

Nietzsche and the Style of Non-Assertion: Skepticism, Fanaticism, and Hypothesis-Making

Lorenzo Serini

Introduction

In this article, I take up an intriguing suggestion put forward in Nietzsche studies by commentators such as Daniel Conway and Julie Ward (1992), Richard Bett (2000), and Andreas Urs Sommer (2018). Originally, Conway and Ward suggest that Sextus Empiricus and Nietzsche, despite their different philosophical projects, are engaged in a similar campaign against dogmatism. Their attack on dogmatism, Conway and Ward note, is often interpreted as “a perverse and hopelessly self-referential enterprise that effectively precludes them from positive assertion,” which leaves both Sextus and Nietzsche without “any recognizable philosophical position that might be proposed as an alternative,” and which leaves them even exposed to the charge of self-refutation (193). Conway and Ward persuasively argue that “In both cases, the familiar charge of self-refutation is valid, but critics mistakenly assume that such self-refutation is necessarily vicious”: “Like Sextus, Nietzsche attempts to discredit dogmatism by deploying a strategically non-assertorical language” (193), which involves the deliberate construction, and rhetorical use, of self-refuting arguments (*peritropai*) that not only corrode dogmatic assertions, but also consume themselves—thus avoiding asserting anything dogmatically (199).

This suggestion is further developed by Bett: “Methodologically, much of Nietzsche’s published work before 1888 has significant points of kinship with ancient skepticism” (2000: 83). As Bett observes,

It is characteristic of [Nietzsche's] method of writing in small, disjointed sections—his 'aphoristic' style, as it is often called—that his books are hard, if not impossible, to read as adding to a single, consistent point of view. Instead, he throws out a wide variety of ideas on some subject, often from apparently very differing perspectives; and it is frequently very hard to tell whether, or how far, he seriously means what he is saying. (83)

Bett's comment well captures an experience shared by many readers of Nietzsche. The situation described by Bett becomes even more complicated if we consider Nietzsche's "multifarious art of style" (EH "Good Books" 4). Indeed, it is perhaps an oversimplification to call Nietzsche's method of writing before 1888 "aphoristic." Although his thoughts are typically expressed in short paragraphs pursuing discontinuous or multi-perspectival lines of inquiry, in this period Nietzsche writes radically different types of books, such as *Human, All Too Human* (aphorisms), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (philosophical poetry), and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (polemical essays). In particular, *Zarathustra* is written in a heavily literary style, and Nietzsche does not directly speak with his own voice, but indirectly, through the mouths of a variety of characters. Such a literary and indirect voice is also typical of important sections of his other books (see, for example, GS 125). The pluralism of styles, including literary styles, of perspectives and characters across his oeuvre, as well as in the context of the same book, projects a kaleidoscopic voice. All of this, I think, makes it even harder to recover theory from Nietzsche's text and to put a systematic interpretation upon it.¹

In agreement with Conway and Ward, Bett (2000: 83) suggests that Nietzsche's "aphoristic" writings—roughly, between 1878, after the early Wagnerian period, and 1888—involve a "kind of distancing strategy, [a] rejection of straightforward assertoric modes of utterance," which is comparable with the writing methods of Sextus and of Montaigne. "Like Nietzsche," according to Bett (2000: 84), "Sextus aims to avoid being pinned down to a single definite view, and favors the contemplation of a multiplicity of perspectives; Sextus also employs a variety of literary devices to make clear

that his own writing is not to be taken as philosophical writing of any usual sort. The most obvious of these devices is perhaps the use of the various stock skeptical 'expression' such as 'no more' and 'I determine nothing.'"

Drawing on Bett, Sommer remarks that "Nietzsche's aphoristic style, often avoiding a final decision between contradictory conceptions, resembles the skeptical mode of speaking developed by Sextus Empiricus and Montaigne: a mode full of reservations, aware of the fact that silence would perhaps be more adequate" (442). While Conway and Ward, as well as Bett (2000: 84), tend to focus on self-refutation (*peritropē*) in Sextus and Nietzsche as a similar feature of their non-assertoric discourses, Sommer (444-45) hints at the philosophical significance that silence (*aphasia*)—understood either as complete speechlessness or as a mode of speaking and writing full of reservations—has for both the Pyrrhonian skeptics and for Nietzsche.

