoché*. In this section, I follow the development of Nietzsche’s characterisation of scepticism as an unmetaphysical way of thinking and living in volume two of HH, more specifically in the *Wanderer and His Shadow*. And I continue the comparison with ancient sceptical traditions.

⁵²³ In ancient Greek ‘ἀσεβείῃν’ (impiety) literally means not being pious or religious: that is, being ungodly, godless, unholy, profane, sinful, sacrilegious, irreligious, and by extension also irreverent. The madman is impious both in the senses of godless (he is seeking God) and irreverent.

⁵²⁴ See Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 6, 46-53, PH 1.14, 187-208. In WS 213, as we will see in Chapter 5, Nietzsche favourably associates Pyrrho with silence or *aphasia*.

⁵²⁵ See Pippin 2010, pp. 47-51. Pippin rightly emphasises the need to acknowledge the literary dimension of GS 125 in order to avoid confusing Nietzsche’s voice with that of the madman. For Nietzsche, Pippin stresses, the madman’s response to the death of God is pathological as well as that of the crowd in the marketplace.

⁵²⁶ Bambach 2010. See BT §14, p. 69; WS 18. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 1931, p. 43, DL 6.2.41. On Nietzsche and Cynicism see also Branham 2004.

⁵²⁷ See HH 275. On the Cynics’ renunciation of customs see Desmond 2014, pp. 77-131.

⁵²⁸ See BGE 26.

As Keith Ansell Pearson shows, Nietzsche's thinking undergoes a subtle but significant development from the first to the second volume of HH: 'Whereas in volume one of [HH] Nietzsche negotiates the competing claims of the positivist goal of science and eudemonistic philosophy by aligning himself with the former, in MOM and WS he seeks to marry the project of naturalistic demystification with a project with a project of seeking "spiritual-physical health and maturity" (MOM 184)'.⁵²⁹ This development, I argue, has important implications for Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism, too. In HH II, scepticism as an unmetaphysical way of thinking and living comes to play a central role in Nietzsche's affirmative project of a search for the well-being of humanity, as well as of a search for the happiness and joy of the philosopher. In particular, I want to show that WS addresses in a significantly different way the questions that revolve around the problem of scepticism in HH 21: metaphysical agnosticism, suspension of judgment, and practical rejection of metaphysics.

My proposal is that we find another instance of suspension of judgment in WS 16 entitled '*Where indifference [Gleichgültigkeit] is needed*'. The indifference Nietzsche recommends here, I propose, is a re-appropriation of an ancient sceptical practice. This re-appropriation has been largely neglected in the literature on Nietzsche and ancient scepticism and, quite surprisingly, Jessica Berry, who is particularly keen to attribute Pyrrhonian *epoché* to Nietzsche, overlooks this important aphorism.⁵³⁰ The German word '*Gleichgültigkeit*' – Nietzsche could have used also '*Indifferenz*' – literally means that one is indifferent to some things on account of their 'being of equal validity'. Such things, it follows, do not make a difference to us because they are equally valid. The term '*Gleichgültigkeit*' accurately captures the intellectual and emotional attitude of indifference practiced in various Hellenistic philosophies, including Pyrrhonism; this attitude was cultivated as the appropriate state of mind and feeling with respect to what in ancient Greek was called '*adiaphora*', that is, things indifferent. Indifference, thus understood, is at the basis of the Pyrrhonian practices of equipollence and suspension of judgment.⁵³¹ In particular,

⁵²⁹ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 8. Another significant development from the first to the second volume of *Human All Too Human* concerns the figure of the poet. See, for example, MOM 99.

⁵³⁰ Berry 2011. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are perhaps the only commentators who mention, although only in passing, the link between indifference and 'Nietzsche's adoption of certain aspects of sceptical practice (Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming).

⁵³¹ See Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 46-50, 52, especially PH 1.188, 191, 195, 198-199, 207. See also Diogenes Laertius 1931, pp. 477-479, DL 2.9, 62-63, 66. Richard Bett intriguingly distinguishes Pyrrho from the Pyrrhonists – at least as presented by Sextus Empiricus – on account of their different attitudes to indifference. On the one hand, Bett notes, Pyrrho's reported claim that things are *adiaphora* (undifferentiable or indifferent) can be read metaphysically, 'that is, as describing proprieties possessed by things themselves' (Bett 1997, p. 4). Pyrrho practices indifference because he believes that the nature of things is indeterminate (metaphysical indeterminacy). On the other, the Pyrrhonists make it clear that 'when a Sceptic says "Everything is undetermined", he takes "is" in the sense of "appears to me"; by "everything" he means not whatever exists but those unclear matters investigated by the

the literal meaning of ‘*Gleichgültigkeit*’ accurately captures some aspects of Pyrrhonian equipollence, which refers to things that ‘appear to us equal in respect of convincingness and lack of convincingness’.⁵³² It is quite possible that in WS 16 Nietzsche is flirting with the Hellenistic practice of indifference and more specifically with the Pyrrhonian one. In a late posthumous fragment, Nietzsche directly associates indifference with Pyrrho (NF-1888,14[99]),⁵³³ attributing it to the latter’s way of life. In this period, however, Nietzsche uses the word ‘*Gleichgültigkeit*’ with strongly negative connotation, in that Pyrrho’s indifferent way of life, characterised by suspensive tranquillity and practical conformity, is diagnosed as a symptom of weakness, weariness, decadence, and nihilism.

In WS 16, Nietzsche flirts with another Pyrrhonian idea connected with indifference: ‘Indeterminacy [*aoristía*] is an intellectual feeling in virtue of which we neither deny nor posit anything investigated in dogmatic fashion, i.e. anything unclear’.⁵³⁴ The idea is that things – or, in Nietzsche’s specific case, the first and last things of religion and metaphysics – are indeterminable to us. Qua indeterminable, Nietzsche concludes, these things are indifferent to us; and qua indifferent to us, he recommends that we suspend judgment about them. Like Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment, Nietzsche’s practice of indifference has a fundamental therapeutic function: it aims to cure the practitioner from a number of mental troubles and to achieve a form of physical-spiritual health. But the affinities end here. It is important to highlight from the start that, as in the case of suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world in HH, Nietzsche uses indifference selectively; unlike the Pyrrhonists, as we will see shortly, he recommends that we remain indifferent specifically about the first and last things – not about any matter of investigation. Hence, Nietzsche’s therapy of indifference is specifically aimed at curing the troubles caused by a focus on religious and metaphysical questions. Moreover, we will see shortly, Nietzsche links indifference to a kind health which is largely different from Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*: the former does not accompany only suspension of judgment (at least not in all areas) but is

Dogmatist which he has considered; and by “undetermined” he means that they do not exceed what is opposed to – or, in general, conflicts with – them in convincingness or lack of convincingness’ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 50, PH 1.198-199. The Pyrrhonists stress that their attitude to indifference is not metaphysical but epistemological or doxastic. According to Bett’s reading, then, Pyrrho is not a Pyrrhonian sceptic because, ultimately, he does not suspend judgment about the nature of things but dogmatically determines that everything is indeterminate.

⁵³² Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 49, PH 1.196.

⁵³³ In WP 437.

⁵³⁴ Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 49, PH 1.198.

associated with an overflowing joy deriving from a fuller attachment to and affirmation of earthly life.⁵³⁵

Nietzsche's argument in WS 16 is that indifference is needed towards the first and last things concerning religious, metaphysical questions and any form of philosophical dogmatism. The first set of questions are largely religious and theological, including 'why do humans exist? What fate do they have after death? How do they reconcile themselves with God?' (WS 16). Indifference, Nietzsche adds, is also needed towards 'the questions of philosophical dogmatist, whether they be idealists or materialist or realists' (WS 16) – these dogmatic philosophers, like religious and metaphysical thinkers, are concerned with final answers 'in areas where neither belief nor knowledge is necessary' (WS 16).

In correspondence with what we saw in Section 4.1, Nietzsche claims that we need indifference towards these questions because we completely lack rigorous, scientific knowledge about the first and last things beyond the limits of human experience (as in HH, in a way he is still operating within a Kantian-inspired epistemological context): 'a foggy, deceptive belt of swamps lies around everything that can be investigated and made accessible to reason a strip that is impenetrable, eternally flowing and indeterminable [*Unbestimmbaren*]' (WS 16).⁵³⁶ It is abundantly evident that, here, Nietzsche is not primarily interested in carrying out an epistemological or ontological analysis: he limits himself to claiming (not without some imprecision) that we have no epistemic access to things beyond the experiential limits of human reason, that things beyond such limits are indeterminable to us, and that, in any case, everything is becoming (it is not entirely clear in the text how this ontological, Heraclitean claim relates to the other two). Nietzsche transposes the problem of metaphysics to the domain of psychology, and instead of seeking the truth or falsity of metaphysical claims, asks after the drives and needs that motivate our search for metaphysical certainties and securities: 'The drive for wanting to have *only certainties* in this area is a *religious drive*, nothing more' (WS 16).⁵³⁷ Given that we cannot know about the first and last things, he is suggesting, the drive for wanting belief or faith or acquiring certain knowledge in this area is the expression of a psychological need rather than

⁵³⁵ In linking the sceptical practice of indifference towards religious, metaphysical questions to happiness or joy Nietzsche echoes, once again, Diderot. See Diderot 1916[1746], p. 45, §28. See Section 2.4.

⁵³⁶ The imaginary employed by Nietzsche in portraying the areas beyond the limits of human reason echoes the opening of Kant's 'On the Ground of the Distinction of All Objects in General into *Phenomena* and *Noumena*' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. See Kant 1998[1781/1787], CPR, B294-295. See also Nietzsche's previous drafts for WS 16 in the notes of HH II, p. 488.

⁵³⁷ Nietzsche adds 'a concealed and only seemingly sceptical form of "the metaphysical need" ...' (WS 16). In Section 2.4, I attempted to explain in what sense the metaphysical need can assume a sceptical form in the context of my comparison between Nietzsche and Descartes.

a genuine commitment to scientific and free-spirited investigation. In contrast to this drive, indifference is construed as a sign of intellectual maturity: the scientific thinker ‘acquires an aversion and a suspicion toward what is half-solvable – toward everything that can provide a form of certainty only as a whole and in a less determinate way’ (WS 179).⁵³⁸

In brief, the drive to determine (either through faith or knowledge) what is in reality unknowable or indeterminable, according to Nietzsche’s psychological and historical observation, is the expression of the metaphysical need. As we saw in Section 1.2, for the middle Nietzsche, this need in the historically transmitted aftereffect of erroneous interpretations of the world: ‘We have for ages audaciously fantasized in places where we can ascertain nothing, and we have persuaded our descendants to take these fantasies for seriousness and truth, in the end by using the abominable trump card: that belief is worth more than knowledge’ (WS 16). Here, Nietzsche might be referring to two things: first, to the Christian and in general religious tendency to prioritise faith over knowledge, which – at its most extreme – could result in the fanaticism of the ‘*credo quia absurdum est*’ (HH 630);⁵³⁹ second, to forms of fideism, such as those promoted by Pascal and Kant, by means of which one denies knowledge in order to make room for faith (these, in Nietzsche’s view, are one way or another connected to Christianity).⁵⁴⁰

The metaphysical need, Nietzsche observes, is not natural but artificial: within a religious and metaphysical framework, ‘[reason] is *wrongly* directed and *artificially turned away* from the small and nearest of things’ (WS 6). It is in this way that we have become concerned with – and about – the first, last, and furthest things. It is in opposition to this concern that Nietzsche affirms that ‘we have no *need* whatsoever for these certainties about the uttermost horizons in order for humanity to live fully and fitly’ (WS 16). The practice of indifference towards religion and metaphysics is thus directly linked with the well-being of humanity. In contrast, as we have seen, in HH Nietzsche was unsure about the effect of metaphysical agnosticism upon humanity and, certainly, he was inclined to see a tension between suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world and human well-being: for example, he admitted that only few people, endowed with a good temperament and a cheerful disposition, would be able to joyfully renounce to metaphysics as guide for life, whereas the majority of the people would experience initial melancholy and even despair.

⁵³⁸ We saw in the previous section that in HH Nietzsche had construed mistrust as a sign of intellectual maturity (HH 17).

⁵³⁹ See Sections 3.4 and 5.1. See also MOM 97; D 68.

⁵⁴⁰ See Section 3.4.

Nietzsche goes on to say that '[w]hat is now needed with regard to those final things is not knowledge against belief, but rather *indifference towards belief and supposed knowledge* in those areas' (WS 16). This passage, I think, clearly highlights another development of Nietzsche's sceptical practice from HH to WS. Nietzsche's practice of indifference towards metaphysical questions in WS has a dimension that had not yet taken full shape in HH. Indeed, *Gleichgültigkeit*, as construed in WS 16, entails two moments or directions: the first diverts attention from the first and last things in the furthest areas of our horizon; the second re-concentrates our attention on the small, nearest things. While Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism and suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world in HH move in the first direction, the second moment is brought to maturation in WS: 'We must once again become *good neighbors of the nearest things* and not gaze beyond them as contemptuously as we have previously done toward clouds and monsters of the night' (WS 16).⁵⁴¹

The nearest things, Nietzsche specifies in WS 6, concern those '*smallest and everyday things*' according to which we arrange our way of life – 'dividing up our day, time and selection of social relations, in occupation and leisure, commanding and obeying, feeling the nature and art, eating, sleeping and thinking'.⁵⁴² Among these things, in the preparatory notes for WS, are included also the search for health, education (of one's own and of others), and the way we cultivate our moods (NF-1879,40[16]). Nietzsche's contention in WS is that the small and nearest of things are largely neglected and regarded with contempt by most people, within and without philosophy (WS 6). This neglect, according to Nietzsche's diagnosis, is cause of '*almost all of the physical and psychic frailties* of individual people' (WS 6). In particular, he sees in the religious and metaphysical outlook on life a fundamental disadvantage. Indeed, as Nietzsche clearly puts in his notebooks, metaphysics leads to pessimism about the value of life because, in placing the justification for life in other, metaphysical world, it leads us to dismiss the possibility of finding happiness in this world, and hence distracts us from the nearest and most important things. (NF-1878-30[24]).⁵⁴³ Moreover, Nietzsche observes, such a metaphysical outlook can even degenerate into a form of contempt for the nearest of things (WS 5). To avoid this, Nietzsche contends, these small things deserve urgent, close philosophical attention. On the one hand, the adoption of an attitude of indifference teaches us how to unlearn the contempt inherent in religious, metaphysical, and dogmatic views; on the other, it also leads to reconsideration and re-evaluation

⁵⁴¹ See also HH 'Preface §4-5.

⁵⁴² See also WS 5.

⁵⁴³ See also NF-1878,27[87].

of the small, nearest things of earthly life. This latter aspect represents a significant step further with respect to suspension of judgment in HH. In WS, indifference acquires more positive, constructive, and affirmative dimension.

As we have seen, Nietzsche's suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world and, in general, his sceptical practice in the first volume of HH was not entirely devoid of a *pars construens*. In HH, scepticism is associated with the estimation of the small, unpretentious truths, certainties, and probabilities discovered by scientific enquiry, with the hope for future edification, and with a form of joy in the case of specific people or temperaments. Having said that, for Nietzsche, in HH the spiritual effort is primarily concentrated on the detachment from the religious and metaphysical explanations entrenched in human life without a clear focus on a positive alternative. In contrast, in WS Nietzsche wants to bring to focus such alternative, pointing to a re-attachment to and reaffirmation of life. The practice of indifference not only diverts our attention from other-worldly concerns and worries but also positively redirects our spiritual efforts towards this-worldly life. Indifference, in cooperation with scepticism as a truth-producing methodology, I stress, plays an important role in the constructive task of establishing what in MOM Nietzsche calls '[*d*he two principles of a new life': '*First Principle*: we should base our lives upon what is most certain, most demonstrable: not as in the past, upon what is furthest away, most indefinite, cloudiest upon the horizon. *Second Principle*: we should determine the *sequential ordering* of what is near and nearest at hand, of what is certain and less certain, before we arrange our lives and give them definite direction' (MOM 310).⁵⁴⁴ In this sense, as we have seen, in WS 16 Nietzsche claims that indifference is needed for the well-being of humanity; and, as we will see in what follows, it is in this sense, too, that he associates the appreciation of the nearest things with a fuller, more affirmative form of joy.

In WS, Nietzsche traces the constructive side of indifference back to Socrates, 'the simplest and most imperishable mediator-sage' and to a specific legacy of his, including Xenophon, Montaigne, and Horace (WS 86): 'Socrates was already defending himself with all his might against the 'arrogant neglect of what is human' - of the small, nearest things (WS 6). Socrates is even elected as the model for the Occidental civilisation, instead of Christ, 'to advance

⁵⁴⁴ See Section 2.2.

ourselves morally and rationally' (WS 86).⁵⁴⁵ In particular, Nietzsche sees in Socrates the example and origin of various philosophical ways of life.⁵⁴⁶

All the roads of the most varied philosophical ways of life lead back to [Socrates]; these are basically the ways of life of various temperaments, ascertained by reason and habit and all pointing towards a capacity to rejoice in life and in one's own self; from which we might wish to conclude that the most characteristic feature of Socrates has been his capacity to share in all these temperaments. Socrates has an advantage over the founder of Christianity in the cheerful form of his seriousness and his *playful wisdom*, which constitute the best spiritual condition for humans. He had, moreover, the greater understanding.⁵⁴⁷ (WS 86)

To conclude this section, I want to make four remarks about this key aphorism. First, in WS Nietzsche reclaims the tradition of Xenophon's ethical account of Socrates in the *Memorabilia* as opposed to the tradition of Plato's accounts of Socrates (NF-1878,27[51]) – especially of the one in the *Phaedo* where Plato-Socrates discusses the nature or the afterlife and the immortality of the soul.

Second, Nietzsche attaches once again key importance to temperament: different temperaments, he suggests, lead to different ways of life.⁵⁴⁸ For example, in HH 275 Nietzsche distinguishes the Cynic and the Epicurean ways of life with respect to convention precisely on account of temperament: '[t]he Epicurean adopts the same point of view as the Cynic; generally, only a difference of temperament sets them apart. And so the Epicurean uses higher culture to make himself independent of prevailing opinions; he raises himself above them, whereas the Cynic merely continues to negate them'. The Epicurean independence from prevailing opinions, in contrast to the Pyrrhonian way of life, specially appeals to Nietzsche who attributes to the free-spirited way of thinking and living an Epicurean-inspired '*refined heroism* that disdains offering itself to the reverence of the masses' (HH 291).⁵⁴⁹ Nietzsche suggests that Socrates somehow exemplifies 'the capacity to share in all these temperaments'. The Socratic and Hellenistic schools,⁵⁵⁰ in their differences, all take the figure of Socrates as a model which, Nietzsche underlines, is pregnant with possibilities of philosophical ways of life: different schools interpret

⁵⁴⁵ This is a complete reversal with respect to the early writings where Nietzsche attributes the degeneration of Western culture to Socrates – or, more precisely, to a form of Socratism.

⁵⁴⁶ In the early writings, Nietzsche similarly regards Socrates as 'the first philosopher of life' (PPP, p. 145), albeit with strongly negative connotations: 'Socratic philosophy is absolutely practical: it is hostile to all knowledge unconnected to ethical implications' (p. 145). See also NF-1872,19[27]. Cf. HH 7.

⁵⁴⁷ See also D 9; GS 340. On Nietzsche's re-evaluation of Socrates in the middle writings see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 90.

⁵⁴⁸ See Section 1.4.

⁵⁴⁹ See NF-1878,28[15]. See Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 9, 140.

⁵⁵⁰ In WS, Nietzsche re-evaluates the Socratic schools which, as we saw, he had criticised for their focus on happiness in HH 7.

and mould such a fruitful figure capable of generating various temperaments and ways of life. It is significant that Nietzsche indicates Xenophon, Horace, and Montaigne as the best interpreters of Socrates: Xenophon's Socrates has distinctly traits of Cynicism; Horace, who draws on Hellenistic philosophy, has a proclivity for Epicureanism; and Montaigne, who openly chooses Socrates as his philosophical example, displays a variety of temperaments and assays various ways of life, the Stoical, the Sceptical, and the Epicurean.

Third, in the late notebooks Nietzsche contrasts the Socratic way of life with the Pyrrhonian: '[Pyrrho's] life was a protest against the great doctrine of identity (happiness = virtue = knowledge).⁵⁵¹ One cannot promote the right way of life through science: wisdom does not make "wise"' (NF-1888,14[99]). In WS 86 Nietzsche praises Socrates as the origin and model of the philosophical life, whereas in NF-1888,14[99] he observes that the Pyrrhonian way of life is a protest against the Socratic art of living which selects philosophy as the guide for life and action. This is yet another possible reason to resist conflating Nietzsche's indifference with Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment: the former is a form of scepticism practiced in the context of Nietzsche's reappraisal of the philosophical wisdom and mode of living inspired by Socrates, one that, as we will see shortly, leads to a full, joyful affirmation of the small, nearest things of earthly life.

Fourth, there are good reasons to think that in WS the figure of Socrates converges with that of Montaigne – who, as we saw, in HH 34 was the model for a good temperament and a cheerful spirit. Nietzsche attributes to Socrates the cheerful form of seriousness and *playful wisdom* that he had attributed to Montaigne in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Montaigne's genuinely cheering cheerfulness was distinguished from a superficial cheerfulness: the former was similarly characterised as the result of the victory, out of courage and strength, over what is monstrous, horrifying and serious (SE §2, pp. 181-182).⁵⁵² Moreover, the cheerfulness and playful wisdom Nietzsche attributes to Socrates and Montaigne are closely linked to scepticism.⁵⁵³

In conclusion of this section, let me say something more about Nietzsche's re-appropriation of Montaigne's scepticism.⁵⁵⁴ It is well-known in the secondary literature that throughout his writing Nietzsche holds Montaigne in the highest esteem for a number of reasons, including style of writing and thinking, intellectual honesty and courage, cheerfulness, freedom

⁵⁵¹ Here, Nietzsche is referring to Socrates's ethical intellectualism. See NF-1888,14[92].

⁵⁵² In WS 128, Nietzsche distinguishes a serious thinker-author from a melancholy one: 'a *serious* one, if he tells us what he *has suffered* and why he is now at rest amid joy'.

⁵⁵³ In the notebooks, Nietzsche associates Socrates with forms of scepticism (NF-1872,23[8]; NF-1880,7[222]).

⁵⁵⁴ I addressed Nietzsche's re-appropriation of Montaigne's sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation in Section 2.3.

of spirit, practice of philosophy as a way of life, and scepticism.⁵⁵⁵ In the notebooks, Nietzsche even directly praises Montaigne's 'courageous and joyful [*frohmiithige*] skepticism (NF-1885,36[7]).⁵⁵⁶ Montaigne's joyful scepticism, as we saw in Section 1.4, is contrasted with the scepticism of Pascal which is marked by intellectual and personal despair. In addition to Montaigne's sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation,⁵⁵⁷ Nietzsche values other aspects of the French essayist's scepticism.