Building on the suggestions made by these commentators, in this article I want to further explore Nietzsche's non-assertoric style of writing in comparison and in contrast with Pyrrhonian skepticism. I thus focus on what we may call a "skeptical style"—that is, a way of speaking and writing designed to avoid and combat forms of dogmatism, which is typical of various skeptical traditions.² Standard theoretical arguments for or against skepticism in metaphysics, epistemology, and moral philosophy, though not irrelevant, will not be at the center of my discussion. Here, I concentrate on the styles that for Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists are better suited for *skepsis*—that is, for a continuous practice or mode of investigation. Nietzsche, I want to argue, is only partly committed to a Pyrrhonian-inspired non-assertoric mode of speaking and writing as a means to avoid and combat various forms of dogmatism, especially its most extreme expressions in fanaticism. Unlike Pyrrhonian *aphasia*, Nietzsche's skeptical style permits—indeed, requires—hypothesis-making.

In section 1, I discuss Nietzsche's ambivalent reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Section 2 problematizes Conway and Ward's, Bett's, and Sommer's suggestions that Nietzsche, like the Pyrrhonists, adopts a non-assertoric style of speaking and writing. In section 3, I close read aphorism 213 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, wherein Nietzsche stages a somewhat enigmatic dialogue between an old man and a character named "Pyrrho," a

philosopher of silence, who is ambivalently portrayed as a teacher of mistrust (positively) and as a fanatic of mistrust (negatively). I argue that Nietzsche is critical of a philosophy reduced to non-assertion for by obstinately denying any possibility for making assertions about anything philosophical it turns into a dogmatic and fanatical stance. Section 4 explores Nietzsche's characterization of Zarathustra as a skeptic in *The Anti-Christ*, focusing on his skeptical style of speaking and teaching. Zarathustra's style, I argue, combines a (non-fanatical) avoidance of dogmatic assertion with doctrine-teaching, and provides a helpful model for understanding and appreciating Nietzsche's own skeptical style. In section 5, I show that, at least starting from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche favors a *skepsis* of experiments that is not reducible to Pyrrhonian skepticism—especially, to a philosophy of suspension of judgment and non-assertion. To voice his experimental *skepsis*, Nietzsche adopts a non-assertoric style of writing that not only works against dogmatism and fanaticism but also permits him to make daring philosophical hypotheses.

1. Nietzsche and Pyrrhonian Skepticism

Before I say something about Nietzsche's reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism, let me briefly outline some of the basic features of Pyrrhonism. I base my reconstruction on Sextus's *Outline of Pyrrhonism*. Pyrrhonism is first and foremost a way of life (*agōgē*) without dogmatic beliefs (Sextus Empiricus 4 [PH 1.7], 7 [PH 1.16-17]) and devoted to continuous investigation (*skepsis* and *zetesis*) (Sextus Empiricus 3 [PH 1.1-4], 4 [PH 1.7]). In contrast to the Dogmatists, who "think that they have discovered the truth," and to the Academics (or the negative dogmatists), who "have asserted that things cannot be apprehended," as Sextus reports (3 [PH 1.1-4]), the Skeptics are those who "are still investigating." Their practical aim is to attain tranquility of mind (*ataraxia*) in their inquiries (Sextus Empiricus 5-6 [PH 1.10, 12], 10-11 [PH 1.25-30]) by suspending judgment (*epochē*) about everything unclear (Sextus Empiricus 5 [PH 1.10], 6-7 [PH 1.13-15], 10-11 [PH 1.25-30], 11-46 [PH 1.31-186]). Like the Dogmatists, according to Sextus (5-6 [PH 1.12]), the Pyrrhonists begin their investigation troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather

assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil; unlike the Dogmatists, "the Sceptics were unable to acquire tranquility by deciding the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspend judgment. But when they suspend judgment, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body" (Sextus Empiricus 11 [PH 1.29]). Learning that tranquility follows suspension of judgment, the Pyrrhonists train themselves in the "ability to set out oppositions" between "conflicting accounts" about appearances and thoughts to bring about suspension of judgment and to pursue "freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul" (Sextus Empiricus 4-5 [PH 1.8-10]).³ They thus live a life devoted to continuous inquiry without holding any belief—by which they mean rushed "assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences" (Sextus Empiricus 6-7 [PH 1.13-16])—and in conformity with traditional opinions and customs (Sextus Empiricus 7 [PH 1.16-17], 9 [PH 1.23-24]). Central to the Pyrrhonian practices of continuous investigation and suspension of judgment is a non-assertoric use of language (Sextus Empiricus 3 [PH 1.4]), including the use of an array of skeptical phrases (Sextus Empiricus 46-53 [PH 1.187-209]; cf. Diogenes Laertius: 487-491 [DL 9.74-78]). For example, the Pyrrhonists use the phrase "no more" to express their indifference (*adiaphoria*) with respect to conflicting arguments that are equipollent or in equilibrium in terms of convincingness and unconvincingness (Sextus Empiricus 46-47 [PH 1.187-191]); "suspend judgment" to make it clear that they "neither [...] posit nor [...] reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters being investigated" (Sextus Empiricus 49 [PH 1.196]); and "I determine nothing" to stress that they are *not* "making an utterance about an unclear object and assenting to it" (Sextus Empiricus 49 [PH 1.197]). In addition to the more famous phrases, there are expressions such as "perhaps," "maybe," and "possibly" that are "indicative of non-assertion" (Sextus Empiricus 48 [PH 1.194]). The Pyrrhonian skeptics are well aware that ordinary language pervasively involves assertion, "the positing or denying of something—e.g., 'It is day', 'It is not day'" (Sextus Empiricus 48 [PH 1.192]); and that, in this way, it naturally tends toward dogmatism, that is, toward

assenting to something unclear under investigation and forming a belief about it. To avoid and combat the assertive tendency of both ordinary and philosophical language, the Pyrrhonists make the constant effort to practice “non-assertion” (*aphasia*) or “refraining from assertion”—from either positing or rejecting anything unclear (Sextus 46 [PH 1.192]). While in Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines*, Pyrrhonian non-assertion is presented as a skeptical language, which comprises skeptical phrases and expressions, other sources that center on the figure of Pyrrho seem to suggest a more literal interpretation of *aphasia* as speechlessness—either as total silence or at least a partial privation of speech (see, for example, Bett 2000: 37-39).

Let me now turn to Nietzsche’s reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism. As Sommer notes, “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. He certainly knew very well the chapters on Pyrrho and Timon in the *Vitae philosophorum* [*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*] (DL IX 11 and 12)” (443). Stefano Busellato (2012: 30-31) further suggests that one way or another Nietzsche must have become familiar with Sextus’s *Outlines of Scepticism*, too, in his study of Diogenes Laertius in particular and Greek philosophy in general. Moreover, as is well known, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche expressly praises Victor Brochard’s *Les Sceptiques Grecs* (1887). “Some posthumous fragments from 1888,” according to Sommer (444), “are linked to Brochard’s work: they deal with the founding father of ancient philosophical skepticism, Pyrrho of Elis [...]. Before Nietzsche reads Brochard, the skeptics of Antiquity barely appear in Nietzsche’s writings,” especially in the published works, with the rare exception of the direct mention of a character named “Pyrrho” in aphorism 213 in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*.