As Jessica Berry points out, Nietzsche appreciates Montaigne's revival of Pyrrhonian scepticism as an antidote to dogmatism, especially in religious and metaphysical matters.⁵⁵⁸ Keith Ansell-Pearson notes that '[t]he attraction of Pyrrhonism for Montaigne resides in the fact that it is content to remain in doubt rather than allow the mind to get entangled in the errors produced by human fantasy, and this is an intellectual practice we see Nietzsche putting to work in various aphorisms in the volumes of [HH], such as a aphorism 16 of [WS]'.⁵⁵⁹ Berry, however, seems to interpret Montaigne merely as a Pyrrhonian sceptic. This interpretation is not as unproblematic as Berry makes it. It is important to note that, although Montaigne is largely sympathetic to the Pyrrhonists there are aspects of Montaigne's intellectual project and of his scepticism, too, that are not compatible with the ancient sceptical tradition. Interpreters agree that Montaigne largely transforms and innovates ancient forms of scepticism - not only Pyrrhonism.⁵⁶⁰ Hence,

⁵⁵⁵ On Nietzsche and Montaigne see Donnellan 1982; 1986; Molner 1993; Marchi 1994; Vivarelli 1994; Berry 2004b; 2011; Pippin 2010; Anderson & Cristy 2017; Miner 2017. Nietzsche seems to be critical of Montaigne only in two places WB §3, p. 271; BGE 208. Both in *Wagner in Bayreuth* and in *Beyond Good and Evil*, however, Montaigne does not seem to be the direct target of Nietzsche's criticism. In the Conclusion, I will deal with Nietzsche's mention of Montaigne in the context of his criticism of weak scepticism in BGE 208. As to the *Unfashionable Observations*, it is important to keep in mind that, after all, in *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche even writes that Montaigne's writing has truly increased the joy of living on this earth (SE §2, p. 181). Ansell-Pearson 2018a notes that '[i]n fact, Nietzsche attacks the idea, which he associates with the interest in Montaigne, that the task of philosophy is to achieve personal serenity" (p. 44). In WB, then, Nietzsche directly attacks the German scholars' (mis)appropriation of the figure of Montaigne as a model for the modern intellectual life. As Warren Boucher reports, Montaigne was fashionably received as the thinker withdrawing from society: '[t]he Montaigne inferred from the *Essais* is the "late" humanist reading and writing in his tower, serenely living out the decline of classical western civilization - the happy existentialist surviving without metaphysical support of any kind' (Boucher 2017, p. 378). This reception of Montaigne is, of course, incompatible with Nietzsche's early conception of the philosopher as a physician of culture - their task is not only to engage with culture but also to transform society (WB §3, pp. 272-273).

⁵⁵⁶ Translation modified. Nietzsche also links Montaigne's scepticism to intellectual honesty (NF-1884,25[74]). See also SE §2, p. 181.

⁵⁵⁷ See Section 2.3.

⁵⁵⁸ Berry 2004b; 2011.

⁵⁵⁹ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁵⁶⁰ See, especially, Hartle 2003, pp. 12-25; Paganini 2018a, pp. 238-243. There are in fact different kinds of scepticism in Montaigne's *Essays*: besides Pyrrhonisms, we can find a fideistic use of scepticism to undermine reason (especially in the 'Apology'), a philosophy of doubt, and a free-spirited attitude of suspect. In particular, according to Paganini, Montaigne originally elaborates a philosophy of doubt which is not present in ancient Greek traditions.

Montaigne's philosophical practice, like Nietzsche's, is not reducible to Pyrrhonian scepticism. This, I think, has consequences also for Nietzsche's reception of Montaigne's scepticism.

Not only does Montaigne discuss and deploy a variety of scepticisms in the *Essays*,⁵⁶¹ but his very intellectual and literary practice of assaying can be construed as a form of scepticism. As Richard Scholar concisely puts it, 'for Montaigne, assaying is a method of experimentation that he puts into practice in life and in the pages of his book'.⁵⁶² Robert Miner proposes the hypothesis that Montaigne is one of the sources of the experimental scepticism Nietzsche favours in GS 51 and BGE 42. This hypothesis, he claims, is doubly reasonable. On the one hand, 'Nietzsche sees Montaigne [...] as an "attempter" [...]. He reads and re-reads the *Essais* in German translation as *Versuche*, "attempts". He knows that "essayist" means "to try" or "to attempt"'.⁵⁶³ On the other, 'Montaigne's practice of self-assaying, fuelled by sceptical mistrust, makes him an "attempter" in Nietzsche's sense'.⁵⁶⁴ I particularly agree with Miner when he claims that Nietzsche's experimental scepticism, like Montaigne's assayistic scepticism, is ultimately not *ephectic* or suspensive.⁵⁶⁵ Montaigne's scepticism is not *ephectic*, in that it does not aim at suspension of judgment in all matters but to assay or experiment with different points of view in order to exercise the ability to form freer judgments: Foglia observes that, for Montaigne, '[t]his process should lead to wisdom, characterized as "always joyful". Montaigne's scepticism is not a desperate one. On the contrary, it offers the reader a sort of jubilation which relies on the modest but effective pleasure in dismissing knowledge, thus making room for the exercise of one's natural faculties'.⁵⁶⁶ Similarly, I want to stress, at each of stage of his intellectual development Nietzsche's sceptical practice, including his experimental scepticism, does not stop itself at suspension of judgment, but it is 'judgment-friendly', as Urs Sommer happily qualifies it.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶¹ There are in fact different varieties of scepticism in Montaigne's *Essays* besides Pyrrhonisms: scepticism about reason and philosophy, fideism (especially in the 'Apology'), a philosophy of doubt, and a free-spirited attitude of suspect. In particular, according to Paganini 2018a, Montaigne originally elaborates a philosophy of doubt which is not present in ancient sceptical traditions. In this sense, Montaigne paves the way for modern uses of doubt, including free-spirited, libertine critique (which, unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, attacks beliefs justified on the basis of the principles of authority).

⁵⁶² Scholar 2010, p. 68.

⁵⁶³ Miner 2017, p. 29. Cf. GS 51; BGE 42.

⁵⁶⁴ Miner 2017, p. 39. Cf. GS 322; A 57.

⁵⁶⁵ Miner 2017, pp. 27-30. There is, nevertheless, an important difference. As we saw in Section 4.2, Nietzsche's experimentalism aims at transforming both individual and social modes of living, whereas Montaigne's assays are conducive to the acceptance of customs and traditions as well as to a form of fideism. In this sense, Montaigne's accidental practice of philosophy can be interpreted as a dialectic of scepticism and credulity, going through a movement of departure from and return to the pre-philosophical. See Hurtle 2003, pp. 33-38.

⁵⁶⁶ Foglia 2019, pp.

⁵⁶⁷ Sommer 2018, pp. 443, 448.

Consider the example of the scepticism about morality Nietzsche attributes to the psychological observation typical of the French moralists – and perhaps of Montaigne, too. Moralists *à la moralistes français*, who pursue a sceptical investigation into moral things, are often accused of being ‘immoralist’ by moral people ‘because they dissect morality’ (WS 19).⁵⁶⁸ But the sceptics in the field of morality, Nietzsche wishes to specify, do dissection ‘only, however, in order that things might be better known, better judged, better lived; not in order that the whole world do dissection’ (WS 19). On the other hand, Nietzsche also wishes to distinguish sceptical moralists from preachers of morality who do not dissect enough; present-day moralists, he exhorts, need to do better than older ones who doubted too little and preached too much (WS 19). Wanting to be a preacher, as we will see in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion, for Nietzsche, can easily degenerate into a form of fanaticism.

In a posthumous fragment of 1880, Nietzsche firstly commits himself to a ‘scepticism of experiments [*Skepticismus der Experimente*]’ as opposed to the ‘inertia of despair [*Trägheit der Verzweiflung*]’ (NF-1880,6[356]). In the second part of the middle period, as in *Schopenhauer as Educator*,⁵⁶⁹ Nietzsche continues to criticise the kind of scepticism degenerating into despair of truth, standstill of the mind, and paralysis of the will; in clear contrast to the early writings, though, he now believes it is scepticism itself, or at least a form of it, that can be used to remove intellectual and personal despair, especially that arising from the uncertainty about truths of metaphysics (NF-1882,6[1]). This kind of scepticism, Nietzsche writes, renounces the need to believe in things unknowable and, simultaneously, it claims ‘the right to create’ (NF-1882,6[1]).⁵⁷⁰ I will return in the Conclusion to the link between scepticism and the creation of new values. In the notes in preparation to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche calls this ‘scepticism as temptation [*Skepsis als Versuchung*]’ (NF-1882,16[83],21[1]).⁵⁷¹ However, Montaigne’s assay of judgment is ultimately not equivalent to Nietzsche’s experimental scepticism: as mentioned, Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are right in noting that, while Montaigne’s – and the Pyrrhonists’

⁵⁶⁸ See also MOM 71.

⁵⁶⁹ See Section 1.1.

⁵⁷⁰ In Chapter 3, I highlighted the link Nietzsche establishes between scepticism, experimentalism, and honesty or truthfulness. In analogy with GS 51 and with NF-1882,6[1], in GS 107 Nietzsche places a limit to his commitment to honesty, too: ‘Honesty would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the good will to appearance’ (GS 107). In contrast to *Human, All Too Human*, then, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche reclaims an artistic or poetic right to create and a good will to appearance as limits of his commitment to scepticism as a practice of truthfulness.

⁵⁷¹ In the Conclusion, I will also investigate the kind of scepticism Nietzsche attributes to Zarathustra.

- scepticism promotes a way of life which acquiesces to traditional customs and laws, Nietzsche is ‘committed to experimentalism with respect to both individual and social modes of living’.⁵⁷²

4.3 Epicurean-Like Forms of Scepticism

In the first part of this section, I want to delve into the link between Nietzsche’s sceptical practice of indifference and ‘the capacity to rejoice in life’ – especially in the small, nearest things – exemplified by Socrates (and Montaigne). It is my contention that the kind of happiness or joy Nietzsche associates with indifference is not reducible to Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*; rather, it is better understood in connection with his appropriation of Epicureanism. Here, I take issue once again with Jessica Berry. In the second part of this section, I show that in the second edition of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche associates Epicurus with another form of scepticism – one that takes delight in dealing with the uncertainties and insecurities of the knowledge and life.

The majority of commentators agree that throughout his writings Nietzsche is strongly critical of Pyrrhonian tranquillity.⁵⁷³ Among them, Richard Bett notes that ‘for Nietzsche the avoidance of trouble and strife is decidedly not a priority’.⁵⁷⁴ More precisely, as we have seen, unlike the Pyrrhonists, for Nietzsche the achievement of tranquillity is not the only, nor even the primary, task of philosophy. (One of the primary tasks of free-spirited philosophy is to have a transformative effect upon individuals and culture through knowledge.) Moreover, at different stages of his intellectual development Nietzsche thinks that a truthful practice of philosophy often comes with dangers, troubles, and sufferings.⁵⁷⁵ As Bett himself (elsewhere) and Keith Ansell-Pearson show, however, at least in the middle writings Nietzsche is deeply concerned with the search for happiness and joy.⁵⁷⁶ I want to show how his concern with joy, particularly in MOM and WS, differs from the Pyrrhonists’ concern with tranquillity.

Even Berry – who, as we have seen, is particularly keen to associate Nietzsche with Pyrrhonian scepticism – acknowledges that ‘Nietzsche would clearly not accept *ataraxia* as an ethical ideal (at least not on the received interpretation of the role the concept played for the

⁵⁷² Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming.

⁵⁷³ See Parush 1976, pp. 534-535; Conway & Ward 1992, p. 217; Bett 2000, p. 68; Wilkerson 2006, p. 56; Mitcheson 2017, p. 72.

⁵⁷⁴ Bett 2000, p. 68.

⁵⁷⁵ See, for example, SE §4, p. 203; HH 109; GS 283; GS 343.

⁵⁷⁶ Bett 2005 and Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 35-45, 135-150.

Hellenistic philosophers)'.⁵⁷⁷ Nevertheless, she argues that commentators 'have by large and far *overestimated* Nietzsche's rejection of tranquillity and *underestimated* its complexity in the ancient source'.⁵⁷⁸ On the one hand, Berry suggests that the notion of 'peace of the soul' has different meanings and interpretations for Nietzsche, some of which are distinctively positive.⁵⁷⁹ I agree with Berry that Nietzsche does value some forms of tranquillity; as I showed in Section 4.2, this is particularly true in *Human, All Too Human*. On the other, it is not as clear as Berry has it that Nietzsche would not accept the Hellenistic ideal of *ataraxia*. Indeed, Keith Ansell-Pearson among others has shown that Nietzsche develops an appreciation of Epicurean *ataraxia* in the middle writings.⁵⁸⁰ What I want to suggest here is that Nietzsche would not fully accept Pyrrhonian tranquillity - the form of mental peace that accompanies suspension of judgment in all matters. Berry makes a lot of effort to demonstrate that the Hellenistic notion of *ataraxia* - and, more specifically, the Pyrrhonian one - has origin in Democritus' notion of *euthymia* (cheerfulness or being in a good spirit) which, she rightly stresses, is a more robust and positive state of the soul.⁵⁸¹ Of course, Nietzsche himself, as a fine philologist, is well aware of this: he mentions this origin at least twice, in his early study on Democritus and in late writings (NF-1888,14[100]). Berry claims that Democritus' *euthymia* would be far more acceptable for Nietzsche and even closer to the Nietzschean notion of cheerfulness. Here, I do not want to dispute this claim - it is well known that Nietzsche esteems Democritus⁵⁸² and there are good reasons to think that the latter is one of the sources of the former's gay or cheerful science.⁵⁸³ However, what Berry draws from this connection is more questionable. After recognising the distinction between Hellenistic

⁵⁷⁷ Berry 2011, p. 107.

⁵⁷⁸ Berry 2011, p. 155.

⁵⁷⁹ Berry 2011, pp. 155-156. Berry's claim is based on a single passage from *Twilight of the Idols* in which Nietzsche discusses different conception, both negative and positive, of 'peacefulness of the soul' ('Morality' 3).

⁵⁸⁰ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 133-150. See also Bett 2005. Berry fails to recognise this, see Berry 2011, p. 172.

⁵⁸¹ See Berry 2011, pp. 156-173. On the relation between *euthymia* and *ataraxia* see also Bett 2000, p. 66, n. 25. For an argument that problematises the link between Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* and Democritean *euthymia* see Kuzminski 2008, pp. 41-45. Kuzminski places more emphasis on the influence of Buddhism on the Pyrrhonian notion of tranquillity: 'for the Pyrrhonist *ataraxia* is not simply cheerfulness, or good spirit, or self-satisfaction, which indeed can accompany the adoption of various beliefs; it is rather a certain unusual and profound freedom from agitation or anxiety, a special tranquillity which flows only from having no beliefs at all. *Euthymia*, insofar as it is rooted in a "correct view", in an attachment, is vulnerable to refutation of that view, hence its instability, which produces anxiety in the believer. For Pyrrhonists, like Buddhists [...], attachment is a symptom of the problem, not a solution' (p. 42). In the late writings, Nietzsche himself considers Pyrrho as a 'Greek Buddhist' (NF-1888,14[85]). See also NF-1888,[99],[162],[191]. In NF-1888,14[17], Nietzsche even equates Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* to Buddhist Nirvana. On Nietzsche's critique of Buddhist Nirvana and other negative definitions of happiness (such as *a-taraxia*) see GS 'Preface' § 3, p. 36.

⁵⁸² On Nietzsche and Democritus see, for example, Caygill 1999; Power 2001; Berry 2004a; Swift 2008.

⁵⁸³ In addition to Berry 2011, pp. 156-173, see also Berry 2004a.

ataraxia and its predecessor,⁵⁸⁴ she is keen to emphasise the link between Democritus and the ancient sceptical tradition.⁵⁸⁵ Now, this link is well established both in ancient sources⁵⁸⁶ and in the secondary literature;⁵⁸⁷ and, as I have just mentioned, Nietzsche himself is well aware of this.⁵⁸⁸ By tracing this genealogy, Berry insinuates that Nietzsche's appreciation of Democritus' cheerfulness brings him closer to an appreciation of a sceptical, if not Pyrrhonian, tranquillity. This genealogy plays a key role in her attempt to bring Nietzsche into rapport with the ancient sceptical tradition: after all, tranquillity is the primary and arguably the only aim of Pyrrhonian scepticism; if Nietzsche did not accept a form of tranquillity as the goal of his scepticism, her comparison would certainly result weaker.⁵⁸⁹

I think Berry is more successful in showing an affinity between Nietzsche and Democritus on cheerfulness and much less successful in establishing a link between Nietzsche's sceptical practice and Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* or other forms of tranquillity. As I showed in Section 4.1, this link can be established – though, with some necessary caveats.⁵⁹⁰ We saw in Section 4.2 that for Nietzsche the sceptical practice of indifference has a constructive side (reconcentration on the small, nearest things) which is conducive to a form of joy. This form of joy, I want to argue now, is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*. The tranquillity sought by the Pyrrhonist always accompanies suspension of judgment and, as such, it is the result of an intellectual and emotional detachment from things. In contrast, Nietzschean joy is not only suspensive but also affirmative: it is not only linked to the detachment from the first and last things but, as we saw, it is also linked to the attachment to the small, nearest things. In Nietzsche's view, then, joy is associated with a fuller affirmation of life: it 'must contain powers for uplifting and healing the moral nature of human beings' (MOM 339). Nietzsche also calls this the '*trinity of joy*' – one that is associated with 'in the first place *elevating* thoughts, secondly, *scouting* ones, thirdly, *illuminating* ones' WS

⁵⁸⁴ Berry 2011, p. 159.

⁵⁸⁵ Berry 2011, pp. 167-173.

⁵⁸⁶ See Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 54-55, PH 1.213-214; Diogenes Laertius 1931, p. 485, DL 2.9, 72.

⁵⁸⁷ See, for example, Warren 2002, pp. 86-128.

⁵⁸⁸ In an early posthumous fragment, Nietzsche seems to quote a passage from Diogenes Laertius' chapter on Pyrrho, where it is said that some find Democritus to be a sceptic on account of his rejection of qualities. Compare Nietzsche's fragment with Diogenes Laertius' passage: '[T]o become skeptical is to sigh over the realisation that "Truth is going down the drain"' (NF-1872,19[216]); "Of a truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well"' (Diogenes Laertius 1931, p. 485, DL 2.9, 72). See also NF-1888,14[100].

⁵⁸⁹ See Mitcheson 2017, p. 79.

⁵⁹⁰ We saw that in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche links suspension of judgment about the metaphysical world to forms of tranquillity. But, as I highlighted, it is not only suspensive: Nietzsche also links tranquillity to beliefs based on the modest, empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities discovered by scientific enquiry.

332.⁵⁹¹ In the eyes of Nietzsche, one might speculate, Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* would come at the cost of renouncing too much joy in life, making the latter into ‘boredom [...], rather than *wisdom*’ (MOM 337).⁵⁹²

The fact that Nietzsche is critical of Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*, I have mentioned, does not necessarily mean that he would not accept other forms of Hellenistic *ataraxia* or any other form of tranquillity. It has been shown in the secondary literature that, in fact, in the middle writings⁵⁹³ Nietzsche values and appropriates an Epicurean form of *ataraxia*.⁵⁹⁴ It is important to note that Epicurean *ataraxia*, too, has its origin in Democritus’s *euthumia*; yet, the Epicurean and Pyrrhonian forms of tranquillity are very different states of the soul, they are achieved in very different ways, and, furthermore, they are associated with very different ways of life.⁵⁹⁵ We have seen that Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* is the freedom from the mental disturbance caused by dogmatism; it accompanies suspension of judgment on all matters and is associated with a mode of living in conformity with traditional customs and laws, including religious ones. Epicurean *ataraxia*,⁵⁹⁶ in contrast, is the freedom from unjustified fears and anxieties such as the fear of death and the fear of the gods; this is achieved through Epicurus’s teaching on mortality – which the Pyrrhonists consider dogmatic⁵⁹⁷ – and the practice of a naturalistic philosophical demystification of

⁵⁹¹ On Nietzsche’s notion of ‘the trinity of joy’ see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 9-10; Meyer 2019, pp. 145-146.

⁵⁹² Thomas Ryan and Michael Ure well explain how Pyrrhonian tranquillity entails the renunciation of fuller forms of joy: ‘The Sceptics argue that philosophical discourse itself is the source of mental distress and pursue peace of mind by suspending all judgments, including value judgments. The Sceptic has no philosophical reason to deviate from conventional (non-philosophical) custom and so lives an everyday life. What makes the Sceptic’s way of life philosophical is that, since he refuses to make or hold value judgments the Sceptic rejects that anything will befall him is a good or evil. [...] The Sceptic achieves the diminution of distress at the cost of giving up the pleasure which attends the thought that he is enjoying a true good. [...] The Sceptic trades away the possibility of pleasure in return for the diminution of possible pains’. (Ryan & Ure 2014, pp. 101-102).

⁵⁹³ In the late writings, instead, Nietzsche considers both Pyrrho and Epicurus ‘two forms of Greek decadence’ precisely on account to their ethical ideal of *ataraxia* (NF-1888,14[99]). For the late Nietzsche, their philosophical attempts to avoid suffering acquire strongly negative connotations: they are regarded as the expression of a fundamental psychological weakness and of a need for rest (NF-1888,15[58]). Their notions of *ataraxia* would be subsumed in the category of a ‘negative definition of happiness’ that Nietzsche develops in the Preface of *The Gay Science* (§ 2, p. 34): a weak, negative definition of happiness such as avoidance of suffering, according to Nietzsche’s late diagnosis, comes at the cost of eschewing too many important aspects of life.

⁵⁹⁴ On Nietzsche’s appropriation of Epicurean happiness or *ataraxia* see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 135-138. Ansell-Pearson suggests that Nietzsche’s specific understanding of Epicurus’s happiness, at least in GS 45, is inseparable from suffering (p. 138).

⁵⁹⁵ See Stricker 1990.

⁵⁹⁶ Importantly, Epicurean *ataraxia*, as the absence of physical-spiritual suffering, is closely linked to a continuous (or ‘katasematic’) pleasure, that is, to a stable state of contentment and calm. On the distinction between ‘kinetic’ and ‘katasematic’ sources of pleasure see Cooper 2012, pp. 229-246. This pleasurable tranquillity is, for the Epicureans, the highest form of happiness and, as Striker 1990 summarises, can be reached ‘by realizing that there are only a very few desires the fulfilment of which is necessary for a pleasant life, and that those can be easily satisfied’; as well as by dispelling, through philosophical investigation, unfounded fears (p. 100).

⁵⁹⁷ See, for example, Sextus Empiricus 2000, p. 203, PH 3.229.

superstitious ways of thinking, such as the view that the gods intervene in human affairs. John Cooper explains that Epicureans live a life of irreligion – as opposed to the outwardly religious life lived by the Pyrrhonists:⁵⁹⁸ ‘The Epicurean life involves rejecting the traditional Greek gods (and, by extension, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim ones too) and all the religious practices that go along with belief in those religions [...]. Epicureans live cheerfully [...] completely free from any and all concern regarding any afterlife’.⁵⁹⁹ Finally, the Epicurean way of life leads to a withdrawal from society⁶⁰⁰ and to the formation of small philosophical communities of friends gathering in the so-called ‘Epicurean garden’.⁶⁰¹

Before the late notebooks, Pyrrho is directly mentioned only once in an enigmatic dialogue in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* where he is characterised, not without negative connotations, as a ‘fanatic of mistrust’ (WS 213). I will focus on this aphorism in Section 5.3. In contrast, the figure of Epicurus appears several times across the middle writings with strongly positive connotations.⁶⁰² Keith Ansell-Pearson argues that Nietzsche is not only deeply interested in but also inspired by Epicurus is his middle philosophy:⁶⁰³ in particular, Ansell-Pearson claims that ‘[i]n the middle period Nietzsche offers a conception of “heroic-idyllic philosophizing”, clarifying that “[t]he heroic-idyllic is heroic [...], at least in part, because conquering the fear of death is involved [...], and idyllic because Epicurus philosophized calmly and serenely, and away from the crowd in the garden’.⁶⁰⁴

Instead of Pyrrho, I suggest, Nietzsche appropriates the figure of Epicurus, linking the latter to the sceptical practice of indifference and to an affirmative form of joy in concentrating on the small, nearest things of earthly life (not merely to tranquillity).⁶⁰⁵ Here, Nietzsche figures

⁵⁹⁸ See Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 9, 143, PH 1.24, 3.2.

⁵⁹⁹ Cooper 2012, p. 260.

⁶⁰⁰ See Cooper 2012, pp. 264-270. In NF-1879,60[16], Nietzsche includes ‘withdrawal from politics’ in his doctrine of the nearest things.

⁶⁰¹ On Nietzsche’s appropriation of the ideal of the Epicurean garden see Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 13, 41, 141, 144, 147. In this appropriation, Ansell-Pearson notes, ‘Nietzsche is not [...] recommending self-withdrawal and isolation as the ultimate cure to one’s predicament; rather, these are the means or steps on the way to working on oneself so that one can become genuinely beneficial towards others’ (p. 44). Nietzsche’s Epicurean garden then, is a place of temporary isolation and recovery from society: this does not change that, as Ansell-Pearson 2018a underlines, ‘[h]is preference is for slow and diligent intellectual work, involving a careful working through of problem that are both individual and social, and he envisages transformations taking place over a long *durée*’ (p. 44).

⁶⁰² See, for example, MOM 22, 408; WS 7, 192, 227, 295; D 72, 150; GS 45, 277, (book five) 370, 375.

⁶⁰³ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 35-45, 135-150.

⁶⁰⁴ Ansell-Pearson 2018a, p. 140.

⁶⁰⁵ It is important to bear in mind that Nietzsche pairs Epicurus and Montaigne in MOM 408 on account of their naturalistic ethics. Epicurus, along with Montaigne and Socrates, I think, is one of the key figures Nietzsche appropriates in the middle writings to cultivate the capacity to rejoice in life in modernity.

Epicurus as ‘the soother of souls in late antiquity’, attributing to him ‘the wonderful insight that is so rarely found nowadays, that solving the ultimate theoretical questions is not at all necessary for soothing the disposition’ (WS 7). In this attribution, I think, Nietzsche unequivocally links Epicurus to the practice of indifference he recommends in WS 16 – which, as I argued in Section 4.2, has something to do with scepticism in the form of suspension of judgment. Nietzsche values Epicurus first and foremost for two of his calming formulations, the first is directly linked to indifference, the second adds another sceptical dimension to it. The first formulation is ‘even supposing that this is the case, it matters nothing to us’ (WS 7). Epicurus, Nietzsche states, did not enter in metaphysical disputes such as those about the existence of the gods, ‘he did not contradict this hypothesis but instead conceded that it could well be so: but that there is *still a second* hypothesis for explaining the same phenomenon: something different could perhaps still be the case’ (WS 7). Nietzsche is referring to Epicurus’s recommendation to remain open to multiple hypotheses:⁶⁰⁶ ‘A *multiplicity* of hypotheses concerning the origin of pangs of conscience, for example, is still sufficient in our time for removing from the soul the shadow that so easily arises from brooding upon a single, solely visible and thereby hundred times overrated hypothesis’ (WS 7). The reference to Epicurus’s doctrine of the multiplicity of hypotheses introduces another dimension into the sceptical practice of indifference with which he is associated: this is a cautious attitude of openness to multiple hypotheses, explanations, and interpretations, encapsulated by the formula ‘it may be so, but it may also be otherwise’ (WS 7).

In what remains of this section and of this chapter, I shall consider another form of scepticism that Nietzsche associates with Epicurus in the second edition of GS (1887) and I conclude with some remarks on the link between intellectual honesty, curiosity, and suspension of judgment. It has been one of the central arguments of my thesis that throughout the middle writings Nietzsche links forms of scepticism to the constructive side of his developing philosophical projects. We have seen that in HH (especially in volume one) sceptical practices and attitudes of investigation, including temporary and issue-specific forms of suspension of judgment, are linked to modest, empirical truths, certainty, and probabilities; in MOM and WS, the practice of indifference is linked to the joyful attachment to the small, nearest things and affirmation of earthly life; in D and GS, scepticism is linked to experiments with new possibilities of thinking and living. In the Preface and in book five of the GS, I want to suggest now, Nietzsche links scepticism to an intellectual and emotional delight in uncertainty, characterising it as an Epicurean-like attitude to knowledge.

⁶⁰⁶ On Nietzsche’s appropriation of Epicurus’ doctrine of multiple explanations see Wotling 2020, pp. 164-165, 168.

If in HH Nietzsche valued a scientific, unmetaphysical, and – in a sense – sceptical form of certainty, in the late writings he becomes suspicious about the ‘*demand for certainty*’ even ‘in a scientific-positivist form’ (GS 347).⁶⁰⁷ There, Nietzsche sees ‘[t]he demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm’ as the expression of the same psychological⁶⁰⁸ need for belief or faith that is at the bases of the need for religion and metaphysics; this need, according to Nietzsche’s late diagnosis, is the manifestation of a fundamental weakness of the psyche – that is, of an incapacity to do without certainty (GS 347).⁶⁰⁹

In contrast, in the second edition of GS Nietzsche construes scepticism as an intellectual and emotional attraction for uncertainty – and not only as the ability to tolerate it. In aphorism 357, entitled ‘*Why we look like Epicureans*’, Nietzsche links this sceptical attraction to Epicurus and to a ‘jubilant curiosity’:

We are cautious, we modern men, about ultimate convictions. Our mistrust lies in wait for the enchantments and deceptions of the conscience that are involved in every strong faith, every unconditional Yes and No. [...] [T]he jubilant curiosity of one who formerly stood in his corner and was driven to despair by his corner,⁶¹⁰ and now delights and luxuriates in the opposite of a corner, in the boundless, in what is ‘free as such’. Thus an almost Epicurean bent for knowledge develops that will not easily let go of the questionable character of things; also an aversion to big moral words and gestures; a taste that rejects all crude, four-square opposites and is proudly conscious of its practice in having reservations. For this constitute our pride, this sight tightening of the reins as our urge for certainty races ahead, this self-control of the rider during his wildest rides... (GS 375)

In qualifying this attitude towards knowledge and uncertainty ‘almost Epicurean’, it is important to note, Nietzsche is not claiming that Epicurus himself is a sceptic, nor that he displays this sceptical attitude. Rather, Nietzsche is using his figuration of Epicurus to say something about scepticism. The Epicurean-like form of scepticism incorporates some of the aspects that Nietzsche attributed to his sceptical practice of philosophy in HH: the caution about ultimate convictions in relation to the problem of modernity; the aversion to big metaphysical and moral words by means of which philosophers, such as Schopenhauer, have immodestly attempted to

⁶⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that even the late Nietzsche highly values the sceptical mode of investigation, understood as a philology or hermeneutics of suspect, he had attributed to scientific enquiry and its methods starting from the middle writings. See, for example, A 13, 59.

⁶⁰⁸ Nietzsche describes his intellectual development from his middle to late thinking about certainty as follows: ‘It could appear as if I had evaded the question of certainty. The opposite is true: but while I asked about the criterion of certainty I tested to determine in the first place according to which scales things have been weighed so far – and whether the question of certainty itself were not already a *dependent* question, a question of the *second* rank. (NF-1885,2[169]). The question of first rank, for the late Nietzsche, becomes psychology. See Pippin 2010.

⁶⁰⁹ In correspondence with his suspicion about the will to certainty (and about positivist science), Nietzsche also develops a profound criticism of Descartes’ notion of certainty in the 1885-1886 notebooks. See Section 2.2.

⁶¹⁰ On the relation between the corner and our new boundless ‘infinite’ see GS 343, 374.

provide an all-too simplistic and crude answer to the problem of existence, one that does not do justice to ‘the questionable character of things’. ‘Today’, Nietzsche observes, ‘we are at least far from [such a] ridiculous immodesty’ (GS 374). In contrast to this immodesty, now Nietzsche favours ‘the Epicurean instinct (of a friend of riddles)’ (NF-1888,2[162]).

Moreover, by now it should be familiar to us, Nietzsche endeavours to attach positive emotions to scepticism and uncertainty: here, he emphasises the move from despair (over the realisation of the limits of human knowledge and of the final unknowability of things) towards a ‘jubilant curiosity’ about and a delight in what is uncertain, boundless, and questionable. In HH, Nietzsche associated scepticism with a form of joy in detaching oneself from religious and metaphysical explanations. (We saw that this detaching joy was experienced only by certain people endowed with a good temperament and a cheerful soul, whereas other people could experience melancholy and even despair). In WS, a fuller and more affirmative form of joy in attaching oneself to the small, nearest things was associated with the sceptical practice of indifference. In 1887, but at least starting from 1881, Nietzsche associates the Epicurean-like form of scepticism with the gay science.

With this Epicurean-like scepticism Nietzsche introduces a significant innovation with respect to the sceptical practices he developed in HH and HH II. In the latter, scepticism was, on the one hand, a tool to curb our need for religious and metaphysical certainties, but on the other, as I have reminded, it was conducive to other forms (especially, scientific) of truths, certainties, and probabilities. In the fifth book of GS, scepticism remains a tool to curb our need for certainties of religious and metaphysical kinds, but its use is further extended to scientific certainties, too (GS 347, 373). Moreover, as become even clearer if we read GS 375 in relation to the Preface to GS, where Nietzsche re-evaluates the intellectual and emotional attitude towards uncertainty in knowledge and life in general. In the Preface, Nietzsche writes that on account of the great suspicion inherent in free-spirited philosophy ‘[t]rust in life is gone: life has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently. It is the love for a woman that causes doubts in us. The attraction for everything problematic, the delight in an x’ (GS ‘Preface’ §3, pp. 36-37). The Epicurean-like form of scepticism, then, is now linked not only to the affirmation of the small, nearest things but also to an even greater form of affirmation. This greater affirmation is the love of life as a problem: not only do we affirm life because we are profoundly attached to it in spite of all sorts of doubts it arouses in us, but we affirm life precisely on account of its problematic, questionable, and undecipherable character.

The link Nietzsche establishes between this form of scepticism and Epicurus has been very recently noted by Patrick Wotling: ‘To recognize our share of ignorance is not a defeat; it is, rather, the counterpart of honesty and of a subtler, unprejudiced approach to what reality is.’⁶¹¹ [...] In Epicurus, then, Nietzsche detects a nascent form of affirmative thinking that enjoys the complexity of reality, and above all, feels this indomitable complexity as an attractive situation: according to Nietzsche, this is the direction that the Epicurean attitude points to, although less radically so than his own way of thinking’.⁶¹² Wotling compellingly argues that, in light of this figuration, Nietzsche construes Epicurus – the friend of riddles – as nothing less than the forerunner of his idea of the gay science.

Moreover, Wotling notes that the Epicurean-like attitude is linked to Nietzsche’s campaign against fanaticism,⁶¹³ to his commitment to intellectual integrity,⁶¹⁴ and even to his rejection of any form of obscurantism.⁶¹⁵ These, as have seen thus far and will see in the following chapter, are key aspects of Nietzsche’s concern with various forms of scepticism starting from the middle writings. In particular, the attitude of enjoying riddles that Nietzsche attributes to Epicurus is not a form of obscurantism: as Wotling accurately remarks, ‘[i]t is even quite the opposite. This [is a] type of [thinking that] identifies and sets aside the so-called explanations that do not explain anything or, in philological terms, the untenable interpretations, particularly the predetermined ones, which distort the text to be decipher by injecting a personal prejudice into it’.⁶¹⁶ This way of thinking, Wotling underlines, does not lead to obscurantism but to a careful consideration of the ‘multiplicity of hypotheses’ that Nietzsche attributes to Epicurus in WS 7.⁶¹⁷

I think Wotling is right when he claims that, although at times Nietzsche uses the largely Pyrrhonian notion of ‘*ephexis*’ or ‘suspension’ for his philology or hermeneutics of suspicion towards rushed, distorted interpretations of the world, ‘his investigations have a tendency to connect Epicurus and the sceptical attitude’.⁶¹⁸ By showing that, for Nietzsche, Epicurus is a forerunner of the gay science and that the Epicurean-like attitude is linked to scepticism, Wotling

⁶¹¹ Wotling correctly links this also with Nietzsche’s notions of strength and health: ‘It takes more strength, and it is a symptom of greater health, to be able to admit the limitations of the present state of our knowledge rather than despair’ (forthcoming, p. 167).

⁶¹² Wotling 2020, p. 167.

⁶¹³ Wotling 2020, p. 167. I will focus on the link between scepticism and fanaticism in Chapter 5.

⁶¹⁴ Wotling 2020, pp. 167-168. See Chapter 3.

⁶¹⁵ Wotling 2020, p. 167. See Section 3.4.

⁶¹⁶ Wotling 2020, p. 167.

⁶¹⁷ Wotling 2020, p. 168.

⁶¹⁸ Wotling 2020, p. 168. Jessica Berry, of course, takes the opposite view. See Berry 2011, pp. 104-132.

opens a promising interpretative path, which he himself does not pursue: the gay science is a sceptical practice. I have only started to take this path by showing in what senses Nietzsche associates Epicurus with scepticism in the middle writings and in the second edition of *GS*. Here, I have no space to further investigate the sceptical character of the gay science, but more research is needed in this direction.

In conclusion of this section and chapter, I want to make few remarks about the link between intellectual honesty, curiosity, and suspension of judgment in the light of Nietzsche's appreciation of uncertainty in the later writings. Bernard Reginster argues that curiosity rather than intellectual honesty is the distinctive trait of Nietzsche's free spirits.⁶¹⁹ Reginster claims that curiosity entails an intellectual and emotional attraction to uncertainty, whereas honesty (which he largely understands as a standard of belief) entails an aversion to it. Ultimately, according to Reginster, honesty is a form of truthfulness driven by the desire for a state of knowledge or being certain. Honesty, Reginster goes on to say, rests upon an ascetic aspiration, for it devalues and aims to eliminate uncertainty which for Nietzsche is an essential feature of human life. In the context of this argument, Reginster claims that Nietzsche's experimental scepticism in *GS* is more closely linked to curiosity. I think Reginster captures an important aspect of Nietzsche's commitment to scepticism in the *GS* and in the late writings, however due to a lack of sensitivity to Nietzsche's intellectual development he somewhat undervalues the importance of honesty in the middle writings, especially prior to *GS*.⁶²⁰

Mark Alfano notes in passing that scepticism (by which he largely means the search for counterexamples⁶²¹) is a tool to be deployed in concert with Nietzschean virtues such as curiosity, honesty, and courage, in order to enquire well.⁶²² In the same direction as Reginster, though, Alfano construes Nietzschean curiosity as cardinal virtue – one that unifies and presupposes the other virtues, including honesty. Alfano's allusion to scepticism as a tool for enquiry, in concert with a number of intellectual virtues, indicates a promising direction of interpretation, one which I have taken and developed in my thesis.

⁶¹⁹ Reginster 2013.

⁶²⁰ In Chapter 3, we saw in the middle writings scepticism as a practice of truthfulness is not only linked with experimentalism but also with a commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience, which is largely construed as an intellectual virtue, a standard of belief, and in a sense even as an epistemic norm that ought to guide free-spirited philosophy.

⁶²¹ Whereas Alfano understands scepticism only as the search for counterexamples, I showed in Chapter 3 that various sceptical practices play a fundamental role in Nietzsche's commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience.

⁶²² Alfano 2013. I agree with Alfano and in part with Reginster that Nietzsche construes honesty as an intellectual virtue, posing questions concerning virtue epistemology and the ethics of belief.

Alfano argues that ‘a certain kind of curiosity is a cardinal Nietzschean virtue [alongside creativity], and that others (especially courage and honesty, though also scepticism, sympathy and courtesy) are all traits needed by someone who wants to investigate as Nietzschean curiosity demands [...]: if someone were curious, then she would be courageous, honest and so on’.⁶²³ Alfano understands Nietzschean curiosity as ‘an insatiable desire to solve novel, difficult problems and puzzles, and to discover or invent them when none are ready to hand’.⁶²⁴ On his reading, this form of curiosity requires courage to see and accept unpleasant truth about oneself and others, as well as honesty, especially towards oneself. Hence, he argues, curiosity is a *cardinal* virtue in Nietzsche’s philosophy because all the other intellectual virtues are presupposed and united by it: in particular, if curiosity cannot be attained without courage and honesty, the latter two do not require curiosity – one can be courageous and honest without being curious.⁶²⁵

Unlike Alfano, I do not wish to extrapolate a theory of intellectual virtues and especially of their cardinality or unity from Nietzsche’s text, for I am sceptical that such a systematic view of virtues lies behind Nietzsche’s scattered and largely experimental remarks.⁶²⁶ However, I think there are two further problems with Alfano’s argument for the cardinality of curiosity. First, it excessively undervalues Nietzsche’s conception of honesty.⁶²⁷ In particular, I do not think that Alfano’s claim that honesty is not as cardinal as curiosity – because one must be honest to be curious but one could very well be honest without being curious⁶²⁸ – does justice to Nietzsche’s conception of intellectual honesty and conscience. Consider GS 2: here, as we have seen, intellectual honesty and conscience are construed as the search for ‘an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con’ in order not to deceive oneself in matters of belief.⁶²⁹ It seems to me that in an important sense this honest search – which should not be interrupted, not even if one finds good reasons for their beliefs – does entail a form of curiosity. One must be curious to look for ‘the final and most certain reasons’ demanded by intellectual honesty and the conscience.⁶³⁰

⁶²³ Alfano 2013, p. 776.

⁶²⁴ Alfano 2013, p. 779.

⁶²⁵ Alfano 2013, pp. 781-785.

⁶²⁶ See Page 2019, p. 364.

⁶²⁷ Here, I am agreement with Page 2019.

⁶²⁸ Alfano 2013, p. 785.

⁶²⁹ Cf. HH 225.

⁶³⁰ See Section 3.2.

Second, Alfano, along with Reginster, heavily neglects the importance Nietzsche attaches to forms of suspension of judgment in relation to intellectual honesty in the middle writings. Drawing on from BGE 227, Alfano maintains that honesty without curiosity would in fact be a ‘weary honesty’ which he construes as a mere ‘suspension of judgment on difficult or troubling questions’;⁶³¹ the curious person ‘would not be satisfied with false beliefs, unsupported beliefs or the withholding of judgment’;⁶³² indeed, ‘suspension of judgment is diametrically opposed to the curious investigation of a “word of danger”’.⁶³³

Both Alfano and Reginster, albeit for different reasons, argue that curiosity plays a more important role than honesty in Nietzsche’s philosophy. They claim that honesty without curiosity would lead to a suspension of judgment on problematic issues, contending that suspension of judgment would be a merely passive epistemic stance incompatible with the courageous and experimental mode of investigation advocated by Nietzsche.⁶³⁴ As I have shown in this chapter, however, Nietzsche uses or recommends suspension of judgment at various times in the middle writings (HH 9, 21; WS 7, 16; D 82).⁶³⁵ In particular, as we have seen, for Nietzsche it is precisely intellectual honesty that demands us to suspend judgment about specific questions such as those concerning religion and metaphysics.⁶³⁶ Is this a limit to Nietzschean curiosity? Should the free-spirited investigator curb their curiosity in order to respond to the demands of intellectual honesty and conscience?

I think the middle Nietzsche would provide a positive answer to both questions. In WS 16, as we have seen, Nietzsche even recommends indifference towards religious and metaphysical questions, suggesting that we have no need to be concerned with these problems, nor – in a sense – to be curious about them. Curiosity about these issues – which, for Nietzsche, cannot be scientifically settled – could jeopardise free-spirits’ commitment to intellectual honesty – which forbids to form beliefs without good evidence or reasons. Moreover, according to Nietzsche’s diagnosis, an unfettered curiosity here could even create unnecessary fears and anxieties, such as those concerning death and the meaning of life. In this context, then,

⁶³¹ Alfano 2013, p. 785.

⁶³² Alfano 2013, p. 779.

⁶³³ Alfano 2013, p. 778. See also Reginster 2013, pp. 450, 455.

⁶³⁴ Alfano 2013, 785; Reginster 2013, pp. 446, 450.

⁶³⁵ In Chapter 5, I will show that Nietzsche also links suspension of judgment to intellectual justice (HH 32; MOM 33).

⁶³⁶ Intellectual honesty and conscience demand that we temporarily withhold judgment to avoid rushing into wishful conclusions in order to draw a better conclusion, and that we indefinitely suspend judgment about the metaphysical world on account of our lack of scientific knowledge about it.

indifference, in concert with honesty, would be a much more virtuous intellectual practice than curiosity. The practice of indifference, though, does not aim to impede curious investigation altogether; rather, as Nietzsche makes it clear in WS 7, 16, it seeks to control and redirect curiosity towards the small, nearest things of the earthly life.

Alfano and Reginster are both arguing against Jessica Berry, who attempts to characterise Nietzsche's sceptical practice as the Pyrrhonian 'ability to tolerate or withstand the anxiety associated with uncertainty' as opposed to the curious, experimental attraction to it.⁶³⁷ In my thesis, I have been largely critical of Berry's reading, but this time I would like to defend it – at least in part. In the first place, it should be noted, Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment is conducive not only to tranquillity but also to a zetetic or continuous mode of investigation which is not at all incompatible with Nietzschean curiosity.⁶³⁸

Moreover, it is imperative to pay attention to the evolution of Nietzsche's thinking with respect to the issue of certainty. Scepticism is not linked only to uncertainty, curiosity, and experimentalism at each stage of his intellectual development. In HH, as I argued, scepticism is construed not only as a truth-searching methodology but also as a method to discover or produce modest, empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities.⁶³⁹ Although Nietzsche begins to problematise the demand for certainty in the second edition of GS, still in GS 2 we can find a close link between scepticism, honesty, the intellectual conscience, and certainty (about those things one can be certain about). Here, '*the desire for certainty*' in cooperation with the honest, restless search for reasons is considered the 'inmost craving and deepest distress' inherent in the intellectual conscience of higher human beings (GS 2).⁶⁴⁰ What is remarkable and remarkably unnoticed is that in this aphorism the honest and, in a sense, sceptical desire for certainty coexists with the emerging Epicurean-like form of scepticism, which is linked with curiosity and uncertainty. This is a courageous, sceptical questioning in the midst of the disagreement – which, as we have seen, characterises modernity for Nietzsche – and of 'this whole marvellous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence' (GS 2).

⁶³⁷ Reginster 2013, 456, n. 27. Cf. Berry 2011, pp. 139, 161-163.

⁶³⁸ See Section 2.3.

⁶³⁹ See Sections 2.1 and 2.2.

⁶⁴⁰ Note the difference with GS 347 (book five).

Scepticism, Fanaticism, and Intellectual Justice

In the previous chapter, we saw that at various times in his middle writings Nietzsche deploys and recommends forms of suspension of judgment, especially about religious and metaphysical questions. I labelled this use of suspension as ‘issue-specific’ and contrasted it with Pyrrhonian *epoché*. In the previous Chapter as well as in Chapters 2 and 3, I suggested that Nietzsche also refers to what I called a ‘temporary use’ of suspension as a tool to think and enquire well – for the purpose to make better judgments. In this chapter, I consider another use of the practice of suspending judgment in Nietzsche’s philosophy: starting from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche deploys and recommends suspension of judgment as a weapon or antidote against conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. More in general, here, I explore the antithesis between scepticism and conviction in Nietzsche’s middle and late writings.