Nietzsche’s views on skepticism and in particular on Pyrrhonism are rather ambivalent, especially in the late writings (Bett 2000: 79). While Nietzsche endorses some kinds of *skepsis* (e.g., GS 51; BGE 209; A 54), he is very critical of other kinds (e.g., BGE 208). Moreover, as we will see shortly, while in the published works written in 1888 Nietzsche makes positive assessments of the skeptics, including the ancient skeptics, in the

posthumous fragments of the same period he is highly critical of Pyrrho's philosophy of tranquility and indifference as well as of his ordinary way of life (see NF 1888, 14[85]; 14[87]; 4[99]; 14[100]; 14[116]; 14[129]; 14[141]; 14[142]; 14[149]; 14[162]; 14[191]; 15[5]; 15[58]). In section 3, I will argue that a similar ambivalence can be found in Nietzsche's characterization of Pyrrho in WS 213. In the remainder of this section, I consider Nietzsche's complimentary remarks about the skeptics in *Ecce Homo* and in *The Anti-Christ*. Those remarks, I want to argue, suggest that Nietzsche positively assesses—at least to a certain extent—a Pyrrhonian-inspired style of speaking and writing.

After praising Brochard's book in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche adds: "The sceptics were the only *respectable* types among the philosophical tribes, tribes that generally talk out of both sides of their mouths (they would talk out of five sides if they could)!" (EH "Clever" 3). In this passage, it is important to note, Nietzsche finds the skeptics respectable precisely for their way of talking; and the capacity to talk out of both sides of the mouth that he attributes to them seems to be somehow related to the Pyrrhonists' "ability to set out oppositions" between accounts as well as to their way of speaking about those opposed accounts (Sextus Empiricus 4 [PH 1.8], 46-47 [PH 1.188-191]). The idea that Pyrrhonism involves a pluralism of differing voices can be found in Diogenes Laertius, too: "Some call Homer the founder of [the Pyrrhonian] school, for to the same questions he more than anyone else is always giving [a] different answer at different times and is never definite or dogmatic about the answer" (483-485 [DL 9.69-71]).

Why is the capacity to talk out of two or even five sides of one's mouth *respectable* for Nietzsche? A possible answer to this question can be found in *The Anti-Christ*, where the skeptics are similarly described as "the decent types in the history of philosophy" (A 12). The similarity with *Ecce Homo* makes it plausible to suppose that the Greek skeptics are at least included among those decent types of philosophers. Here, Nietzsche praises the skeptics for their having a better "conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity" than the rest of philosophers and "admiring fans" (A 12). Skeptics are thus regarded by Nietzsche as respectable or decent

because they strenuously defend their intellectual integrity from the one-sidedness of dogmatism and fanaticism (A 54), by voicing contrasting arguments and, as Conway and Ward argue, even by speaking against themselves (see D 370). The Pyrrhonists, in particular, excel in the ability to “ponder divergent views” that, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche attributes to free spirits; this ability is key to fostering an “independent and careful attitude toward knowledge” and serves as an antidote to “the tremendous acceleration of [modern] life” that rushes us to “seeing and judging partially or falsely” (HH 283).

Still in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche contrasts “The priest’s total lack of psychological cleanliness” with the capacity for philology, which he famously conceives of “as *ephexis* in interpretation” (A 52). “*Ephexis*,” as Jessica Berry (2011: 131) clarifies, means “stopping or checking” and was an important term in Pyrrhonism; Bett (2000: 73) specifies that it is “a close etymological correlate of *epochē*, the Pyrrhonists’ standard term for suspension of judgement.” Philology as *ephexis*, then, has to do with the deferral of interpretation to avoid rushed conclusions. As Nietzsche sees it, philology as *ephexis* in interpretation is not merely an academic discipline but, more generally, an “art of reading well”—that is, an intellectual ability “to read facts *without* falsifying them through interpretations, *without* letting the desire to understand make you lose caution, patience, subtlety”—that can be applied to texts as well as to all sorts of phenomena (A 52; see also HH 8). The ability to temporarily withhold interpretation for Nietzsche is key to pursuing scientific inquiry with “discipline of spirit, integrity or spiritual rigor of conscience,” to maintaining “freedom of spirit,” and to avoid dogmatism and fanaticism (A 47; see also HH 270-71; 631; 633). In contrast to the acceleration of modern life, and to the rashness of dogmatists and fanatics, philology, Nietzsche writes in the 1886 preface of *Dawn*, “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; see also GM Preface 8).