Recent studies have shown that Nietzsche fundamentally defines his free-spirited philosophy in antithesis to forms of fanaticism – intellectual, moral, and religious.⁶⁴¹ Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are among the very few commentators who note that, more specifically, Nietzsche places scepticism in antithesis to fanaticism; and that he does so in the context of his appreciation and appropriation of the Enlightenment, especially the French one, in his middle writings.⁶⁴² In particular, Keith Ansell-Pearson recently notes that ‘Nietzsche follows a long tradition of deploying skeptical arguments and positions so as to defeat moral and religious fanaticism, and he may have been especially influenced in this regard by French Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot and especially Voltaire’.⁶⁴³ Nietzsche’s construal of scepticism as a tool to combat fanaticism, I want to stress, is another instance of his encounter with the French

⁶⁴¹ Reginster 2003; Ansell-Pearson 2015; 2018a; 2018b; forthcoming; Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. As we will see, Reginster 2003 focuses – not without imprecision – on Nietzsche’s account of fanaticism between the middle and late writings, tending to interpret it as a fundamental psychological weakness rather than as an intellectual defect. Ansell-Pearson 2015; 2018a; 2018b especially focuses on Nietzsche’s attack on moral fanaticism such as that of Rousseau. For a more general study on how a certain kind of philosophising can serve as an antidote against fanaticism see Passmore 2013.

⁶⁴² Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. See also Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁶⁴³ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. See also Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming;

Enlightenment sceptical tradition.⁶⁴⁴ In contrast to previous studies, in this chapter I explore Nietzsche's Enlightenment account of conviction in the middle writings, highlighting the differences with his late account of fanaticism, when he becomes suspicious and even critical of the Enlightenment project.⁶⁴⁵ I show that the antithesis between a sceptical practice of philosophy and fanaticism is one of the most important senses of scepticism in his middle and late writings. As we will see in the Conclusion, indeed, this sense of scepticism can help us to understand Nietzsche's enigmatic claim in the *Anti-Christ* that Zarathustra is a sceptic. Moreover, I explore the antithesis between intellectual justice and conviction in chapter 9 of *HH*, highlighting the link between the former and scepticism. Intellectual justice, I suggest, requires the use of suspension of judgment as a weapon or antidote against the rashness inherent in fanaticism. Finally, I also show that, for Nietzsche, scepticism itself can degenerate into a form of fanaticism

5.1 The Antithesis Between Scepticism and Fanaticism

In paragraph 54 of the *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche expressly places scepticism in antithesis to conviction and fanaticism. Here, scepticism is construed as 'the freedom from every sort of conviction' or the ability 'to see freely' which is necessary for greatness of spirit.⁶⁴⁶ This ability, for Nietzsche, is a sign or proof of psychological strength – it is the ability, as we will see shortly, to do without the need to believe that in aphorism 347 of *The Gay Science* is associated with a psychological weakness. In A 54, Nietzsche goes on to say, '[c]onvictions are prisons. [People with convictions] do not see far enough, they do not see *beneath* themselves. [...] [They] have a pathologically conditioned optics, which makes them into fanatics'. People with convictions are constrained or unfree spirits in that they are unable to see many things beyond their 'strict and necessary optic', especially they are unable to fairly consider views in conflict with their own. Their prison-like optics are even associated with a pathological condition: for the late Nietzsche,

⁶⁴⁴ See Section 2.4.

⁶⁴⁵ On the reversal of Nietzsche's attitude towards the Enlightenment between his middle and late writings see, especially, Garrard 2008; Lampert 2017, pp. 148-153.

⁶⁴⁶ Nietzsche also writes that great spirits will allow themselves convictions 'under certain circumstances. Conviction as a *means*: there are many things that can be achieved only by means of conviction'. He suggests that they would use convictions and use them up without subordinating themselves to them. It is not entirely clear what these uses might be. One might speculate that great spirits, faced with the task of the revaluation of values, would use convictions rhetorically to convince people because, as Nietzsche notes, 'humanity would rather see gestures than listen to reasons' (A 54).

indeed, fanaticism is first and foremost the expression of a fundamental weakness or disease of the psyche.

In GS 347, Nietzsche traces the need for faith back to a psychological weakness.⁶⁴⁷ In this aphorism, fanaticism, as a strong – indeed as the strongest – attachment to one’s beliefs, is construed as the only form of strength that weak people can allow themselves. This is, for Nietzsche, a particularly perverted form of strength: the entire constellation of drives (points of views and feelings), which for Nietzsche constitute what we call ‘the self’, is subjugated by a single drive to the detriment of all the others. In this sense, according to Nietzsche’s diagnosis, fanaticism is pathological form of strength arising from weakness: fanatics’ unwavering commitment to a single point of view and feeling originates from the hypertrophic need to cling to their conviction and from the incapacity to function without it.⁶⁴⁸

Fanatics, Nietzsche continues in A 54, lack commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience; and, therefore, they are the antagonists of sceptics, free spirits,⁶⁴⁹ and other truthful people – as well as of the truth. In A 55, Nietzsche directly links the fanatical optic to self-deception, too: ultimately, he suggests, fanatics are unable or unfree to see many things because they do not want to see what might shake their conviction – which, as we have just seen, they need in order to function well due to their psychological weakness.

In the fifth book of GS, Nietzsche opposes the mistrust inherent in scientific enquiry to convictions:

In science convictions have no rights of citizenship. [...] Only when they decide to descend to the modesty of hypotheses, of a provisional experimental point of view, of a regulative fiction, they may be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge – though always with the restriction that they remain under police supervision, under the police of mistrust.⁶⁵⁰ – But does this not mean, if you consider it more precisely, that a conviction may obtain admission in science only when it *ceases* to be a conviction? (GS 344)

Although in the late writings Nietzsche becomes suspicious of science and the unconditional will to truth, and although in GS 344 he even suggests that science itself might rest upon the conviction that truth is needed at all costs, in 1887 he still values scientific enquiry for promoting ‘the police of mistrust’ in order to prevent and combat fanaticism. As we saw in Chapter 2, the mistrust promoted by science is at the centre of Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy. In this section, I aim to show that we find the antithesis between scepticism and fanaticism already and fully at work in

⁶⁴⁷ I touched upon this fundamental aphorism in Sections 2.2 and 3.2. I will return to it in the Conclusion.

⁶⁴⁸ See Reginster 2013.

⁶⁴⁹ See also GS 347.

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. HH 635; WS 145.

the middle writings, especially in the context of Nietzsche's Enlightenment-inspired critique of convictions in the ninth book of *Human, All Too Human*.

In a recent article, Paul Katsafanas analytically distinguishes three features of what he calls the 'Enlightenment Account of Fanaticism':⁶⁵¹

1. Unwavering commitment to an ideal.
2. Unwillingness to subject the ideal (or its premises) to rational critique
3. The presumption of a non-rational sanction for the ideal (or its premises).⁶⁵²

Katsafanas delves into the second feature, highlighting an important sense in which fanaticism – at least as conceived by Enlightenment thinkers – is opposed to a form of scepticism: for the fanatic, ideals are '[u]nquestionable: They present themselves as not to be doubted, critiqued, or weighed against other values'.⁶⁵³ The Enlightenment account individuated by Katsafanas, I think, can help us to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche's Enlightenment-inspired account of conviction.

Nietzsche defines conviction (*Überzeugung*) as 'the belief [*Glaube*] that we possess the absolute truth about some specific point of knowledge' (HH 630). The form of belief or faith inherent in conviction does not primarily concern the content of an opinion but rather the manner of commitment to it. It is a dangerously hypertrophic form of *Glaube*, that is, '[h]abituation to spiritual principles without reason' (HH 226). In correspondence with the first feature of the Enlightenment account presented by Katsafanas, conviction is described as an unwavering 'belief in opinions' (HH 630) that takes the form of an (unreasonable) obligation or loyalty to one's opinions and more specifically to one's errors (HH 629).⁶⁵⁴ Conviction is further

⁶⁵¹ Katsafanas 2019, p. 7. In particular, Katsafanas refers to Lock, Hume, Shaftesbury, and Kant (pp. 5-9).

⁶⁵² Katsafanas 2019 argues that the account of fanaticism provided by Enlightenment thinkers captures a particular type of rational failing. According to Katsafanas, the Enlightenment account of fanaticism fails to fully or adequately capture a number of practical failings, such as intolerance and violent behaviour, that we ordinarily attribute to fanatics. Katsafanas, then, attempts to supplement the Enlightenment account with four additional features: '(4) Sacred values: The individual adopts one or more sacred values', which are inviolable, unquestionable, and associated with characteristic emotions (p. 12); '(5) Fragility of the self: The agent needs to treat a value as sacred in order to preserve unity of the self (p. 13); '(6) Fragility of the value: The value's status is taken to be threatened when it is not widely accepted' (p. 14); '(7) Group identity: The fanatic identifies himself with a group, where this group is defined by shared commitment to a sacred value' (p. 16). Katsafanas takes (5) from Nietzsche's analysis of the need to believe in GS 347. See also Reginster 2003. In contrast to Katsafanas and Reginster, I think, in the middle writings – excluding the fifth book of *The Gay Science* – Nietzsche's account of conviction is very similar to the Enlightenment account in that it largely describes fanaticism as a rational defect.

⁶⁵³ Katsafanas 2019, p. 12.

⁶⁵⁴ Reginster 2013 specifies that 'Nietzsche distinguishes "conviction [*Überzeugung*]" from "opinion [*Meinung*]". "*Meinung*" may be used to designate a belief that remains open to revision (as in some uses of the phrase "I think")

described as ‘a state of blind madness that [enchants] us’, which is generated by inflamed passions such as ‘wrath’, ‘vengefulness’, and ‘enthusiastic devotion’ (HH 629).

Nietzsche considers conviction a largely ‘unscientific or half-scientific’ manner of commitment to one’s opinions which expresses a form of dogmatism and can even degenerate into the most extreme fanaticism (HH 630).⁶⁵⁵ ‘Convictions’, he states, ‘are more dangerous enemies of truth than are lies’ (HH 483).⁶⁵⁶ This maxim gives us an idea of the importance of Nietzsche’s campaign against conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. Convictions are arguably *the* principal enemies or critical targets of free-spirited philosophy. On the positive side, this maxim suggests that a genuine sense of truth needs an aversion to convictions – even more than an aversion to lies. (This is an important sense in which, for Nietzsche, free-spirited philosophy is truth directed.) But why are convictions more dangerous than lies with respect to truth? To lie, in this context, is meant generally as the more or less intentional act of not telling the truth.⁶⁵⁷ In a posthumous fragment from the middle period, Nietzsche observes that at least ‘intentional dissimulation rests upon [...] a sense of honesty towards oneself’ (NF-1880,6[232]).⁶⁵⁸ In contrast, to have a conviction is to form a doxastic commitment that involves error, self-deception, and emotional excess; and that may even result in violence. For this reason, Nietzsche identifies not the liars but people of convictions or fanatics, who ‘[advocate] opinions violently in [their] words and actions’, as the ‘[enemies] of our present-day culture’ (HH 633).

In what is one of the few contributions dealing with Nietzsche on fanaticism, Bernard Reginster rightly points out that Nietzsche defines freedom of spirit in contrast to fanaticism.⁶⁵⁹ Reginster’s major claim is that for Nietzsche fanaticism is less an intellectual defect, such as a defective commitment to truth and truthfulness, than it is a symptom of psychological weakness.⁶⁶⁰ As we have seen, this interpretation is certainly accurate with respect to Nietzsche’s account of fanaticism in his late writings; however, I think, Reginster excessively undervalues the primary

or “I believe”). By contrast, ‘*Überzeugung*’ designates a belief not open to revision, as so refers to a form of psychological certainty. Nietzsche describes conviction as an “unconditional” *attitude*, distinguished by its “rigidity” [GS 375; GM 3.24; A 54]. Furthermore, his analysis indicates that he conceives of it as a form of psychological certainty that is not based on (rationally appropriate) epistemic considerations’ (p. 442).

⁶⁵⁵ By ‘half-scientific’ Nietzsche means that even science and philosophy are not immune from conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism.

⁶⁵⁶ Nietzsche removes this distinction in *The Anti-Christ*, claiming that lies are in fact just embryonic forms of convictions (A 55).

⁶⁵⁷ See also HH 54.

⁶⁵⁸ My translation. As Reginster 2013 notes, ‘unlike the fanatic, the liar must retain an appreciation of the correct standards of epistemic rationality’ (p. 445).

⁶⁵⁹ Reginster 2003.

⁶⁶⁰ See also Katsafanas 2019, p. 13.

role that truth and truthfulness play in Nietzsche's Enlightenment-inspired critique of fanaticism in his middle writings.⁶⁶¹ Although – as we will see shortly – also in these writings Nietzsche traces the origin of convictions back to a psychological need, I contend, he strongly condemns fanaticism for its being an intellectual defect or vice – that it is a failing of the mind.⁶⁶² After all, in HH convictions are construed as enemies of truth and free spirits are distinguished from constrained spirits of all kind (such as people of convictions, true believers, dogmatic thinkers, and fanatics) on account of the former ones' commitment to truthfulness, in the form of intellectual honesty and conscience: free minds, who are animated by 'the spirit of truthful inquiry', demand reasons, whereas constrained minds demand faith (HH 225). Moreover, Reginster fails to bring out the key role played by scepticism in the opposition Nietzsche sets between freedom of spirit and fanaticism both in the middle and late writings. Keith Ansell-Pearson recently notes that 'in his middle writings Nietzsche aligns himself with an Enlightenment project of deploying scepticism as a philosophical tool [...] to combat fanaticism'.⁶⁶³ In what follows, I aim to highlight the senses in which scepticism is in antithesis to fanaticism in his middle writings and how and why for Nietzsche scepticism can be used as a weapon or antidote against fanaticism.

Adopting his historical-psychological approach, Nietzsche examines how convictions arise in order to reveal their intellectually suspicious, if not completely blameworthy, nature (HH 629). The hypothesis he proposes is that convictions arise from the combined action of the passions and of what he calls '*laziness of spirit*' (HH 637).⁶⁶⁴

First, opinions grow from the passions, especially the inflamed ones, which rush us into forming premature opinions.⁶⁶⁵ In contrast to scientific thinkers, Nietzsche states, '[w]hat it really means for [non-scientific people] to have an opinion is [...] to be fanatical about it and henceforth to set their heart upon it as a conviction. When something is unexplained, they become ardent for the first idea to occur to them that looks like an explanation for it: from which, especially in the field of politics, the most awful consequences continually ensue' (HH 635).⁶⁶⁶ As in GS 344,

⁶⁶¹ Reginster 2013.

⁶⁶² For example, Nietzsche notes that conviction is based on three errors or 'childish presuppositions': 'that there are absolute truths; likewise, that perfect methods have been found for attaining them: finally, that everyone who has convictions makes use of these perfect methods. All three assertions immediately prove that someone with convictions is not a person of scientific thought' (HH 630).

⁶⁶³ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming. See also Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming;

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. SE §1, pp. 171-173.

⁶⁶⁵ On the action of the passions on actions see HH 61.

⁶⁶⁶ On a form of political thinking that is, instead, opposed to fanaticism see WS 299. I will return on this aphorism Section 5.2.

in HH 635, too, Nietzsche opposes fanaticism to the ‘instinct of mistrust’, together with the sceptical attitude of circumspection, developed through a scientific way of thinking.⁶⁶⁷ This passage suggests that in part the intellectual defect contained in fanatical stances is an rashness of the mind – that is, an incapacity to defer conclusion and wait for a proper explanation of things. Fanaticism arises from an intellectual failure in the philological art of reading slowly and well; it is, then, opposed to the methodical use of *ephexis* or suspension which, as we saw in Section 2.1, Nietzsche promotes as the model for rigorous and scientific thinking.⁶⁶⁸ We will see shortly that in his middle writings Nietzsche recommends forms of suspension of judgment as weapons or antidotes against fanaticism.

In conviction not only are opinions rashly and inaccurately formed under the pressure of the passions, but they also remain inextricably intertwined with them.⁶⁶⁹ Another important component of conviction is indeed an excessive passionate or emotional investment in opinions (HH 629). Nietzsche is principally critical of the passions because he sees in them a potential threat to rigorous thinking, to mental health, and to social stability: on the intellectual side, extreme emotions can engender misguided, erroneous ways of thinking; on the practical side, they can cause mental troubles and even violent actions, jeopardising both individual and social tranquillity.⁶⁷⁰

In contrast, in HH Nietzsche favours a largely dispassionate mode of thinking in the context of his therapeutic ambition of cooling down the human mind:⁶⁷¹ ‘we [free-minded philosophers] have to conjure up the spirit of science, which makes us on the whole somewhat colder and more sceptical, and in particular, cools down the scorching stream of a faith in final,

⁶⁶⁷ See Section 2.1.

⁶⁶⁸ It seems that, for Nietzsche, fanaticism originates in the same psychological-mental operation which, as we saw in Section 4.1, is at the basis of religious and metaphysical explanation. See NF 1876,19[107]; HH 13.

⁶⁶⁹ According to Nietzsche, there may be also particularly dangerous convictions which arise from the passions but are later held in ‘coldness and sobriety’ (HH 629).

⁶⁷⁰ For example, in WS 221 Nietzsche criticises the French revolution for its violence and ardent crave for changing the world abruptly. The violence of the French revolution, he observes, is not a direct outcome of the Enlightenment but a fanatical perversion of it, which ‘became flesh and spirit in Rousseau’. According to his reception, the Enlightenment is ‘so fundamentally alien’ to revolutionary stances, to their violent and abrupt nature. Nietzsche, then, seeks to appropriate the liberating and illuminating work of the Enlightenment, purifying it from revolutionary, violent, and fanatical stances. In spite of his anti-revolutionary stance Nietzsche is not a conservatist, in that he does not wish to conserve or preserve the socio-cultural-moral order; rather, as Ansell-Pearson 2018a notes, ‘[h]is preference is for slow and diligent intellectual work, involving a careful working through of problems that are both individual and social, and he envisages transformations taking place over a long *durée*’ (p. 44).

⁶⁷¹ See Ansell-Pearson 2018a, pp. 17-45. Keith Ansell-Pearson also notes that starting from the second volume of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche re-evaluates the passions – at least some of them and in moderate doses – (p. 34) and that that in *Dawn* he even construes the search of knowledge as a passion – the passion of knowledge (pp. 63-86).

definitive truths that has become so fierce, principally due to Christianity' (HH 244). In his campaign against fanaticism, Nietzsche contrasts the cooling scepticism produced by scientific enquiry with the overheated spirit of modernity which is prone to mental and emotional excess. Christianity, according to Nietzsche's diagnosis, is principally responsible for overheating the modern spirit because it has made earthly happiness, eternal salvation, and the whole human life dependent upon the belief or faith in absolute truths – such as in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul:

one wanted to be right because one thought that one *had* to be right. Letting one's belief be torn away perhaps meant putting one's eternal salvation in question. In a matter of such extreme importance, the "will" was all too audibly the prompter of the intellect. The presumption of every believer of every persuasion was that he *could* not be refuted.⁶⁷² (HH 630)

The sceptical attitude cultivated through the practice of free-spirited philosophy, in concert with scientific enquiry, thus, functions as a weapon or antidote against fanaticism, cooling the fiery passions and, in this way, correcting the intellectual defect largely caused by them. Rashness of the mind, for Nietzsche, is avoided and defused by using *ephexis* or suspension of judgment as a method for thinking and enquiring well, exercising in the sceptical virtues of mistrust, circumspection, caution, and modesty – and, as we will see shortly, intellectual justice.

Second and in addition to the passions, Nietzsche claims that '*laziness of spirit* allows opinions to harden into *convictions*' (HH 637). This is key to understand the action of scepticism against fanaticism. Laziness or inertia of spirit is construed as another intellectual defect, along with rashness, contained in conviction and may be explained as an intellectual tendency to avoid the effort to seek genuine evidence or reasons for or against one's opinions. Thus explained, spiritual inertia stands in direct opposition to freedom of spirit, whose commitment to 'truthful inquiry' demands reasons (HH 225); it stands in direct opposition to the intellectual conscience, too, which – as we saw in Section 3.2 – finds it contemptible not to take such an effort (GS 2). It is this intellectual laziness that solidifies a rushed opinion, arisen out of passion and charged with a heavy emotional load, into a conviction. A lazy mind is easily satisfied with the first explanation urged by the force of the passions. Ultimately, it is not a rigorous intellectual effort but passion that pushes and fanatically attaches the mind to an opinion.⁶⁷³ This is one of the reasons why, as

⁶⁷² Nietzsche construes fanaticism, especially that related to Christianity, as an instance of wishful – or 'wilful' – thinking which originates in a psychological need and an excessive religious sensibility.

⁶⁷³ For Nietzsche a certain laziness of spirit is characteristic of less contemplative human beings, especially of those living in the modern restlessness of a tremendous acceleration of life (HH 282, 285). These active, busy people – among whom Nietzsche includes scholars (HH 284) – are inclined to remain true to their convictions: they 'will never examine the idea itself, [they have] no time anymore for that; it goes against [their] interests to consider it discussable at all' (HH 511). But laziness of spirit, according to Nietzsche, may take a more convoluted form, too –

we will see shortly, fanatical commitments are so resistant to rational critique and doubt. Moreover, it is important to note, inertia of spirit also stands in direct opposition to the pathos of sceptical, zetetic search which ‘does not grow weary of relearning and examining anew (HH 633). Fanaticism, then, is in antithesis to the activities of critical (re)examination and continuous investigation which, as we saw in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, for Nietzsche lie at the centre of a genuine commitment to scepticism.

Nietzsche’s hypothesis concerning the origin of convictions highlights that the strong – indeed unconditional – nature of dogmatic and fanatical commitments to certain opinions is caused by two intellectual defects or vices, namely, rashness and laziness, in cooperation with the demands of passions and psychological needs. Purifying these commitments from intellectual errors, Nietzsche concludes, ‘what remains is the *strength* of feeling, and this guarantees nothing with respect to knowledge except its own strength, just as a strong belief demonstrates only its strength, not the truth of what is believed’ (HH 15).⁶⁷⁴

Here, Nietzsche’s account of conviction intersects the second and third features of the Enlightenment account of fanaticism presented by Katsafanas. Laziness of the spirit assumes the form of an unwillingness to subject opinions to genuine critique and doubt. Nietzsche spells this out in *Dawn*, analysing the fanaticism involved in religious people’s experience of divine revelation: in this experience, one ‘withdraws [one’s] opinion from critique, indeed from doubt, one makes it holy’ (D 62). Not only fanatics – especially of the religious kind – do not take the genuine intellectual effort to criticise and doubt their beliefs, but their commitment to these beliefs is so strong that it does not waver in front of contrary reasons or evidence.

‘The Enlightenment thinkers’, Katsafanas specifies, ‘emphasize that the fanatic refuses to entertain doubt *for a particular reason*: He takes himself to be in possession of a distinctive type of ground for his belief; specifically, a ground that the Enlightenment thinkers judge to be non-

one that, as we saw in Section 3.4, is associated with an only half-scientific way of thinking and with a subtler obscurantism. Even highly contemplative human beings, in Nietzsche’s view, may in a sense lapse into spiritual inertia. In particular, Nietzsche has in mind traditional metaphysicians and theologians who do make the intellectual effort to actively search for reasons in support of their beliefs. These thinkers for Nietzsche are dogmatic and lazy-minded because, ultimately, they avoid the intellectual effort to honestly consider some beliefs – such as the beliefs in the existence of a benevolent God and of an immortal soul – to be disputable (HH 131; MOM 12). These beliefs, in Nietzsche’s hypothesis, arise from passions such as the fear of death and need (HH 110) – rather than from conclusive proof (HH 27, 110, 113; MOM 12; D 501) – and are emotionally associated with ‘metaphysical hopes’ concerning the afterlife (HH 131). Beliefs such as these are therefore un-believable if a thinker is genuinely guided by a Nietzschean intellectual conscience. In spite of this, Nietzsche observes, these beliefs tend to be solidified in convictions, and a commitment to them may easily take dogmatic and even fanatical forms. In this sense, for Nietzsche, contemplative human beings, too, are not immune from intellectual laziness: these beliefs remain unquestioned, dogmatic, and even fanatical presuppositions of their thinking, for they need or want to believe in them.

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. GS 347; GM 3.24; TI ‘Skirmishes’ 12.

rational'.⁶⁷⁵ In a similar fashion, Nietzsche notes, 'if the objections proved extremely strong it still remained possible for [the believer] to malign reason and perhaps even to plant the "*credo quia absurdum est*"⁶⁷⁶ as the banner of the most extreme fanaticism' (HH 630). In the most extreme cases, fanaticism overpowers scepticism, critical reason, and the intellectual conscience; in its most extreme forms, it even redirects doubt into reason itself, leading to the abandonment of rationality altogether. In this way, not only are fanatics unwilling to criticise and doubt their opinions, but they are also completely immune to criticism and scepticism. They have the presumption that their convictions are justified by a higher authority than critical reason or, according to Nietzsche's terminology, than the intellectual conscience. In HH 226, Nietzsche explains conviction in terms of a preference for an unconditional surrender to various forms of non-strictly rational authority such as faith and tradition.

A dangerous one-sidedness, then, governs the fanatical mind: fanatics are ready to sacrifice their intellectual conscience, all their other opinions, and even their own life to their strong, unwavering commitment.⁶⁷⁷ This fanatical mind, for Nietzsche, is linked to a specific type of personality exacerbating the so-called 'strength of character' which is typical of constrained spirits and spurs one to 'energetic action':

Someone with strength of character lacks any knowledge of the many possibilities for action and the many directions it can take; his intellect is unfree, constrained, because in any given case it indicates perhaps only two possibilities to him; he must by necessity choose between them in a way that conforms to his whole nature, and he does this easily because he does not have to choose among fifty possibilities. (HH 228)

The fanatical mind is a specific type of constrained spirit, one that is one-sided, unfree, and constrained to the utmost degree: 'To see just *one* thing, to find in it the sole motive for action, the judge of all other actions, is what makes [...] a fanatic – therefore, dexterity in measuring with

⁶⁷⁵ Katsafanas 2019, p. 8. Katsafanas specifies that 'Strictly speaking, the Enlightenment account is not committed to the claim that *unwillingness to doubt* is always problematic. After all, it might be perfectly rational to refuse to doubt that triangles have three sides...' (p. 8). As seen in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, for Nietzsche, although there are illegitimate and non-genuine forms of doubt, unwillingness to subject one's belief to critique and doubt remains a form of conviction. In affinity with Diderot, Nietzsche considers the sceptical commitment to a continuous mode of investigation to be compatible with holding certain beliefs: the search for truth has nothing to lose by doubt, critical (re)examination and further investigation.

⁶⁷⁶ See Section 3.4.

⁶⁷⁷ Interestingly, Nietzsche links this fanatical surrendering with 'a sort of remorseful conscience' which, in contrast to the intellectual conscience, considers it contemptible not to believe in conformity with these forms of authority (HH 631). Fanatics' remorseful conscience can be so strong that it warrants any sacrifice, in extreme cases even the sacrifice of their own life: 'Those countless human beings who sacrificed themselves for their convictions believed that they were doing it for the absolute truth' (HH 630). Nietzsche wants to clarify that these fanatics were wrong: they did not sacrifice themselves for the truth, as they so strongly believed, but for their unwavering commitment to their opinions – which, ironically, turned out to be erroneous.

a single measuring stick' (WS 296). This is why fanatical actions acquire virtually inexhaustible energy (MOM 226) – to the point of violence. Fanatics unwaveringly committed to a single point of view are unable to comprehend and tolerate alternative views, generating a potentially violent conflict (HH 632). In contrast, 'the free spirit [who has knowledge of the many possibilities for actions] is always weak, especially in action' (HH 230) – and their weakness in action is associated to a 'light scepticism' in thinking (NF-1876,17[93]).

It should be noted that, in line with the Enlightenment tradition, Nietzsche wants to warn us against the dangerous practical consequences of fanaticism, too: much of violence in history, he observes, is provoked by the conflict of convictions and not simply by conflicting opinions (HH 630). Nietzsche implies that conflicting opinions can in fact coexist more or less peacefully; and, as we saw in Section 1.2, he even regards the coexistence and comparison of conflicting views as a sceptical characteristic of modernity (HH 23), recommending that we moderns retrieve and cultivate the capacity to ponder divergent views, rather than limiting ourselves to have a hateful aversion to them (HH 282).

In our 'sceptical age', Nietzsche observes, there is no room for more or less extreme forms of fanaticism, whether religious or not (WS 158). In the 'age of comparison' (HH 23), as we have seen, 'contending dogmas and skepticism now speak too powerfully, too loudly' (HH 261); 'rigorous methods of inquiry have disseminated enough mistrust and caution that everyone who advocates opinions violently in his words and actions [that is, every fanatic] is felt to be an enemy of our present-day culture, or at least a backward person' (HH 633). The majority of 'cultivated people', for Nietzsche, 'still desires convictions and nothing but convictions from a thinker', and thinkers who present themselves as geniuses, such as Schopenhauer, are nothing but '[enemies] of truth, however much [they] might believe to be its suitor[s]' (HH 635). In opposition to this fanatic genius, Nietzsche introduces the figure of the genius of justice (HH 636) – a type of thinker more suitable for the modern sceptical age. In the following section, I analyse Nietzsche's characterisation of the genius of justice or the fair-minded thinker. This type of thinker embodies the virtue of intellectual justice or fairmindedness which, on my reading, is one of the key intellectual virtues Nietzsche promotes in the middle writings to combat fanaticism.

5.2 Scepticism and the Intellectual Virtue of Justice as Antidotes Against Fanaticism

We saw that in A 54 Nietzsche explicitly places scepticism in antithesis to conviction; we also saw that this antithesis is at work also in GS 344 (1887) and in the middle writings, particularly in the

ninth chapter of *Human, All Too Human*. What is interesting to note is that in the series of aphorisms under the title ‘*Of conviction and justice*’ (HH 629-637) Nietzsche, in fact, primarily places *justice* in opposition to conviction and not scepticism or mistrust. What is, then, the link between scepticism and justice? In what follows, I suggest, scepticism is linked with a form of justice in its antithesis to conviction and fanaticism. But in the first place, what kind of justice does Nietzsche have in mind here? As will become clear, in these aphorisms he is not discussing the moral and political concept of justice; rather, he is concerned with intellectual justice or fairmindedness. In this context, justice is construed as an intellectual or even epistemic virtue inherent in the intellectual conscience alongside honesty (WS 212).⁶⁷⁸

This can be best seen in HH 636 where Nietzsche introduces the figure of the ‘genius of justice’ or the fair-minded thinker as an opponent of conviction:

There is also, to be sure, a quite different species of genius, that of justice; and I cannot resolve myself to rate this kind lower than any other sort of philosophical, political, or artistic genius. [1] Its style is to avoid with heartfelt indignation everything that blinds or confuses the judgment of things; [2] it is in consequence an *opponent of convictions*, for it wants to give everything its due, whether it be something living or dead, real or imagined - [3] and for that reason it must perceive things clearly; hence, it places everything in the best light and goes over with a careful eye. [4] In the end, it will give, even to its opponent, blind or short-sighted ‘conviction’ [...], what is due to conviction - for the sake of truth. (HH 636)

Curiously, in HH 636 Nietzsche distinguishes the philosophical genius from the genius of justice,⁶⁷⁹ but already in *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, he states that ‘the final difference between philosophical minds and the others would be that the former want *to be just*; the latter want to be *judges*’ (MOM 33). I will return to MOM 33 because here Nietzsche importantly links philosophical justice with a form of suspension of judgment and accuses Schopenhauer - the judge of life - of lacking the intellectual justice proper to a genuinely philosophical mind. For now, let me focus on the four characteristics of the genius of justice in HH 636.

(2) The genius of justice is characterised as an opponent of convictions in that it wants to do justice to things. Here, ‘things (*Dinge*)’ are not reducible to mere physical objects (*Gegenstände*); rather, the former ones may be ‘something living or dead, real or imagined’, including people, ideals, and more in general things that we think, feel, and do. On the one hand, justice is opposed to conviction because it wants to treat things justly or fairly; on the other, conviction is construed as a form of intellectual injustice because it ‘makes us unjust’ (HH 637).

⁶⁷⁸ On Nietzsche’s treatment of the theme of justice see Sedgwick 2013. Peter Sedgwick especially explores the ethical dimensions of justice, paying only very limited attention to Nietzsche’s construal of justice as an intellectual virtue in the middle writings. See Sedgwick 2013, p. 75.

⁶⁷⁹ See also HH 618.

(1) In their oppositions to conviction, fair-minded thinkers want to avoid everything that blinds or confuses their judgment of things. Convictions, as we have seen, contain at least two intellectual defects that completely blind or confuse our judgment: the inflamed passions rush us to inaccurate explanations of things and laziness of the mind prevents us from carefully examining our beliefs. These intellectual defects or vices are to be understood not only as errors and instances of self-deception or lack of honesty but also as intellectual injustices.

Avoiding all of this, for the genius of justice, is a matter of ‘heartfelt indignation’. In this way, Nietzsche links fairmindedness to the intellectual conscience: conviction and other intellectual injustices ought to be avoided and condemned as vicious and blameworthy stances of the mind.⁶⁸⁰ (3) In order to do justice to things, the fair mind must perceive things clearly; it must make the effort to place everything in the best light as well as to place itself in the best position for carefully looking at things. (4) Importantly, Nietzsche explicitly claims that the fair-minded thinker wants to do justice to things – and even to convictions⁶⁸¹ – ‘for the sake of truth’: intellectual justice, like honesty, implies some kind of respect for truth – at least as avoidance of conviction.

The figure of the genius of justice has a central role in the context of Nietzsche’s major – and deliberately provocative – claim HH 629 that to be just ‘we *must* be traitors, act unfaithfully, forsake our ideals again and again’. Intellectual justice implies the act of changing our opinions about things or at least entertaining the possibility of it without regarding this change as a painful and blameworthy betrayal (HH 629). In contrast to people true to their convictions, then, fair-minded thinkers ought to remain open to change in order to do full justice to things. In a highly metaphorical language, Nietzsche depicts justice as ‘the only goddess that we acknowledge above ourselves’ (HH 637), linking it to therapeutic task of cooling down the human mind: ‘Redeemed from the fire [of the passions], driven by the spirit, we then stride from opinion to opinion, through the shifting of parties, as noble betrayers of all the things that can ever be betrayed – and yet without any feeling of guilt’ (HH 637).⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. MOM 26; GS 2.

⁶⁸¹ But what does it mean to do justice even to conviction – that is, to the opponent of fairmindedness and the enemy of truth? Abbey 2020 notes that as part of its opposition to conviction, ‘the genius will give conviction their place [...] by observing some of the benefits they have yielded in the past’ (p. 145). Abbey goes on to say that, in the midst of his criticism of conviction Nietzsche himself tries to do justice to it in HH 637 by acknowledging that ‘the methodical search of truth is the result of those ages in which convictions were feuding with one another’ Abbey 2020, pp. 153-154.

⁶⁸² As I argued in Section 2.3, in *Human, All Too Human* the intellectual wandering from opinion to opinion does not exclude the possibility of certainty and precisely measure possibilities; what is prevented is the danger of conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism (HH 637). On the distinction between certainty and conviction see also HH 635.

Nietzsche's high esteem of the genius of justice and of virtue of fairmindedness has been largely neglected in the secondary literature.⁶⁸³ In a preparatory draft for the preface to the second edition of *HH*, Nietzsche even regards his turn from the early to middle phase of his philosophising as a search for intellectual justice: 'I was already beyond my twenties in years – when I realized what I was still entirely lacking: namely justice' (NF-1885,40[65]).⁶⁸⁴ In a notebook from the middle period Nietzsche declares that his philosophical task is fundamentally moved by 'the drive for integrity towards [himself], justice towards things' (NF-1880,6[67]).⁶⁸⁵ As Karl Jasper suggests, honesty and justice are construed as 'two kinds of truthfulness'.⁶⁸⁶ If – as we saw in Section 3.1 – the link between honesty and scepticism is well established in the secondary literature, the precise link between justice and scepticism still needs to be explored.⁶⁸⁷

As Nietzsche himself says in the fragment quoted above, honesty or integrity and justice differ on account of their directedness: honesty is a practice of truthfulness directed towards oneself; justice is a practice of truthfulness mostly directed towards things. In another notebook of the same period, Nietzsche also gives us a hint about how to understand their interaction: integrity, that is integrity towards oneself, forbids one to misjudge things (NF-1880,11[63]).

⁶⁸³ Exceptions include Jaspers 1997, pp. 204-209; Cristy 2019.

⁶⁸⁴ In reality, already in *History for Life* Nietzsche praised a form of intellectual justice as 'the rarest of all virtues' in the pursuit of truth (HL §6, p. 122): 'Only insofar as the truthful person has the unconditional will to be just is there anything great in that striving for truth that everywhere is so thoughtlessly glorified' (HL §6, p. 123). The thinker who possess the urge and strength for justice was regarded as 'the most venerable exemplar of the human species' – this seeks truth 'as the ordering, punishing judge' (HL §6, pp. 122). The principal capacity of the just thinker in the *Unfashionable Observation* is the power to judge, fairly, about the most important matters in life (HL §6, p. 123). This form of justice entails of a commitment to truthfulness but is inseparable from an act of legislation: ultimately, the judge pronounces an authoritative judgment or verdict about these matters. This latter aspect is emphasised in *Schopenhauer as Educator* where the philosopher is characterised as 'the judge of life' (SE §3, p. 194). 'The peculiar task of great thinkers', for the early Nietzsche, is 'to be legislators of the measure, mint, and weight of things' (SE §3, p. 193) – 'Philosophy is tied to the *legislation of greatness*' (NF-1872,19[83]), and the true philosopher exemplified by Schopenhauer 'seeks to establish [the] value [of existence] anew' (SE §3, p. 193). On account of this, Nietzsche distinguished the fair judge from scholars, who are busy with inconsequential knowledge, and – remarkably – from fanatics, too, who have 'the blind desire to be [...] judge[s]' without the strength and capacity for judging fairly (HL §6, p. 123). In the middle writings Nietzsche praises a different form of justice. On the one hand he continues to the link justice with a genuine commitment to truthfulness, on the other he abandons the idea that the just thinker is a judge and legislator of life.

⁶⁸⁵ In PLI 2014, pp. 3-4. In the same notebook, Nietzsche even sees a form of the will to power at work in 'our greatest justice and integrity' – connecting the latter ones to scepticism: 'scepticism just applies to all authority, we do not want to be duped [not even by ourselves]' (NF-1880,6[130], in PLI, p. 4).

⁶⁸⁶ Jaspers 1997, p. 201. Jasper alludes to the link between truthfulness and scepticism, albeit without precision: 'the passionate will to truth, in the form of an ineradicable skepticism, strives with ever renewed insistence' (p. 211); quite vaguely, he speaks of an '*Unlimited Doubt*' neglecting a number of limitations, such as the picture of life, certainty, experiment, and strength that, as I have been arguing in this thesis, Nietzsche imposes upon sceptical investigation in the course of the maturation of his philosophy. Moreover, Jaspers does not bring out the exact relation between intellectual justice and scepticism.

⁶⁸⁷ For example, Mark Alfano in his studies on Nietzsche's virtue epistemology do not include justice among the intellectual virtues promoted by Nietzsche. See Alfano 2013; 2019.

Honesty requires us to do justice to things; and failing to do justice to them would be an injustice to ourselves or more precisely to the demands of what Nietzsche calls ‘our higher self’ (HH 629).⁶⁸⁸

Nietzsche observes that in modernity, ‘[w]ith the tremendous acceleration of life, the spirit and the eye have grown accustomed to seeing and judging things partially or falsely’ (HH 282). The modern acceleration of both our active and contemplative lives, according to his observation, contributes to the spreading of intellectual injustice. In contrast, Nietzsche emphasises the need to slow down our thinking and to cultivate the ability to ponder divergent views in order to do more justice to things. Nietzsche, I suggest, promotes intellectual justice as an antidote or weapon against fanaticism, again recommending forms of suspension of judgment. We saw his uses of suspension of judgment in connection with intellectual honesty and conscience in Chapter 4, in this section I want to bring to light the largely neglected link between suspension and fairmindedness in the context of his critique of fanaticism in the middle writings.

In *Mixed Opinion and Maxims*, Nietzsche directly links intellectual justice to a form of suspension of judgment in an aphorism entitled ‘*Wanting to be just and to be judge*’ (MOM 33). Here, we find a criticism of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics-based ethics and more specifically of his judgmental stance on life. Whilst acknowledging Schopenhauer’s genius as a moralist – that is, as a great connoisseur of things human and all-too-human – Nietzsche criticises him for his belief that morality is necessarily based on the metaphysical explanation of how things ultimately and truly are. This belief, for Nietzsche, is in fact a prejudice (or a pre-judgment) that Schopenhauer shares with Christianity. This prejudice is considered a defect of intellectual justice: not only does it fail to do justice to things, but it also results in a pessimistic condemnation of earthly life. As we saw in Section 4.1, Nietzsche maintains that from a metaphysical standpoint we have no knowledge of how things are. On the contrary, Schopenhauer, like moral people (and not like the moralists), wants to issue judgments about the metaphysical meaning of human actions. While Christians judge all human actions in relation to a benevolent God, Schopenhauer does so – in an equally metaphysical way – on the basis of a blind will to live. This wanting to judge on unknown matters, as Nietzsche sees it in MOM, consists in a vicious intellectual practice which should not be mistaken for philosophy, at least of a free-spirited kind. Genuinely philosophical minds want to be just; and this commitment to intellectual justice entails a form of suspension of judgment about the metaphysical basis of ethics: ‘the philosopher therefore has to

⁶⁸⁸ See also HH 624. Cf. SE §1, pp. 171-175.

say, like Christ, “Judge not [*richtet nicht!*]”⁶⁸⁹ and the final difference between philosophical minds and the others would be that the former want to be just [*Gerecht*], the latter want to be judges [*Richter*]’ (MOM 33).

Moreover, implicitly criticising Schopenhauer’s pessimistic judgement on life, Nietzsche affirms that, to adopt a just attitude towards things, ‘it is necessary not to want to view the world as more disharmonious than it is!’ (D 4).⁶⁹⁰ Starting from HH, indeed, Nietzsche sees in the very attempt to judge the value of life a form of intellectual injustice: ‘All judgments concerning the value of life are illogically developed and are therefore unjust’ (HH 32). This is for a number of reasons. This kind of judgment, which has the pretention to reach a total appraisal of the value of life, cannot be based on sufficiently complete evidence; ‘all assessments are premature [that is, unjust] and have to be so’ (HH 32). This insufficient evidence, in addition, is gathered from the point of view of a particular perspective on life which, as we saw in Section 1.3, for Nietzsche, is largely influenced by different temperaments and external circumstances. Finally, not only are evaluating subjects partial – and therefore unjust – judges, but they do not even have a fixed evaluative perspective: they ‘have moods and waverings’ which could influence their judgment about the value life has for them in a specific moment (HH 32).

‘Perhaps’, Nietzsche suggests, ‘it follows from all this that we should not judge at all’ (HH 32). This, however, is impossible for Nietzsche: ‘if we could only live without appraising, without aversion and attraction’ (HH 32). In the matter of the value of life ‘completely referring from judgment is very difficult’ (HH 371); and, thus, we are necessarily unjust beings – our judgments do not and cannot do full justice to things. Error and a degree of intellectual injustice are necessary for life (HH 33).⁶⁹¹

As we saw in Chapter 4, it is important to bear in mind that suspension is not the final goal or end of Nietzsche’s philosophy. On other matters (such as the value of life), in his view, suspension is neither possible nor fully desirable. On most matters, Nietzsche recommends suspension of judgment as an antidote or weapon against fanaticism in order to promote fairmindedness. In these matters, suspension is aimed at combatting intellectual rashness and, in this way, at making less partial or false judgments about things.

⁶⁸⁹ Nietzsche is alluding to the famous verse ‘Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged’ in the *New Testament* (Matthew 7:1).

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. HH 28.

⁶⁹¹ There is another instance of Nietzsche’s suspension of judgment in HH 101, where he recommends not to merely judge the past according to our moral standards. The withholding of moral judgment, here, is considered a virtuous intellectual practice to avoid an unfair abuse of earlier periods and an uncritical glorification of ours.

In certain cases, Nietzsche even recommends that it might be needed to practice the intellectual skills of great politicians; instead of suspending judgment, philosophical minds might need to formulate a sudden, yet approximately accurate, conclusion – even at the cost of partially sacrificing their commitment to intellectual justice: ‘To see many things, to weigh them together, to balance one against another and to formulate a sudden conclusion, a fairly certain sum from theme – that is what great politicians, generals and businessmen do: – therefore, rapidity at a sort of mental calculation’ (WS 296). Nietzsche opposes this intellectual skill to fanaticism – ‘to see just one thing, to find it the sole motive of action, the judge of all other actions’ (WS 296). In contrast to the Pyrrhonists, who – not without a certain fanaticism, as we will see shortly – recur to *epoché* as their only intellectual strategy in all cases, Nietzsche thinks that there are cases in which even a form of intellectual rashness can be practiced in order to make a judgment – even to the partial detriment of fairmindedness.

If in the first part of the middle writings intellectual justice is construed as a key virtue alongside honesty, at least starting from *The Gay Science* Nietzsche begins to impose some important limits to fairmindedness too. In short, he worries that an excessive commitment to intellectual justice could degenerate into an incapacity to make judgment and, consequently, into a standstill of the intellect and into a paralysis of the will. In GS, for Nietzsche, intellectual justice remains an important virtue but must be practiced in cooperation with the capacity to judge. The latter is considered a greater goal than fairmindedness (GS 267). Now, Nietzsche believes that ‘the weights of all things must be determined anew’ (GS 269).⁶⁹² Judiciousness is still important to fairly weigh things together, but it is practiced with a greater goal in mind: to make new evaluative judgments and re-determine the weights of all things. Hence, intellectual justice and, with it, suspension of judgment are valued in so far as they are conducive to this goal. There are two principal dangers here for Nietzsche. First, as I have mentioned, when fairmindedness gets completely stuck in suspension, hindering the capacity of making judgment, it becomes an intellectual vice. Second, wanting to determine the weights of things without a commitment to intellectual justice remains a completely unphilosophical stance which can easily degenerate into the most disagreeable fanaticism.

In GS 111, immediately after linking honesty to scepticism (GS 110), Nietzsche also links intellectual justice to suspension of judgment; this time, however, he emphasises the great danger that every sceptical tendency poses to life:

⁶⁹² See Cohen 2014, p. 47.