Not only does Nietzsche want to be read *philologically* (D Preface 5; GM Preface 8), but it is possible to argue that he adopts a variety of styles to facilitate

ephexis in his readers' interpretation. As we have seen, Bett and Sommer suggest that Nietzsche's aphoristic style contributes to bringing about to this *ephectic* effect. Sommer further proposes that "Nietzsche's [...] skepticism tries to withstand the temptation of systematic thought" (447). In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche famously expresses his distrust of systematic philosophy, viewing the "will to a system [as] a lack of integrity" (TI "Arrows" 26). In contrast to the will to a system, which attempts to put a unitary and final interpretation on things, Nietzsche's will to aphorisms—in cooperation with his willingness to adopt literary and rhetorical devices such as more or less fictional characters—allows him to consider divergent views and to talk from different mouths and with differing voices. His aphoristic style can be thus regarded as "skeptical," for it works against the one-sidedness and rashness in interpretation of dogmatism and fanaticism; and, in so doing, it calls for intellectual integrity "in the midst of this *rerum concordia discors* [discordant concord of things] and of this whole marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence" (GS 2).

2. Nietzsche and Pyrrhonian Non-Assertion?

Although Nietzsche has positive things to say about the ancient skeptics and about ancient skeptical practices such as *ephexis*, his critique of Pyrrho in the posthumous fragments of 1888 is an indication of a complex, ambivalent reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism. While Nietzsche endorses—and, perhaps, appropriates—some aspects or uses of Pyrrhonism, it is clear that he rejects, or would reject, others. There are in fact both fundamental similarities and differences between Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists. Some of these emerge in the growing secondary literature on Nietzsche's reception of the ancient skeptical tradition. In the only book-length study on Nietzsche and ancient skepticism in anglophone scholarship, Berry (2011: 5) "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," including his critique of metaphysics, his naturalism, his perspectivism, and his immoralism.

In her study, Berry dismisses—perhaps too readily—the suggestions put forward by Conway and Ward and Bett concerning the kinship or

similarities between the Pyrrhonian skeptical mode of non-assertion and Nietzsche's style (2011: 24 n. 7, 29 n. 22, 153). Moreover, although Berry (2011: 24) makes it clear that "it is not [her] intention to argue for the claim that 'Nietzsche is a Pyrrhonist,'" at times she ends up overlooking a number of major differences between him and the Pyrrhonists, especially with respect to their views on suspension of judgment, tranquility, and philosophy as a way of life.

Berry is right when she claims that Nietzsche revives the Pyrrhonian practices of *skepsis* (continuous investigation) and *zetesis* (truth-seeking) (2011: 92-93, 150; see GS 51; BGE 209; A 54; cf. Sextus Empiricus 3 [PH 1.1-4], 4 [PH 1.7]); Diogenes Laertius 483 [DL 9.69-70]). However, as we will see in more detail in section 5, Nietzsche's commitment to a skeptical and zetetic mode of investigation takes a different form, one that is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonism. As Keith Ansell-Pearson (2021: 14) notes, perhaps Nietzsche's skeptical practice can be better understood as a constantly renewed effort of searching, which takes the form of a commitment to experimentalism in his writings. As we will see in section 5, experimentalism for Nietzsche is closely linked not only to hypothesis-making but also to trying hypotheses out in practice.

Conway and Ward, Bett, and Sommer argue that despite some strong affinities, there are also substantial differences between Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists—even in the context of the kinship or resemblance of their styles. These commentators agree that, like the Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche often adopts a non-assertoric style of writing, but, if he is a skeptic, he is not a skeptic in the exact same way or sense the Pyrrhonists are. "Although Nietzsche shares Sextus's commitment to the therapeutic value of self-consuming arguments [in combatting the psychic malady of dogmatism]," according to Conway and Ward, "he does not agree that tranquility (*ataraxia*) constitutes psychic health" (217-18; see also Bett 2000: 77; and Ansell-Pearson and Serini 21-23). In addition, as Bett points out, Nietzsche is sometimes very critical of suspension of judgment, interpreting it as a disengagement with the world that is a symptom of a physiological weakness and disease (2000: 75, 77, 81; see also Miner 39; Mitcheson;

Sommer). Relatedly, for Sommer, "[Nietzsche] argues in favor of an experimental form of skepticism that is heroic, active, and after all judgment-friendly," which significantly deviates "from the passive Pyrrhonism with its refusal to make a judgment" (443, 447). Moreover, Katrina Mitcheson suggests that the experimental skepticism favored by Nietzsche entails a practice of self-transformation that is at odds with the practical conformism of the Pyrrhonists (4; see also Ansell-Pearson 2021).