At bottom, every high degree of caution in making inferences and every sceptical tendency constitute a great danger for life. No living being would have survived if the opposite tendency – to affirm rather than suspend judgment, to err and *make up* things rather than wait, to assent rather than negate, to pass judgment rather than be just – had not been bred to the point where it became extraordinarily strong. (GS 111)

It is essential to pay close attention to this passage because it highlights Nietzsche's nuanced and developing position on intellectual justice and suspension of judgment across the middle writings. The fact that Nietzsche considers an excess of these sceptical tendencies dangerous, however, does not mean that he now rejects them: intellectual justice, caution, and suspension can and ought to be promoted as long as they allow and even are conducive to fair, careful judgements – at times, even at the cost of being partially unjust. In *The Anti-Christ*, as we have seen, Nietzsche still recommends us to practice philology as *ephexis* or suspension in interpretation to cultivate a more rigorous and cautious way of thinking. In contrast to theologians' '*incapacity for philology*', which easily leads them to dogmatism and fanaticism, he reaffirms the need for ephectic strategies to think and enquire well '*without* letting the desire to understand make you lose caution, patience, subtlety' (A 52).

5.3 The Fanatic of Mistrust

In the previous sections, I showed that in Nietzsche's middle and late writings scepticism is placed in antithesis to conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. More specifically, I highlighted that, for Nietzsche, scepticism serves as an intellectual and therapeutic tool against fanatical stances, correcting intellectual defects (rashness and laziness), removing unnecessary anxieties (fear of damnation), and quelling violence in opinions and actions. I drew attention to the inextricable link between intellectual justice and the sceptical practice of suspension of judgment in Nietzsche's campaign against fanaticism. We also saw that Nietzsche is well aware that the practice of philosophy itself is not immune from dangerous forms of dogmatism and fanaticism; in particular, he accuses traditional metaphysicians and Schopenhauer of being largely anti-sceptical, dogmatic, and even fanatical thinkers. In this section, I want to show that, for Nietzsche, scepticism, too, can degenerate into fanaticism. This sense of the relation between scepticism and fanaticism can be found in aphorism 213 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow* entitled '*The fanatic of mistrust and his security*', which contains an enigmatic dialogue between an old man and Pyrrho (WS).

Nietzsche's characterization of Pyrrho in WS 213 has been largely undervalued if not completely ignored in the secondary literature. For example, Richard Bett, one of the few scholars commenting on this aphorism, limits himself to only saying that '[Pyrrho] appears in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, in a peculiar little dialogue with an unnamed old man, and the connections between the ideas "Pyrrho" expresses in this dialogue and the ideas Pyrrho or the ancient skeptics really expressed, while not non-existent, are certainly pretty loose'.⁶⁹³ In her study on Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonian tradition, Jessica Berry pays no attention to the character of Pyrrho in WS 213.⁶⁹⁴ This is completely neglected also by Bernard Reginster, too, who focuses on Nietzsche and fanaticism.⁶⁹⁵ Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are among the very few commentators who take this enigmatic dialogue seriously,⁶⁹⁶ noting that here Nietzsche advances a criticism of 'the kind of scepticism which can ironically result in the thinker becoming a fanatic of mistrust'.⁶⁹⁷ In what follows, I delve into Nietzsche's characterisation of Pyrrho, considering and problematising Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's brief remark.

In WS 213, there are at least two direct references to Pyrrho's or the Pyrrhonists' practices: *peritrope* or self-refutation and *aphasia* or refraining from speech or utterance.⁶⁹⁸ By close reading this aphorism, I want to show how Nietzsche flirts with these Pyrrhonian practices. Moreover, and more importantly, I suggest that Nietzsche's Pyrrho - even though he is not a historically and philosophically accurate description of the original Pyrrho - reveals some important aspects of Nietzsche's reception, appropriation, and criticism of scepticism. I want to argue that Pyrrho has an ambivalent role in the dialogue: he is the mouthpiece of Nietzsche's own mistrust as a practice of truthfulness in opposition to fanaticism; and, simultaneously, he represents the fanatic of mistrust who, as Ansell-Pearson and Bamford correctly note, turn scepticism into a fanatical stance. My argument is based on the ambivalent, indeed contrasting, perspectives on Pyrrho developed in the dialogue. On the positive side, Pyrrho is portrayed as the champion of mistrust against fanatical modes of truth-telling; furthermore, Nietzsche makes Pyrrho say that his philosophy of laughter and silence 'would not be the worst one' (WS 213). On the negative side, Pyrrho is characterised (by the title of the aphorism and by the old man)

⁶⁹³ Bett 2000, p. 67.

⁶⁹⁴ Berry 2011.

⁶⁹⁵ Reginster 2003.

⁶⁹⁶ Another is Fornari 2011. Maria Cristina Fornari individuates in WS 213 the so-called paradox of the truthful thinker.

⁶⁹⁷ Ansell-Pearson & Bamford forthcoming. See also Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁶⁹⁸ Instead, Nietzsche seems to never refer to *epoché* or suspension of judgment.

as a fanatic himself. This reading is further supported by the title Nietzsche had thought for this aphorism in a previous draft: ‘*The sage of the future*’ (HH II, p. 513, n. 398). The contrast between the drafted and published titles could not be more striking. The drafted title attaches strongly positive connotations to Pyrrho’s attitude of mistrust, linking it to the philosopher of the future.⁶⁹⁹ The published title (in line with the old man’s accusation) seems to put Pyrrho in an unfavourable light, regarding him – with strongly negative connotations – as a fanatic: after all, as we have seen, fanaticism is *the* enemy of Nietzsche’s free-spirited philosophy.

Let me consider the dialogue. From the opening questions of the old man, we learn that Pyrrho somehow aims to offer humanity an important teaching. What is this teaching? It is a deep, unprecedented kind of mistrust: ‘– *The old man*: Do you want then to be the teacher of mistrust against the truth? – *Pyrrho*: Of mistrust, as it has never yet existed in the world of mistrust against anything and everything. It is the only path to truth’ (WS 213). In this exchange, Nietzsche ironically creates a tension between the old man’s and Pyrrho’s conceptions of mistrust: is mistrust directed against the truth, or is it the only path to truth? Are the old man and Pyrrho in disagreement? This tension can be resolved by clarifying what the old man and Pyrrho actually mean by ‘truth’. While the old man means something like a justified true belief, as becomes clear in the course of the dialogue, the kind of mistrust taught by Pyrrho is directed *against* a dogmatic and fanatical form of truth-telling: ‘nobody would dare *promise* [the truth], unless he were a fanatic’ (WS 213). In this sense, Pyrrho thus recommends to ‘resist the truth for as long as you can, out of disgust toward the one who is its advocate’ (WS 213). But in what sense is Pyrrho’s attitude of mistrust the only path to truth? On my reading, mistrust is directed at truth in the two senses I suggested in Chapter 2 – that is, as truth-searching and truth-producing. First, mistrust is directed at truth at least as an endeavour to think and enquire well, avoiding conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism. Pyrrho and Nietzsche’s mistrust is first and foremost a practice of truthfulness – towards oneself (honesty or integrity), towards things (justice), and towards others (*parrēsia*). Second, for Nietzsche, after a long, painful investigation the practice of mistrust might even ‘harvest’ or produce small truths (WS 213). It is important to note that Nietzsche’s Pyrrho is neither a negative dogmatist, who claims that things are inapprehensible, nor a Pyrrhonian sceptic who suspends judgment on all matters.⁷⁰⁰ Hence, it seems that in this aphorism Nietzsche is attributing to Pyrrho the form of mistrust which, as we have seen, is at the centre of his free-

⁶⁹⁹ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, as we will see in the Conclusion, Nietzsche will expressly establish this link, claiming that future philosophers will be in part sceptics (BGE 210).

⁷⁰⁰ On the original Pyrrho as a negative dogmatist rather than a Pyrrhonian sceptic see Bett 1997.

spirited philosophy. In the 1886 preface to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche expressly attributes this kind of deep, unprecedented suspicion to himself (HH 'Preface' §1, p. 5).

Nietzsche makes his Pyrrho perform his teaching of mistrust against fanaticism by playfully experimenting with the ancient sceptical practice of *peritrope* or self-refutation, which is largely deployed by Sextus Empiricus.⁷⁰¹ In the first half of the dialogue, Pyrrho is engaged in instigating mistrust towards his own teaching (which, as we have seen, teaches mistrust against fanatical modes of utterance and a form of truthful speaking). He wants to warn people against himself, to acknowledge all his errors, 'to expose [his] rashness, contradictions and stupidities' so that they 'will mistrust the truth that passes through my mouth' (WS 213). Paradoxically, by recommending mistrust towards his own discourse Pyrrho is, in fact, performing the very form of mistrust that he seeks to teach.⁷⁰²

The second half of the dialogue takes a different turn. The old man says that Pyrrho's 'words, too, are those of the fanatic' (WS 213). Pyrrho, who is still practicing *peritrope*, agrees with the old man, responding that he wants to be 'mistrustful of all words' (WS 213). The dialogue continues as follows: '- *The old man*: Then you must keep silent. - *Pyrrho*: I will tell people that I must keep silent and that they should mistrust my silence' (WS 213). With this, Pyrrho reaches the climax of his self-refutation, so the old man asks him whether he is withdrawing from his endeavour to teach something important to humanity. Pyrrho responds that, on the contrary, this is the most important part of his teaching. From now on the old man and Pyrrho cease to understand each other, and the latter ends up laughing in reaction to the old man's affirmations.⁷⁰³ The dialogue concludes with Pyrrho declaring that keeping silent and laughing would not be the worst kind of philosophy. Here we find a reference to a second ancient scepticism practice: *aphasia* or refraining from speech or utterance.⁷⁰⁴ This conclusion is both ambivalent and enigmatic. On the one hand, Pyrrho is regarded as fanatic on account of his wanting to mistrust *all* words. Why is this a form of fanaticism for Nietzsche? On the other, Pyrrho's last quip seems to suggest that, in spite of his alleged fanaticism, his philosophy is not the worst one. Is Nietzsche speaking through Pyrrho here? What is the philosophical significance

⁷⁰¹ On *peritrope* or self-refutation in Sextus Empiricus and Nietzsche see Conway & Ward 1992. Surprisingly, Conway and Ward do not take notice of WS 213.

⁷⁰² This paradox echoes a famous passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (I 'Of the Bestowing Virtue', §9). I will deal with this passage in the Conclusion.

⁷⁰³ According to Nietzsche, 'laughter means: being *schadenfroh* but with a good conscience' (GS 200). Walter Kaufmann notes '*schadenfroh*' is untranslatable, signifying 'taking a mischievous delight in the discomfort of another person' (GS, p. 207, n. 51). In WS 213, Pyrrho seems to be maliciously gleeful with respect to the old man. See also GS 333.

⁷⁰⁴ See Sommer 2018, p. 445. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 1931, pp. 475, 489, DL 2.9, 61, 76.

of laughter and silence?⁹ In what remains of this section and chapter, I try to answer to these questions.

Pyrrho's mistrust towards all words, I think, could be regarded as fanatical at least in three, interrelated senses. In the first place, it should be noted at different stages of his intellectual development Nietzsche himself is highly mistrustful of language, especially of its metaphysical pretensions (HH 11).⁷⁰⁵ He maintains that language can be an obstacle or even a trap for philosophy (D 47, 423) – for example, it leads us to oversimplify feelings (HH 16) or to uncritically take words for realities (HH 11; WS 5; D 115). Why, then, is Pyrrho's mistrust fanatical? First, I suggest, because it is excessive or unrestrained: he is suspicious of *all* words, even of his own. Second, this excessive mistrust expresses a certain narrowness of view: it does not genuinely consider the grounds of credibility. Third and in relation to the former two, Pyrrho is engaged in a single philosophical practice,⁷⁰⁶ applying his mistrust to all circumstances, to dogmatic and fanatic claims, as well as to the words of the old man, to all words, including his own, and even to his own wordlessness.

I now turn to Pyrrho's philosophy of laughter and silence. Here, I exclusively focus on the sceptical practice of *aphasia*.⁷⁰⁷ In the ancient sceptical tradition, language is seen with suspicion because it tends to unavoidably determine what is indeterminate (in the case of Pyrrho)⁷⁰⁸ or to conceal dogmatic opinions (in the case of the Pyrrhonists). *Aphasia* as complete silence or at least as an array of Sceptical phrases is a practice of non-assertion – that is, of avoidance any form of *phasis* or dogmatic assertions – to neither affirm nor deny anything.⁷⁰⁹ Bett sees in Nietzsche's aphoristic style in the middle writings has a significant point of kinship with this aspect of ancient scepticism (as well as with Montaigne's *Essays*).⁷¹⁰ In line with Bett, Andreas Urs Sommer notes that Nietzsche favours 'a mode of full reservation, aware of the fact that silence would perhaps be more adequate'.⁷¹¹ In line with the Pyrrhonists, in certain

⁷⁰⁵ On Nietzsche's critique and use of language see Constâncio & Branco 2011; 2012.

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. WS 296.

⁷⁰⁷ On the philosophical function of laughter (and sense of humour) in Nietzsche see Alfano 2019, pp. 216-232.

⁷⁰⁸ See Bett 1997.

⁷⁰⁹ Sextus Empiricus 2000, pp. 6-7, PH 1.13-15. See also PH 1.187-208.

⁷¹⁰ Bett 2000, p. 83.

⁷¹¹ Sommer 201, p. 442.

circumstances,⁷¹² Nietzsche seeks to avoid dogmatic utterances, making use of moderate, cautious, or hypothetical phrases typical of sceptical traditions.⁷¹³

More specifically, I suggest, forms of silence have an important, yet neglected, role in Nietzsche's philosophy. The sceptical practice of silence is presented favourably in numerous passages across his writings, I limit myself to consider only few to highlight some of Nietzsche's philosophical uses of silence. In the preface to *HH* Nietzsche in polemics with the German reception of his books writes that '[his] philosophy advises [him] to keep silent and not to ask any more; especially since in certain cases, as the proverb suggests, we only remain philosophers by keeping silent' (*HH* Preface §8). This proverb, I think, reveals an important aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical practice of silence: this is proper and even necessary in *certain* cases but should not be adopted, fanatically, in *all* cases. In the preface to the second volume of *HH* Nietzsche tells us that '[o]ne should speak only where one is not permitted to keep silent' (*HH* II Preface §1).⁷¹⁴ Silence, here, is linked to the intellectual conscience: one should avoid speaking if what one says is not required by honesty towards oneself, justice towards things, and frankness towards others (or *parrēsia*). At times, Nietzsche says, we should resist speaking and even thinking because we can hear 'behind every word the laughter of error, wishful thinking, delusion' (*D* 423). In these cases, silence is construed an antidote against falsehood, self-deception, and rashness. For instance, silence is demanded especially in relation to the attitude of indifference Nietzsche recommends to cultivate towards metaphysical questions.⁷¹⁵ Moreover, a temporary use of silence is important not to speak too soon and wait for the appropriate time to do so (*GM* II § 25). Silence can be an exercise for speaking and thinking better: 'If one remains silent for a year, one unlearns how to chatter and learns how to speak' (*D* 347). Finally, Nietzsche observes that free spirits will promote a higher form of culture as 'preparatory courageous human beings 'who know how to be silent, lonely, resolute, and content and constant in invisible activities' (*GS* 283): for example, he praises '[Epictetus]' silence or taciturnity' as one of 'the signs of the most rigorous valor' alongside 'circumspection' (*D* 546). Hence, it seems that, for Nietzsche, Pyrrho as the sage of the future or as the teacher of humanity, in contrast to Pyrrho as the fanatic of mistrust, might be able to teach us something important or at least not the worst kind of

⁷¹² In other circumstances, instead, Nietzsche prefers to use a bombastic language which is alien to Pyrrhonian scepticism.

⁷¹³ See, for example, *HH* 21. I discuss this in Chapter 4.1.

⁷¹⁴ See also *HH* II Preface 5.

⁷¹⁵ For a negative, non-philosophical use of silence in religious matters associated with Luther's fanaticism see *GS* 129.

philosophy. This teaching, I think, is a sceptical mode of teaching and learning that functions as a weapon or antidote against fanaticism. I will return to this in the Conclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to offer a contribution to the Nietzsche studies and, in particular, to the secondary literature on Nietzsche and scepticism by providing an interpretation of Nietzsche as a sceptic. In this study I have endeavoured to defend the thesis that in the middle writings Nietzsche becomes a sceptic, albeit of an idiosyncratic kind, for starting from *Human, All Too Human* he consistently defines the task of his developing philosophical projects in alliance with various forms scepticism. In my interpretative work, I aimed to provide an understanding and appreciation of the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writing and to determine the roles of scepticism in his philosophical projects. According to my interpretation, Nietzsche is an idiosyncratic sceptic: he becomes a sceptic in the middle writings; he is an eclectic sceptic in that he selects, appropriates, and transforms sceptical practices from both ancient and modern traditions; he is a selective sceptic in that he favours some forms of scepticism, while he is critical of others; but he is also not only or fully a sceptic in that at each stage of his intellectual development scepticism is not the goal or end of his various philosophical projects – he uses scepticism as a tool to achieve the constructive aims of his philosophy.

First, I have argued that taking cognizance of Nietzsche's intellectual development is of fundamental importance for understanding Nietzsche as a sceptic. I have shown that in the early writings such as the *Unfashionable Observations* Nietzsche was decisively not a sceptic: in *History for Life* and in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he believed the philosopher, as a physician of culture, had the role of warding off the dangers of scepticism to cultural health and flourishing. I have traced the reversal of Nietzsche's attitude towards scepticism between his early and middle writings, highlighting that his becoming a sceptic is largely motivated by practical-cultural reasons rather than by purely theoretical ones. Indeed, I have stressed, throughout his writings Nietzsche's concern with scepticism is closely linked to practical problems, such as psychological and cultural ones: he is primarily concerned with the practical consequences of sceptical positions – according to which areas of our knowledge of the world and of ourselves are questionable or lacking altogether – for human life, for both the individual and society. Moreover, I have shown that Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism varies, albeit less drastically, also within the middle writings in correspondence with the development of Nietzsche's philosophical projects.

Second, I have argued that there are multiple senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings: he engages with various sceptical traditions, not only with the Pyrrhonian one, selecting, appropriating and transforming different forms of scepticism, both ancient and modern, for his philosophical aims. To make better sense of Nietzsche as a sceptic I have explored Nietzsche's statements about scepticism in his middle writings and compared him with other sceptics such as the Pyrrhonists, Montaigne, Descartes, Diderot, and with thinkers that he associates with scepticism such as Epicurus and Kant. This exploration has shown that, for Nietzsche, scepticism in its various senses or forms is essential to free-spirited philosophy.

In HH, we saw, Nietzsche construes scepticism both as a truth-searching and truth-producing methodology. We saw that he promotes a number of sceptical practices, attitudes, or virtues (such as modesty, magnanimity, mistrust, circumspection, and caution) as methods for thinking and enquiring well, and – at least in first volume of HH – even for producing or discovering new empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities.

As I have highlighted, throughout his middle writings Nietzsche appropriates the ancient sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation, combining it with the constructive aims of his developing philosophical projects – with scientific discoveries and cultural edification in HH, with the attachment to the small things and the affirmation of earthly life in WS, and with experimentalism in terms of both individual and social modes of living in D and GS.

Moreover, we have seen that Nietzsche deploys and recommends various sceptical practices, both ancient and modern, such as suspension of judgment, indifference, doubt, critique, self-refutation and silence for his own philosophical goals or ends. Importantly, I have shown, in Nietzsche's writings scepticism is closely linked to intellectual honesty and conscience – as well as to intellectual justice. On the one hand, as we have seen, for Nietzsche a number of sceptical practices are entailed in a commitment to intellectual honesty and conscience; on the other, I have suggested, he favours forms of scepticism only insofar they are motivated by and promote intellectual honesty (and justice), whereas he disapproves of forms of scepticism that are not fully committed to intellectual conscience. Finally, we have seen that Nietzsche largely construes scepticism as a weapon to combat conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism – even though, as we have seen, he worries that forms of scepticism, too, might degenerate into obscurantism and fanaticism. Having shown the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's middle writings, I hope I have clarified some key aspects of his philosophical practice such as his commitment to truth and truthfulness.

Third, I have argued that Nietzsche is not only or fully a sceptic, in that scepticism is not an end in itself in his philosophy. He champions various forms of scepticism as tools to achieve

the philosophical aims of his developing philosophical projects. Although he is not only or fully a sceptic, I have contended, regarding Nietzsche as a sceptic is of fundamental importance for understanding his identity or identities as a philosopher. I shall say more about this towards the end of the Conclusion.

Even in the late writings, where his philosophy becomes more polemical and arguably more assertive than sceptical, Nietzsche still depicts his philosophical characters as sceptics: philosophers of the future are in part sceptics (BGE 209-211) and Zarathustra is a sceptic (A 54).⁷¹⁶ In what follows, I explore Nietzsche's discussion of scepticism in *Beyond Good and Evil* and his claim in *The Anti-Christ* that Zarathustra is a sceptic. This conclusive exploration is intended to demonstrate and emphasise the importance of the middle writings for an understanding of Nietzsche's late philosophy. More specifically, I want to show that appreciating how Nietzsche becomes a sceptic and the senses in which he is a sceptic in the middle writings can help us to better understand his claims about scepticism in the late writings.

In the late writings, as in the middle⁷¹⁷ and early⁷¹⁸ ones, Nietzsche continues to see scepticism as a psychological and cultural problem – rather than as an epistemological, academic issue. This is particularly the case of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which Nietzsche distinguishes a weak form of scepticism (BGE 208) from a strong form of scepticism (BGE 209) in the context of his observation of European culture. More specifically, Nietzsche largely attaches national connotations to this distinction: weak scepticism, he observes, is typical of French culture (BGE 208) and strong scepticism is typical of German culture (BGE 209). In these aphorisms, Nietzsche is critical of the weak form of scepticism which, as we will see shortly, he diagnoses as a psychological and cultural disease widespread especially in contemporary France; on the other hand, he favours the strong form of scepticism which he associates with German culture.⁷¹⁹ In

⁷¹⁶ In the late writings Nietzsche remains committed to a sceptical, zetetic, and experimental mode of investigation, one guided by sceptical attitudes or virtues functioning as truth-searching methodology and motivated by and promoting intellectual honesty and conscience.

⁷¹⁷ See Section 1.3-4.

⁷¹⁸ See Section 1.1.

⁷¹⁹ Although Nietzsche distinguishes these forms of scepticism on national bases and favours a strong, German form of scepticism, it is important to note that in *Beyond Good and Evil* he is also severely critical of nationalism as well as of German culture and politics. In BGE 256, Nietzsche attacks 'the pathological manner in which nationalist nonsense has alienated and continues to alienate the people of Europe from each other; and in BGE 251, Nietzsche wants to show the stupidity inherent in the German 'nationalist nervous fever and political ambition' and, particularly, the stupidity inherent in the German anti-French stance. Moreover, in BGE 254 Nietzsche observes that '[e]ven now France is still the seat of the most spiritual and sophisticated culture in Europe and the preeminent school of taste', notably on account of the French moralists and novelists' excelling in the art of psychological observation.

BGE, then, Nietzsche seems to distance himself from and even criticise the French types of scepticism that, as I have argued in this thesis, he had championed in the middle writings, including the scepticisms of Montaigne and of French Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot. (In the late writings, nevertheless, Nietzsche continues to champion and seeks to radicalise the kind of scepticism he attributes to the psychological observation of the French moralists.⁷²⁰)

I now proceed to close-read BGE 208-209, highlighting the psychological and cultural dimension of Nietzsche's distinction between a weak and strong form of scepticism. If we do not take cognizance of this dimension, I think, we cannot properly understand and appreciate the problem of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings, especially in BGE. Let me begin with a brief discussion of BGE 208.