This complexity and ambivalence, I argue, can be found also in Nietzsche's reception of Pyrrhonian non-assertion. I largely agree with Conway and Ward that Nietzsche deploys a strategically non-assertoric language to discredit dogmatism, and that his arguments are self-consuming, leaving the reader without any recognizable philosophical position—other than his perspectivism. I am also in general agreement with Bett that Nietzsche's aphoristic style—as well as his stylistic pluralism—creates a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives that contributes to avoiding, and rejecting, straightforward assertoric modes of utterance, keeping the reader at a certain distance. Moreover, I believe Sommer is partly right in saying that Nietzsche's style is full of reservations and "aware of the fact that silence would perhaps be more adequate" than the dogmatic presumptions of language. However, I want to ask, is this always the case throughout Nietzsche's writings? Does Nietzsche always deploy a non-assertoric language avoiding and combatting dogmatism in the same way as the Pyrrhonists did? Or does he sometimes speak more assertively, positing and denying things in such a way that the Pyrrhonists would not hesitate to call dogmatic? At times, Nietzsche seems overly assertive and, rather than being reticent or keeping silent, he speaks with emphasis and exaggeration. Is this compatible with the moderate way of speaking of skeptics such as Sextus and Montaigne?

Focusing especially on *Beyond Good and Evil*, Conway and Ward are ready to concede that Nietzsche does make dogmatic assertions. They persuasively argue that "Nietzsche's attack on dogmatism is dogmatic, but only rhetorically so, for it arises from within dogmatism itself. By rhetorically inhabiting the dogmatist's paradigm, Nietzsche engineers an *immanent* critique of dogmatism that is consistent with his perspectivism" (200). "Like

Sextus,” according to Conway and Ward, “Nietzsche adopts the assertorial mode of dogmatism only in order to reveal its limitations,” “[developing] a mode of critique that enables him to speak non-dogmatically about dogmatism” (203, 205). As in the case of Sextus, on their reading, Nietzsche deliberately constructs self-refuting arguments that avoid and combat dogmatism, by consuming dogmatic assertions as well as themselves: “Just as the purgative drug purges itself along with other fluids, so the skeptical argument ‘cancels itself’ [...], as well as cancelling the dogmatist’s argument” (Conway and Ward 208). Conway and Ward’s suggestion is very helpful to explain how, in some contexts, Nietzsche uses, and avoids, dogmatism in his critique of various dogmatic positions. It is important to note that, nevertheless, Nietzsche often constructively proposes alternatives to the positions he criticizes. Consider, for example, positive doctrines such as the eternal return, the overhuman, and the will to power. Is Nietzsche’s non-assertoric style compatible with his proposing alternative doctrines such as those? Are these doctrines just a dogmatic turn in Nietzsche?

Bett contends that in the mature writings before 1888 Nietzsche can be *loosely* described as a skeptic on account of his theoretical and stylistic perspectivism, which, as in the case of more characteristic forms of skepticism, centers around “the difficulty or impossibility of determining how the world really, objectively is” (2000: 70). Bett goes on to say that, however, “Nietzsche’s perspectivism seems to be absent from the published works of 1888” (2000: 82). In these works, as Bett reads them, whereas Nietzsche remains theoretically committed to his perspectivism and even approves of skepticism, “he seems to speak as if he knows the objective truth, which no skeptic would ever do” (2000: 81-82). As mentioned in the introduction, here I leave aside the theoretical framework of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and place my focus exclusively on his skeptical style. For Bett, too, the question as to whether Nietzsche is a skeptic is, at least in part, also a question of his method of writing. In the published works of 1888 such as *The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*, according to Bett, “the stylistic and methodological features which had earlier seemed reminiscent of ancient skepticism [e.g., the multiplicity of perspectives] are largely