In BGE 208, I want to stress from the start, Nietzsche is principally concerned with the status of *present* culture in Europe. He observes that today nobody likes to hear that a philosopher is not a sceptic.⁷²¹ Nietzsche links this observation to his critique of the objective spirit driving contemporary scholars and their 'dangerous indifference about Yes and No' in BGE 207.⁷²² Nietzsche criticises 'a philosophy reduced to "epistemology"' precisely for its being 'really no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence' which is not suitable for creating new values (BGE 204). Hence, weak scepticism is initially linked to contemporary scholars' indifference or abstinence with respect to Yes and No judgments about beliefs, values, and ways of life, to their merely being interested in epistemological and academic issues, and to their disinterest in and incapacity for the philosophical-cultural task the late Nietzsche attributes to philosophers – namely, the creation of new values. Nietzsche observes that 'it is well known today that there is no better soporific and tranquilizer than skepticism, the gentle, lovely, lulling poppy of skepticism' (BGE 208). Nietzsche is concerned with a contemporary use of scepticism which avoids making Yes or No judgments: 'The sceptic, you see, this delicate creature, startles all too easily; his conscience has been trained to twitch with every No, indeed with a decisively firm Yes, and to feel it as some kind of bite' (BGE 208). According to Nietzsche's observation, today's

⁷²⁰ See, for example, BGE 23.

⁷²¹ Cf. HH 631.

⁷²² In BGE 207, the objective spirit drives 'the *ideal* scholar who expresses the scientific instinct' for 'disinterested knowledge'. Nietzsche writes that 'we [...] have to be cautious [...], and put an end to the exaggerated terms in which people have recently been celebrating the desubjectivization and depersonification of spirit, as if this were some sort of goal in itself, some sort of redemption of transfiguration'. Although Nietzsche acknowledges that the objective spirit is 'one of the most [precious and] expensive tools there is' in the search for knowledge, he also emphasises that it is only a tool – not an end in himself. In particular, Nietzsche criticises the objective spirit on for leading to a 'dangerous indifference about Yes and No'. On account of this, he distinguishes the scholar, animated by the objective spirit, from the true philosopher, who is 'sturdy, powerful, self-reliant [and] wants to rule.

scholars are not ready to see or face the ultimate consequences of their search for truth and knowledge – that is, the self-overcoming of morality. Shying away from Yes or No judgments, then, is their attempt to console themselves, resisting to and defending themselves from a form of nihilism ‘that not only does say No, and want[s] No, but – horrible to think! – *does* No. To this end, Nietzsche hypothesises, they might make use of and appropriate sceptical formulas, ‘perhaps by quoting Montaigne: “what do I know?”’ (BGE 208).⁷²³

It should be noted that in BGE 208, as in *Wagner in Bayreuth* §3,⁷²⁴ Nietzsche is not directly attacking Montaigne but the specific appropriation of his sceptical motto by contemporary scholars. In other words, as I read it, the weak sceptic is the scholar type and not Montaigne. As we saw in Section 4.2, in a posthumous fragment of 1885 (just one year prior to the publication of BGE) Nietzsche even directly attributes to Montaigne a ‘courageous and blithe [*froh müthige*] skepticism (NF-1885,36[7]).⁷²⁵ Moreover, in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche praised Montaigne, along with Schopenhauer, for his honesty and cheerfulness, specifying that his genuinely cheering cheerfulness differs from a merely superficial cheerfulness on account of its courage and strength (SE §2, pp. 181-182). In the first part of BGE 208, I suggest, Nietzsche associates a weak, degenerate form of scepticism to the academic, scholarly practice of philosophy. We saw that Nietzsche had already formed this association in SE §3 and in part – with special focus on metaphysicians – in MOM 27.⁷²⁶

In the second half of the aphorism, Nietzsche moves towards a discussion of scepticism as a psychological condition of weakness in the context of his ‘diagnosis of the European disease’ in BGE 208:

Skepticism, after all, is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in common language is called weakness of the nerves and sickliness; it emerges every time races⁷²⁷ or classes that have long been separated interbreed decisively and suddenly. In the new generation, whose blood inherits as it were different standards and values, everything is unrest, disruption, doubt, experiment; the best powers have an inhibiting effect, the virtues do not let one another grow and become strong, in body and soul balance, center of gravity, and perpendicular

⁷²³ Nietzsche mentions a number of other sceptical formulas or phrasings.

⁷²⁴ See Section 4.2, p. 167, n. 555.

⁷²⁵ Translation modified.

⁷²⁶ See Sections 1.1 and 3.4, respectively.

⁷²⁷ On Nietzsche’s notion of race see Conway 2002.

stability are lacking. But what gets sicker and degenerates the most is the *will*:⁷²⁸ independence in decisions is no longer known to them at all, nor the valiant sense of joy in willing.⁷²⁹ (BGE 208)

According to his diagnosis, the weak form of scepticism is the spiritual or intellectual expression of a weak, sickly life form, individual (psyche) or collective (culture-society). A form of life in this physical-spiritual condition of weakness is disorganised and malfunctioning, for it is not strong enough to provide order and direction to different standards and values. Scepticism is closely linked to Nietzsche's late notion of decadence – that is, the physiological degeneration, disaggregation, and decaying of psychological or cultural-societal forms due to 'the loss of all the forces of organization' (TI 'Skirmishes' 37):⁷³⁰ 'scepticism is a consequence of *décadence*' (NF-1888,14[86]).⁷³¹ Here, I cannot even begin to address the problem of decadence in Nietzsche's late writings. (It is not an exaggeration to say that for the late Nietzsche virtually everything is one way or another a symptom of decadence.) What is important to bear in mind, though, is that the weak form of scepticism, as Nietzsche construes it in BGE 208, is the expression of a physiological-psychological-cultural condition of degeneration in which different standards and values are in conflict with each other, resulting in a '[p]aralysis of the will' (BGE 208); and it manifests itself as spiritual unrest, disruption, doubt, and experiment – which, it should be noticed, has strong negative connotations in this aphorism (as indecisiveness). It is also important to notice that, ultimately, in BGE 208 Nietzsche is not principally focusing on the spiritual expression of weak scepticism but rather on the condition of physiological weakness. Beside his initial critique of the scholars' use of scepticism, he does not say much else about the kinds of scepticism he considers weak. He limits himself to say that weak scepticism is 'sometimes gloomy as a cloud overloaded with question marks' and that is widespread '[i]n contemporary France' (BGE 208).⁷³²

⁷²⁸ 'Weakness of the will: this is a metaphor which can be misleading. For there is no will, and hence neither a strong will nor a weak one. Multiplicity and disaggregation of the impulses, lack of system among them, results as "weak will"; their coordination under the dominance of a single one results as "strong will" – in the first case it is oscillation and the lack of a centre of gravity; in the second precision and clarity of direction' (NF 1888,14[219]).

⁷²⁹ See also NF-1885,34[67].

⁷³⁰ See also TI 'Skirmishes' 37.

⁷³¹ Translated in WLN, p. 248. The problem of scepticism is also linked to that of nihilism: Nihilism as sign of the *increased power of the spirit: as active nihilism*. It may be a sign of *strength*: the force of the spirit may have grown so much that the goals it has had *so far* ('convictions', articles of faith) are no longer appropriate – for a belief generally expresses the constraints of *conditions of existence*, submission to the authority of the circumstances under which a being *prosperes, grows, gains in power...*' (NF-1887,9[35]). This form of nihilism represents an '*intermediate state*': 'whether because the productive forces are not yet strong enough or because decadence is still hesitating and has not yet invented the resources it needs' (NF-1887,9[35]). On the link between scepticism and nihilism see Sommer 2006.

⁷³² Nietzsche's diagnosis of weak scepticism in BGE 208 is without doubt an appropriation of Carlyle's discussion of scepticism in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841). See the following excerpts froth

I want to contrast Nietzsche's diagnosis of weak scepticism as a disease spread across Europe – and especially in France – in BGE 208 with his views on the cultural value of scepticism in the middle writings.⁷³³ As in HH 21 and WS 156, in the late period Nietzsche continues to believe that '[o]ur age [...] is sceptical' (NF-1885,34[67]); but in the post-Zarathustra writings he reverses – once again – his assessment of the significance of scepticism for culture. For the middle Nietzsche, as for the late Nietzsche, the sceptical character of modernity lays in the comparison and combination of different beliefs, values, and ways of life (HH 23). In the middle writings, however, he cherished hopes that scepticism would be conducive to future cultural edification and perhaps to a new form of health (HH 22). Nietzsche saw in the comparison of different beliefs, values, and ways of life an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of: he believed free spirits and future philosophers to be charged with the task of selecting higher forms of culture and pursuing scientific enquiry in order to lay 'the foundation stones for new ideals (if not the new ideals themselves)' (D 453). What is more is that in HH 224 Nietzsche even suggested that degeneration could lead to spiritual progress and refinement: 'It is the more unconstrained, the much more uncertain and morally weaker individuals upon whom *spiritual progress* depends in [strong] communities: these are the people who attempt new things and, in general, many

Carlyle's work. 'The Eighteenth was a Skeptical Century; in which little word there is a whole Pandora's Box of miseries. Scepticism means not intellectual Doubt alone, but moral Doubt; all sorts of infidelity, insincerity, spiritual paralysis. Perhaps, in few centuries that one could specify since the world began, was a life of Heroism more difficult for a man. That was not an age of Faith, – an age of Heroes! The very possibility of Heroism had been, as it were, formally abnegated in the minds of all. Heroism was gone forever; Triviality, Formulism and Commonplace were come forever. The 'age of miracles' had been, or perhaps had not been; but it was not any longer. An effete world; wherein Wonder, Greatness, Godhood could not now dwell; – in one word, a godless world!' (Carlyle 2013, p. 108). '[F]or these poor Sceptics there was no sincerity, no truth. Half-truth and hearsay was called truth. Truth, for most men, meant plausibility; to be measured by the number of votes you could get. ... Spiritual Paralysis, I say, nothing left but a Mechanical life, was the characteristic of that century. For the common man, unless happily he stood *below* his century and belonged to another prior one, it was impossible to be a Believer, a Hero; he lay buried, unconscious, under these baleful influences' (p. 108). Scepticism cannot be the basis of greatness: it is "a chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul" (p. 110). On Nietzsche's reception of Carlyle see Meakins 2014. As William Meakins has noted, for Carlyle the figures of the sceptic and the dandy "cut at the firm foundation of strong belief and the actions that follow from it, from which no great achievements or moral insight emerged" (Meakins 2014, p. 269); "Carlyle considers scepticism of religious and moral truth to be the main opponent of a heroic ethic" (p. 271): for this reason "it is especially against scepticism that Carlyle strives so strongly, hoping to reverse its influence" (p. 271). Although Meakins has rightly noted that Nietzsche's attitude to scepticism is fundamentally different Carlyle's, he fails to consider fails consider that Carlyle's notion of scepticism could have influenced Nietzsche's conception of weak scepticism in BGE 208 as a kind of intellectual-physiological illness involving a 'paralysis of the will'. Indeed, I believe to be the first commentator to have noted Nietzsche's appropriation of Carlyle's discussion of scepticism in BGE 208. What is interesting is that in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche states that Carlyle is not able to indulge in the "luxury of scepticism" because he 'is constantly harassed by a yearning for a strong faith *and* the feeling that he is not up to the task' (TI 'Skirmishes' 12). As a result, Nietzsche observes, Carlyle's writings are an 'unconscious and involuntary farce' in which the author constantly appears dishonest towards himself on account of his need for faith (TI 'Skirmishes' 12). What is even more interesting is that in TI 13, Nietzsche writes contrasts Carlyle with Emerson. As we will see shortly, Emerson might be an important influence on Nietzsche's notion of strong scepticism in BGE 209.

⁷³³ See Section 1.3.

different things'. Why does Nietzsche drastically change his mind about the cultural significance of scepticism in the late writings? I think there are two principal reasons. First, Nietzsche's observation of culture leads him to conclude that the Western form of life is too degenerated and weak and that it needs a radical re-evaluation of all values. Second, he realises that a comparison, selection, and rank-ordering of different beliefs, values, and ways of life requires a higher standard of evaluation – the will to power.

I now turn to BGE 209. Nietzsche observes that a 'stronger kind of skepticism' can be found in Germany and might develop in Europe: 'the skepticism of audacious manliness that is closely related to the genius of war and to conquest [...] first entered Germany in the shape of the great Frederick' (BGE 209). It is not completely clear why Nietzsche associates strong scepticism with Frederick the Great. Perhaps, one might speculate, one reason might be that Frederick II aspired to be a philosopher king: not only was he inspired by the French Enlightenment (he corresponded with Voltaire), but he also sought to introduce a largely philosophical legislation in his politics, implementing a number of Enlightenment ideas such as religious tolerance and freedom of press. According to this speculation, Frederick might be the example of a philosopher commander or legislator, who seeks to transform the world, in contrast to the scholars' indifference.

In BGE 209, Nietzsche also associates strong scepticism with 'the Great German philologists and critical historians (who, properly viewed, were all artist of destructions and disintegrations as well'. We saw in Section 2.1 in what senses he attributes forms of scepticism to philology and critical history. Moreover, in a preliminary note for BGE 209 Nietzsche observes that the 'inner daring skepticism in Germany' is also due to its Protestantism which, by casting doubt on the authority of the Catholic Church and by demanding from believers that they continuously question their motivation and behaviour, ultimately engendered a 'non-faith' in religious dogmas and even the loss of the belief in God (NF-1885,34[157]). This genealogy of strong scepticism is aligned with Nietzsche's striking idea in GS 122 that Christianity has taught moral scepticism and that it is precisely Christian truthfulness that leads to the self-overcoming of morality.⁷³⁴

Strong scepticism, as Nietzsche construes it, 'despises and nevertheless lays hold of things; it undermines and takes into possession; it does not believe, but it does not lose itself on that account; it gives the spirit a dangerous freedom, but it keeps the heart severe' (BGE 209). Perhaps, this kind of scepticism has to do with the mental ability that in WS 296 attributes to

⁷³⁴ See Section 3.1.

great politicians and generals – that ‘to see many things, to weigh them together, to balance one against another and to formulate a sudden conclusion, a fairly certain sum from them’. As Keith Ansell-Pearson recently notes, Nietzsche’s construal of strong scepticism somehow echoes Emerson’s account of the sceptic in the essay ‘Montaigne: Or the Skeptic’ in *Representative Men*.⁷³⁵ ‘This is the right ground of the skeptic, this of consideration, of self-containing; not at all of unbelief; not at all of universal denying, nor universal doubting, – doubting even that he doubts; least of all of scoffing and profligate jeering at all that is stable and good’.⁷³⁶ In analogy with BGE 208, it is plausible to link Nietzsche’s strong scepticism to a physiological condition of strength. And Nietzsche himself does so in A 54: ‘The vigour, the *freedom* that comes from the strength and super-strength of spirit *proves* itself through scepticism’; and ‘[t]he freedom from every sort of conviction, being *able* to see freely, is *part* of strength’. It is not clear, however, whether there is a direct connection between BGE 209 and A 54. Interestingly, in A 54 Nietzsche states that ‘the need for faith, for some unconditional yes or no, is a need of the *weak*, characterising this need as ‘Carlylism’. With regard to Carlyle, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche observes that ‘[a] yearning for strong faith is *not* a proof of a strong faith, but rather its opposite. *If you have a strong faith* you can allow yourself the beautiful luxury of scepticism: you are certain enough, stable enough, committed enough for it’ (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 12). In the following aphorism, Nietzsche contrasts Emerson with Carlyle, writing that the former is ‘[m]uch more enlightened, eclectic, refined, much more given to wandering’ and attributing to him a ‘witty cheerfulness’ and a form of honesty’ (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 12). Is Nietzsche associating Emerson with the beautiful luxury of scepticism in this comparison? It is well known that at various times in his intellectual development Nietzsche is an avid and astute reader of Emerson.⁷³⁷ Although it is uncertain whether Nietzsche read Emerson’s essay on Montaigne,⁷³⁸ in an unpublished draft of *Ecce Homo*

⁷³⁵ Ansell-Pearson forthcoming.

⁷³⁶ Emerson 1903[1850], p. 159. For Emerson, ‘true fortitude of understanding consists “in not letting what we know be embarrassed by what we do not know”’. Accordingly, he exhorts, ‘let us have a robust, manly life: let us know what we know, for certain; what we have, let it be solid and seasonable and our own. A world in the hand is worth two in the bush, let us have to do with real men and women, and not with skipping ghosts (p. 159).

⁷³⁷ On Nietzsche and Emerson see, especially, Zavatta 2019.

⁷³⁸ Nietzsche owned in his private library a partial German translation (1858) of *Representative Men* containing the essays on Goethe and Shakespeare in addition to the introduction about the uses of great men. The first full translation of *Representative Men* appeared only in 1895. Nevertheless, we know from Nietzsche’s correspondence with Franz Overbeck that in 1883 he asked Ida Overbeck for a full translation of Emerson’s *Representative Men*. See Zavatta 2013, p. 390. Moreover, a number of passages from Nietzsche’s writings – in addition to his construal of strong scepticism in BGE 209 – echo parts of Emerson’s essay on ‘Montaigne: or the Skeptic’. Compare the following excerpts: ‘We are golden averages, volitant stabilities, compensated or periodic errors, houses founded on the sea’ (Emerson 1903[1850], p. 161); ‘*At the sea*. – I would not build a house for myself, and I count it part of my good fortune that I do not own a house. But if I had to, then I should build it as some of the Romans did – right into the sea. I should not mind sharing a few secrets with this beautiful monster (GS 240). See Vivarelli 1882, pp. 108-09. Both Emerson and Nietzsche, furthermore, praise Montaigne for his honesty: ‘Montaigne is the frankest

Nietzsche writes: ‘*Emerson*, with his *Essays*, has been a good friend and someone who has cheered me up [*Erheitert*] even in dark times: he possesses so much skepticism [*Skepsis*], so many ‘possibilities’ in him, that even virtue becomes witty [*geistreich*]’ (KSA 14, pp. 476-477).⁷³⁹

It seems that Nietzsche considers Emerson to be a sceptic in the experimental sense of scepticism we find at least starting from *The Gay Science*: a sceptical, zetetic enquiry that permits and promotes experiments with new possibilities of thinking and living

As Benedetta Zavatta notes, ‘[t]his attitude of constant experimentation is precisely the attitude that Emerson holds to be the appropriate one for the “self-reliant” thinker who has come to an awareness of the inevitable partiality of every perspective and point of view’.⁷⁴⁰ Zavatta is right when she says that for Nietzsche ‘the real philosopher, the “sceptic out of strength” is someone who risks advancing an interpretation of the world even while knowing that this interpretation will surely be called into question by others, or even by his or her own self, at some point in the near or distant future’.⁷⁴¹ However, she has failed to notice that this kind of scepticism is present in Emerson and that Nietzsche regards Emerson as a figure of the strong sceptic. Indeed, the sense of scepticism Emerson outlines in ‘*Montaigne: Or the Skeptic*’ can be found in many of Emerson’s writings – starting from his essay “*Circles*”:⁷⁴²

Step by step we scale this mysterious ladder: the steps are actions; the new prospect is power. Every several result is threatened and judged by that which follows. Every one seems to be contradicted by the new; it is only limited by the new. The new statement is always hated by the

and honestest of all writers’ (Emerson 1903[1850], p. 164); ‘I know of only one other writer whom, as regards his honesty, I would set equal to or even above Schopenhauer: this is Montaigne’ (SE §2, p. 181). See also NF-1884,25[74]. See Busellato 2012, pp. 206-208.

⁷³⁹ My translation. In 1875 draft, entitled “On the Poet”, of aphorism 32 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* Nietzsche had already connected Emerson and skepticism: “Even today, poetic people (for example, Emerson and Lipiner) prefer to seek the limits of knowledge, indeed, skepticism in order to withdraw from the pathos of logic. They want uncertainty because then the magician, intuition, and great effects upon the soul become possible once again” (HH II, 451-52, n. 51). Curiously, Lipiner’s use of scepticism is regarded as a form of obscurantism (NF-1878,42[4]), whereas in 1888 Emerson’s sceptical extravagance is connected with many possibilities.

⁷⁴⁰ Zavatta 2019, p. 101. Zavatta goes on to say ‘In the essay *Circles*, after having declared that the true thinker is always ready to revise and re-revise his or her vision of things, he further declares that his own identification with this type of thinker and writes of himself, “I am only an experimenter [...]. I unsettle things. No facts are to be sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker” [...] (Nietzsche underlined this last phrase)’ (p. 101). Zavatta also notes that ‘[I]n the margin of the page [of his copy of the *Essays*] Nietzsche scribbled the note “Really [*Ja*]??” [...], probably indicating that he found this intellectual self-portrait of Emerson’s to be quite at odds with the preemptory tone of many of the American writers’ statements’ (p. 110). I too think that Nietzsche is a selective reader of Emerson – one who, as he himself acknowledges, ‘liked to listen to [Emerson]’ since boyhood but has never accepted uncritically what his “good friend” had to say (KSA 14, pp. 476-477, my transition)

⁷⁴¹ Zavatta 2019, p. 101.

⁷⁴² On Emerson and scepticism see, for example, Michael 1988. On Emerson’s appropriation of a Pyrrhonian, sceptical, and zetetic mode of investigation see Friedl 2019, pp. 41-60.

old, and, to those dwelling in the old, comes like an abyss of scepticism. [...] Fear not the new generalization.⁷⁴³

In putting at risk the present order of things, scepticism is perceived as ‘an abyss’ or a negative force by people who are dwelling upon the old. In contrast, according to Emerson’s exhortation, scepticism ought to be courageously sought and even loved as a positive, experimental force capable of generating new possibilities for thinking and life – a new statement, a new circle and a new power. This line of thought is picked up in ‘Experience’:

The new statement will comprise the scepticisms as well as the faiths of society, and out of unbeliefs a creed shall be formed. For scepticisms are not gratuitous or lawless, but are limitations of the affirmative statement, and the new philosophy must take them in and make affirmations outside of them, just as much as it must include the oldest beliefs.⁷⁴⁴

The interesting thing about Emerson is that he does not stop there and become stuck in negativity of scepticism. Much more, then, than a ‘fine Pyrrhonism’ – the equivalence and indifference of all actions – is at work in Emerson and we get a decisive statement on the need for being an ‘experimenter’, and that we find so strongly echoed in Nietzsche.⁷⁴⁵ Emerson is certainly a sceptic in the sense of a searcher and seeker,⁷⁴⁶ but not in the strict Pyrrhonian sense. Pyrrhonian scepticism finds – or skilfully induce – tranquillity or personal serenity by suspending judgment about all matters and living in conformity with laws and customs.⁷⁴⁷ By contrast, Emerson’s is a scepticism that is not only compatible with but also conducive to new affirmations; and, as a form of radical anti-conformism, it contributes to transforming the self and the world, overthrowing the old and opening up a space for new possibilities for thinking and living.

Jessica Berry interprets the contraposition between a weak and strong form of scepticism in BGE 208-209 as a contraposition between modern, Cartesian-inspired scepticism and ancient, Greek scepticism, respectively.⁷⁴⁸ I partly agree with Berry’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s critique of weak scepticism as a critique of the purely academic scepticism of contemporary epistemology – which is manifestation of a wider cultural phenomenon.⁷⁴⁹ However, I am unconvinced by her

⁷⁴³ Emerson 2000, p. 254.

⁷⁴⁴ Emerson 2000, p. 321.

⁷⁴⁵ Emerson, 2000, p. 260.

⁷⁴⁶ See Herwig Friedl, *Thinking in Search of a Language*, London 2018, 41-60.

⁷⁴⁷ See Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 9, PH 1.23-24.

⁷⁴⁸ Berry 2011, pp. 12-13, 32-33, 208.

⁷⁴⁹ Unlike Berry, I place more emphasis on the fact that, for Nietzsche, scholars’ scepticism is not limited to their putting forward sceptical arguments about knowledge but is also the result of their purely academic mode of philosophising.

claim that Nietzsche has Pyrrhonism in mind when praising strong scepticism. To support this, Berry claims that Nietzsche's reference to '*the Great German philologists and critical historian*' in BGE 209 is a clear indication that, for him, strong scepticism is recovered from antiquity. Evidence for this claim is, in my view, insufficient – especially if considered within the German, cultural framework of the aphorism. How is Pyrrhonism linked to the strong, German form of scepticism exemplified by Frederick II? Would Nietzsche use the adjectives 'strong' and 'manly' to describe Pyrrhonian scepticism? Is Pyrrhonism even compatible with 'the tendency [of the German spirit] toward manly skepticism prominently emerged [...] as the courage and hardness of the dissecting hand, as the tenacious will to dangerous voyages of discovery' (BGE 209)? Moreover, we can find evidence against Berry's claim. In the 1888 notebooks, for example, Nietzsche describes Pyrrho as a decadent, characterising his philosophy and way of life as symptoms of a physiological-psychological 'weariness' (NF-1888,14[99]) on account of his 'need for rest' (NF-1888,15[58]). Nietzsche's diagnosis of Pyrrho as a decadent, if anything, suggests an analogy with weak scepticism. In analogy to contemporary scholars, Pyrrho (and the Pyrrhonists) sought 'ultimate indifference' in the midst of the degeneration of the Greek form of life (NF-1888,14[99]). It will become even clearer in a moment that Nietzsche's conception of the task of philosophy, in relation to strong scepticism, in BGE 208-211 is ultimately incompatible with Pyrrhonism.

Before I move to this, I want to make a last critical remark about Nietzsche's distinction between weak and strong scepticism in BGE 208-209. Although in these aphorisms he speaks of scepticisms, he seems to be much more concerned with psychological-cultural conditions of weakness and strength. For this reason, I think, it is questionable whether, while speaking of weak and strong scepticism, Nietzsche actually addresses any philosophical form of scepticism or sceptical practice. In BGE 208, weak scepticism is largely construed as the result of a purely academic practice of philosophy. In BGE 209, in spite of my interpretative attempts, it is not completely clear in what exact sense strong scepticism is sceptical and German.

In BGE 210, Nietzsche supposes that in Europe philosophers of the future will perhaps be strong sceptics,⁷⁵⁰ albeit – he makes it clear – scepticism will be only one of their traits or characteristics. In other words, future philosophers, for Nietzsche, are not themselves fully sceptics. 'With the same right', Nietzsche adds, 'they could be called critics; and certainly they will be experimenting people' (BGE 210).⁷⁵¹ Philosophers of the future have some characteristics

⁷⁵⁰ More precisely, Nietzsche writes 'skeptics in the sense just mentioned' (BGE 210). In all probability, he refers to the strong scepticism he discussed in BGE 209.

⁷⁵¹ See also BGE 42.

in common with critics, too, which, according to the Nietzsche of BGE, distinguish them from pure sceptics: ‘the certainty of value-standards, the conscious application of unity of method, shrewd courage, the ability to stand alone and answer to oneself; indeed, to themselves they confess a *delight* in saying No, and to dissecting, and to a certain level-headed cruelty that knows how to wield the knife surely and subtly, even when the heart is bleeding’ (BGE 210). Their critical discipline is furthermore linked to ‘cleanliness and rigor in matters of the spirit’ (BGE 210). The distinction between scepticism and criticism, though, generates an interpretative tension with BGE 209 where, as we have just seen, Nietzsche directly links strong scepticism precisely to the courage and hardness of the dissecting hand. Moreover, as we will see in the following part of the Conclusion, Nietzsche directly links this dissecting to a form of mistrust inherent in Zarathustra’s truthfulness.⁷⁵² (It seems that, after all, scepticism and critical dissection are in one way or another connected in Nietzsche’s mind). In any case, Nietzsche specifies that future philosophers are not only critics, in that true philosophy is not restricted to criticism – but uses the latter as a tool.

In BGE 211, Nietzsche goes on to say that scepticism and criticism ‘are only preconditions of [future philosophers’] task:⁷⁵³ this task itself wills something else – it demands that [they] create values. [...] [*G*]enuine philosophers are commanders and legislators’. In relation to this task, Nietzsche says that philosophers of the future are experimenting people: ‘they love to partake of experiments in a new, perhaps broader, perhaps more dangerous sense [...], in their passion for knowledge, go further in audacious and painful experiments’ (BGE 210). Of course, the experiments of future philosophers are not the tentative experiments Nietzsche traces back to a condition of weakness in BGE 208. (It is now even clearer that Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future fundamentally differ from the Pyrrhonists.⁷⁵⁴ First, if future philosophers will conduct audacious and *painful* experiments with thinking and living, the Pyrrhonists merely hope to become tranquil and avoid the mental trouble they associate with philosophical investigation. Second, if the primary task of future philosophy is, for Nietzsche, the creation of new values,

⁷⁵² See also SE §3, p. 188.

⁷⁵³ More precisely, Nietzsche says that, in addition to sceptics and critics, philosophers of the future will have to have been dogmatists, historians, poets, wanderers, riddle-guessers, moralists, and free spirits ‘in order to traverse the circumference of human values and value-feelings and in order to be able to gaze with many kinds of eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance, from the depths into every height, and from the corner into every expanse’ (BGE 211).

⁷⁵⁴ As we saw in Section 4.3, there is only one sense in which Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future might be helpfully compared with the Pyrrhonists – that is, their common commitment to sceptical, zetetic mode of investigation. However, as I explained, in Nietzsche’s late writings – as well as in his middle ones (Section 2.3) – the aims of continuous investigation are fundamentally different from those of Pyrrhonism.

Pyrrhonism – which only aims at continuing investigation and attaining *ataraxia* – leads to practical conformism and conservatism.)

It is interesting to note that in BGE 210 he makes it clear that these are two different characteristics of future philosophers, whereas in the middle writings Nietzsche more closely links scepticism to experimentalism: in GS 51, Nietzsche favoured experimentalism as the adequate response to scepticism; and in the notebooks he even spoke of a ‘scepticism of experiments’ (NF 1880,6[356]). In the middle writings and especially in D and GS, Nietzsche believed free spirits had the task of experimenting with new possibilities for thinking and living: they would formulate daring hypotheses and attempt to put them on trial; and they would test the effect of different individual and societal modes of living on human life. By contrast, in the late writings Nietzsche is convinced that philosophers of the future will conduct different kinds of experiments: they will work towards the creation and engineering of new values. In this, they are perhaps more akin to politicians than to sceptics.⁷⁵⁵

In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche intriguingly claims that ‘great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic’ (A 54). To date, commentators have not yet properly explained this claim. In this part of the Conclusion, I endeavour to show in what sense or senses Nietzsche regards Zarathustra as a sceptic. In the first place, it should be noted, Nietzsche’s specifying that Zarathustra, among all great spirits, is a sceptic might sound surprising and even somewhat controversial. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosophical character of Zarathustra proclaims a number of doctrines – such as the eternal return, the superhuman, the will to power, and the creation of new values – which seems to have little to do with scepticism, with a sceptical practice of philosophy, or even with a general sceptical attitude of the mind. In his discourses, Zarathustra teaches these doctrines speaking as an educator of humanity and, assuming this role, his mode of expression tends to be largely assertive. Certainly, he does not seem to be or speak as a sceptic – at least at first glance. Indeed, Z is often interpreted as the place where we can find the most affirmative or constructive side of Nietzsche’s philosophy.⁷⁵⁶ According to this interpretation, Z is perhaps the least sceptical or critical moment of Nietzsche’s intellectual development, in that it offers a number of constructive solutions to central problems and questions of his thinking. This way of interpreting

⁷⁵⁵ Already in *Human, All Too Human*, though, Nietzsche distinguished the task of free spirits from that of scholars: the former one’s task being that of ‘commanding from an isolate site all the scientists and scholars [...] and of showing them the paths and goals of culture’ (HH 282). At the time of HH, nevertheless, Nietzsche seemed not to have clear in mind where the cultural paths and goals might lead to.

⁷⁵⁶ See Loeb forthcoming.

Z is consonant with the way Nietzsche himself often speaks of his work.⁷⁵⁷ In what sense or senses, then, does Nietzsche regard Zarathustra as a sceptic?

To begin answering this question, I suggest, we need an understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche's conception of scepticism in the middle writings. My suggestion stems from Nietzsche's own view of the relation between Z and his middle works. In a letter sent to Franz Overbeck in 1884, Nietzsche writes that when reading *Dawn* and *The Gay Science* he found that there is almost no line in these works that cannot serve as an 'introduction, preparation, and commentary to Zarathustra': 'It is a fact that I composed the commentary before the text' (BVN-1884,504).⁷⁵⁸ The senses of Zarathustra's scepticism can be found both in the text of Z and in its 'commentary' in the middle writings.

In A 54, as we saw in Chapter 5, Nietzsche places scepticism in antithesis to conviction and fanaticism. Scepticism, here, is linked to '[t]he freedom from every sort of conviction, being able to see freely is *part* of strength'. Sceptics, truthful people, who are committed to intellectual honesty and conscience, are contrasted with people of convictions and especially with fanatics. Hence, A 54 implies that, first and foremost, Zarathustra is a sceptic on account of his not being a fanatic. Indeed, we saw that starting from *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche construes scepticism, in concert with intellectual honesty and justice, as a weapon to combat fanaticism. This reading is confirmed by a passage from *Ecce Homo* in which, attaching special importance to Z in his writings, Nietzsche wants to clarify that Zarathustra is not a prophet or a founder of religion: Zarathustra's - and his own - words 'are not the words of some fanatic, nothing is being "preached" here nobody is demanding that you *believe* (EH 'Preface' §4, p. 73). Nietzsche-Zarathustra is a sceptic and not a fanatic because he is not preaching his doctrines, nor he is demanding belief from his disciples or readers.

The first sense of Zarathustra's scepticism, then, lies in the mode of his teaching. This is somehow prefigured in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* 213, where - as we saw in Section 5.3 - Nietzsche stages an enigmatic and ambivalent dialogue between an old man and the figure of Pyrrho that is characterised both as someone who wants to teach something important to humanity and as 'the fanatic of mistrust'. In the first half of the dialogue, we saw that Pyrrho is engaged in instigating mistrust towards his own words in order to teach mistrust against fanatical modes of utterance. Paradoxically, by recommending mistrust towards his own discourse, Pyrrho is in fact performing the very form of mistrust that he seeks to teach. This, I suggested, is an

⁷⁵⁷ See, for example, EH 'Z' §6.

⁷⁵⁸ My translation.

important sense in which Nietzsche opposes scepticism to fanaticism. As Maria Cristina Fornari notes, this paradox echoes a famous passage from *Z*:⁷⁵⁹

Now I go alone, my disciples. You too go now, alone. [...]. One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil. [...] You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra? You are my believer: but of what importance are all believers? You had not yet sought yourself when you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account. Now I bid you lose myself and find yourself; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you. (*Z* 1 'Of the Bestowing Virtue' §3, p. 103)⁷⁶⁰

Paolo D'Iorio remarks that in this passage Zarathustra issues a 'harsh and urgent call to independence and skepticism'.⁷⁶¹ Zarathustra – like Pyrrho in WS 213 – is a teacher who does not address his disciples as merely passive learners or followers to be convinced. Rather, Zarathustra is in search of companions and fellow creators. Throughout *Z*, indeed, he constantly calls into question his own authority as a teacher or educator, in a way overcoming or reevaluating the teacher-discipline relationship.⁷⁶² Nietzsche wants to suggest that true teachers or educators, like Zarathustra and in part like Pyrrho, demand scepticism and not mere belief from their interlocutors. Unlike fanatics, they do not want to preach their doctrines, persuading or seducing their interlocutors; they want the latter ones to think for themselves and to learn how to be sceptical – even of those who teach genuine scepticism. This is, for Nietzsche, the best way to acquire and train a capacity for mistrust. Hence, Zarathustra seeks to combat forms of conviction and fanaticism, both as a preaching style of teaching and as unquestioning way of believing. Zarathustra is a sceptic in the sense that puts a sceptical style of teaching into practice and, simultaneously, he teaches and cultivates a sceptical attitude of the mind in his disciples or readers. Although Zarathustra does not preach scepticism as a doctrine, he remains a sceptic, for he recommends that his doctrines be received with a sceptical mind. This does not mean that for Zarathustra these doctrines are less important or convincing, but rather that they ought to be independently examined, questioned, and tested by his disciples.

Another sense in which, for Nietzsche, Zarathustra can be regarded as a sceptic has to do with his truthfulness. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the close links Nietzsche establishes between

⁷⁵⁹ Fornari 2011, p. 45. See also Busellato 2012, p. 234.

⁷⁶⁰ Cited also in EH 'Preface' §4, p. 73.

⁷⁶¹ D'Iorio 2016, p. 81.

⁷⁶² For example, in the discourse 'Of the Spirit of Gravity', Zarathustra says that he came to his truth 'by diverse paths and in diverse ways'. Asking for the way, he goes on to say, 'has always offended my taste': 'All my progress has been an attempting and a questioning – and truly, one has to *learn* how to answer such questioning'. "This – is now *my* way: where is yours?" Thus I answered those who asked me "the way". For *the* way – does not exist (*Z* 3 'Of the Spirit of Gravity' §2, p. 213).

scepticism and forms of truthfulness such as intellectual honesty – and justice, as I specified in Chapter 5. In EH, Nietzsche praises Zarathustra for being ‘more truthful than any other thinker’ and his teaching for being ‘the only one that considers truthfulness to be the highest virtue’: ‘the self-overcoming from out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of moralists [by which, here, it is meant moral people – not the *moralistes français*] into their opposite – *into me* [the immoralist] – that is what the name Zarathustra means coming from my mouth’ (EH ‘Destiny’ §3, p. 145).⁷⁶³ In Z, Nietzsche-Zarathustra links truthfulness to ‘[t]he bold attempt, prolonged mistrust,⁷⁶⁴ the cruel No, satiety, the cutting into the living’ which shatter the old law-tables, spreading the seeds from which truth has raised and knowledge has grown up (3 ‘Of the Old and New Law-Tables’ §7, p. 218).⁷⁶⁵ Here, Nietzsche interestingly construes scepticism as a form of vivisection. This, I think, can be linked to his conception of experiment in the incorporation of truth.⁷⁶⁶

In GS 110, Nietzsche famously states that ‘knowledge became a piece of life itself’ – meaning that it became an irrevocable part of human life, of the specific practices of people, even affecting their bodies in one way or another. The experiment, for the Nietzsche of GS, is the extent to which truth and knowledge can endure incorporation in contrast with the ‘life-preserving errors’ entrenched in the human condition of life (GS 110). In their evolutionary and historical development, Nietzsche famously claims, human beings have incorporated a number of errors which have become necessary for their life (HH 16; GS 11, 107, 115). Nietzsche’s question is whether truth can be incorporated at the expense of these errors for the purposes of human health and flourishing. He even calls ‘[u]ltimate *skepsis*’ the recognition that what human beings believe to be true are, in fact, merely their ‘*irrefutable errors*’ (GS 265).⁷⁶⁷ Similarly, in Z Nietzsche writes that ‘much ignorance and error has become body in us [...]. The body purifies itself through knowledge; experimenting with knowledge it elevates itself’ (1 ‘Of the Bestowing Virtue’ §2, p. 102). Scepticism as a practice of truthfulness is, thus, understood as a vivisection of the spirit-body for removing incorporated errors: ‘Spirit is the life that itself strikes into life: through its own torment it increases its own knowledge’ (Z 2 ‘On the Famous Philosophers’, p. 127).⁷⁶⁸ In this way, scepticism as vivisection – that is, as the removal of old, erroneous habits of

⁷⁶³ This meaning is directly linked to Nietzsche’s notion of intellectual honesty or integrity as *Rechtschaffenheit*. See Section 3.1.

⁷⁶⁴ Furthermore, Nietzsche-Zarathustra sees at the centre of what philosophers call the ‘will to truth’ a ‘healthy mistrust’ (Z 2 ‘Of Self-Overcoming’, p. 136).

⁷⁶⁵ Cf. WS 213.

⁷⁶⁶ On Nietzsche’s notion of the incorporation of truth see Ansell-Pearson 2006; Mitcheson 2013; 2015.

⁷⁶⁷ On Nietzsche’s notion of ultimate *skepsis* see Wotling 2006/2016.

⁷⁶⁸ See also D 460.

thinking and believing incorporated in a form of life – for Nietzsche is a necessary step towards the experimental incorporation of new truths, values, and practices. I think the sceptical vivisection is a further elaboration of the art of psychological dissection promoted by Nietzsche starting from HH and HH II.⁷⁶⁹ In EH, Nietzsche declares that ‘a *psychologist* without equal is speaking in [his] works’ (EH ‘Books’ §5, p. 105);⁷⁷⁰ and Zarathustra, too, is regarded as a ‘psychologist’ (EH ‘Destiny’ §5, p. 147). In WS, Nietzsche distinguishes himself from ‘[t]he older moralists [because they] did not do dissection enough and preached all too often’ (WS 19). Zarathustra’s vivisection is more radical or sceptical than the older moralists’ psychological dissection, in that – as we have seen – he does not want to preach any moralism. However, it is important to note once again, Zarathustra’s psychological surgery does not merely aim at unbelief either, but at the incorporation of new truths, values, and practices, at the elevation of human beings and at a form of joy (Z 1 ‘Of the Bestowing Virtue’ §2, p. 102). As in WS 19, Zarathustra’s scepticism is neither a doctrine to preach nor absolute unbelief – but an intellectual practice of truthfulness aimed at better knowing, better judging, and better living.⁷⁷¹

Moreover, Nietzsche links Zarathustra to his experimental scepticism – that is, to a form of scepticism compatible with daring attempts at thinking and living and with practical tests of the effect of different hypotheses upon human life. In the preparatory notes to Z, Nietzsche calls this a ‘scepticism as temptation [*Skepsis als Versuchung*]’ (NF-1882,16[83],21[1]), linking it to the constructive task of the creation of new values: scepticism as temptation or experiment is construed as a tool to claim ‘the right to create’ (NF-1882,6[1]). The notion of experimentality is central in Z. Zarathustra speaks to “bold searchers, tempters/attempters/experimenters [*Versuchern*] and whoever put to terrible seas with cunning sails” (Z “On the Vision and the Riddle” 1); he exhorts his brothers and sisters to be creators “experimenting with knowledge” (Z “On the Bestowing Virtue” 2); and he conceives of human beings and societies as experiment (*ibid.*; Z “On the Old and New Tablets” 25).

Finally, I want to make two conclusive remarks. The first is intended to problematise my interpretation of Nietzsche as a sceptic. The second points to three directions for future research on Nietzsche and scepticism. I have argued that Nietzsche is an idiosyncratic sceptic. In part, I have suggested, his idiosyncrasy is due to the fact that, although starting from his middle writings

⁷⁶⁹ See Section 2.1.

⁷⁷⁰ On Nietzsche as a psychologist rather than as a metaphysician see Pippin 2010.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. WS 19.

he considers scepticism essential to philosophy, he is not only or fully a sceptic. Scepticism does not provide us with a complete and adequate understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical activity. That is to say, there are non-sceptical aspects in his philosophy. This has been revealed also by my consideration of Nietzsche's treatment of scepticism in the late writings, particularly of his characterisation of philosophers of the future as sceptics only in part. But is Nietzsche really a sceptic?

In the course of his intellectual development, scepticism is never construed by Nietzsche as the ultimate goal or end of his various philosophical projects; rather, he utilises and deploys scepticism in its different forms as a tool to achieve the constructive aims of his philosophy. In the middle writings, these aims include the production or discovery of empirical truths, certainties, and probabilities, the edification of a higher form of culture, the concentration on and attachment to the small things, the affirmation of earthly life, experimentalism with respect to individual and societal modes of living. In the late writings, they have to do, first and foremost, with the creation of new values, but also with the philosophical notions of the eternal return, the *Übermensch*, and the will to power. Although these aims can hardly be described as sceptical in themselves – they are not sceptical doctrines nor result in mere unbelief – it is important to bear in mind that Nietzsche pursues them as a sceptic. On the one hand, for Nietzsche, these creative, constructive aims are achieved or achievable by means of a sceptical enquiry; on the other, he largely presents them as hypotheses or experiments. In addition to the famous presentation of the eternal return as an existential experiment in GS 341, consider Nietzsche's discussion of the will to power in BGE 36. It is often overlooked that here the question of the will to power too is posed, hypothetically, as an experiment and largely discussed in a hypothetical language: 'Assuming that...' (BGE 36). In this sense, I maintain, appreciating the senses of scepticism in Nietzsche's writings is of fundamental importance for understanding his philosophical activity, even his non-sceptical aims. Thus, regarding Nietzsche as a sceptic can help us to disclose his identity or identities as a philosopher.

In his middle writings, I have argued, Nietzsche becomes a sceptic and perhaps, I want to suggest now, he is at his most sceptical. Nietzsche embraces scepticism as a historical-cultural phenomenon, seeing in it an opportunity to open up new horizons for thinking and living. It is in his middle writings that Nietzsche more favourably engages with various sceptical traditions, both ancient and modern, selecting, appropriating, and transforming a variety of sceptical practices that he deploys and recommends in his developing philosophical projects.

Is Nietzsche a sceptic in the late writings? Can we regard him as a sceptic even when he directly links philosophy to the engineering and creation of new values and when he seeks to

teach the doctrines of the eternal return, the *Übermensch*, and the will to power? For a number of reasons, more or less agreeable, Nietzsche becomes deeply suspicious of scepticism as a historical-cultural phenomenon. In this respect, he is certainly less sceptical than in the middle writings. And yet, in his late writings Nietzsche continues to see the philosopher as a sceptic, albeit in part. The late Nietzsche, I suggest, is a sceptic at least in the same senses in which Zarathustra is a sceptic: he is not a fanatic – he opposes forms of conviction, dogmatism, and fanaticism; he is engaged in a sceptical mode of teaching; he requires that his readers cultivate a sceptical mode of reading and thinking; and he commits himself to scepticism as a practice of truthfulness and of continuous investigation. Having said that, I think, the middle writings reveal, more clearly, the identity of Nietzsche as a sceptic – that is, as a thinker more open to the sceptical character of modernity and more willing to grapple with a sceptical practice of philosophy.

In this thesis I have placed my focus primarily on the middle writings and perhaps, in order to make a better sense of Nietzsche's becoming a sceptic, I have devoted more attention to the two volumes of *Human, All Too Human*. More detailed information on the senses and roles of scepticism in *Dawn* and *The Gay Science* would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy about Nietzsche's scepticism in the middle writings. Further research is also needed to explore and fully explain the development of Nietzsche's thinking about scepticism between the middle and late writings, especially with respect to the reversal of his attitude towards the sceptical character of modernity. Moreover, further research might explore Nietzsche's intriguing appropriation of Emerson's scepticism.

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