abandoned, and the ideas expressed become much less easily assimilable to anything one might recognize as skepticism" (2000:85). To Bett, the latest Nietzsche sounds much more like a dogmatist (either negative or positive) than a skeptic—though he approves certain aspects of skepticism—for "he is *denying* a wide range of cherished beliefs, and thereby apparently committing himself to a wide range of beliefs of his own" (2000: 85). However, even before 1888, and in the context of his so-called "aphoristic style," Nietzsche rarely shies away from making judgments and can be found denying and committing himself to all sorts of things philosophical. How do we reconcile this with his non-assertoric mode of writing? This is particularly problematic if we want to compare Nietzsche with the Pyrrhonian skeptics—who, as we have seen, do everything they can to withhold judgment and avoid assertion. Bett clearly identifies the problem when he asks: "how can Nietzsche *both* be against the [dogmatic] claims of philosophers and others to have captured the objective or absolute truth, *and* be against suspension of judgement?"⁴ (2000 77). A possible answer to this question is that Nietzsche's non-assertoric style may be different from that of the Pyrrhonists, at least in some respects.

An initial step toward such an answer is taken by Sommer and other commentators (see, especially, Mitcheson, Ansell-Pearson 2021, Ansell-Pearson and Bamford 2021: 32-33, 43 n. 19, 108, 113 n. 81, 179, 182, n. 32) when they place emphasis on the experimental character of Nietzsche's skepticism starting from aphorism 51 of *The Gay Science*. Despite Nietzsche's sympathy for "*ephexis* in interpretation" (A 52), Sommer argues, his skepticism is ultimately "judgment-friendly" (448). Something more and more precise, however, should be said about the workings of Nietzsche's experimental skepticism—in particular, I suggest, about the relationship between judgment-making and the non-assertoric style of thinking and writing in Nietzsche.

3. Pyrrho as a Philosopher of Silence in WS 213: Mistrust and Fanaticism

In aphorism 213 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, entitled "*The fanatic of mistrust and his security*," Nietzsche stages a dialogue between a

character named “Pyrrho” and an old man. This aphorism, which is the only explicit mention of Pyrrho in Nietzsche’s published works (at least between 1872 and 1888), touches upon a number of important topics relating to skepticism, such as mistrust, truth, fanaticism, laughter and—I want to argue—silence; however, perhaps due to its somewhat enigmatic nature, it has been largely undervalued, if not completely ignored, in the anglophone literature on Nietzsche and ancient skepticism.

For example, Berry (2011) pays no attention to WS 213 in her book on Nietzsche and the ancient skeptical tradition. Bett, one of the few scholars actually 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” (2000: 67). Maria Cristina Fornari similarly stresses that Nietzsche’s Pyrrho in WS 213 “is not the Pyrrho of the tradition” (47, my translation), though she takes the aphorism much more seriously than other commentators and offers a close reading of it in the context of her analysis of the tension between skepticism and truth in Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is clear that WS 213 is not an historical characterization of Pyrrho, but, I contend, there are still some significant connections with Pyrrhonian skepticism, which—however loose—deserve to be further investigated, for they can help us to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche’s conception and practice of a non-assertoric style. More precisely, it is my contention that in WS 213 Nietzsche is flirting with two specific Pyrrhonian practices, namely, *peritropē* (self-refutation) and *aphasia* (speechlessness or non-assertion). To make this flirtation visible, I will reconstruct the dialogue.

From the opening questions of the old man, we learn that Pyrrho wants to offer humanity an important teaching. It becomes clearer later in the dialogue that Pyrrho wants to be the teacher “Of mistrust, as it has never existed in the world, of mistrust against anything and everything” (WS 213). It makes sense that Nietzsche attributes the teaching of such a deep, unprecedented kind of mistrust to a character named after Pyrrho, the source

of inspiration for Pyrrhonian skepticism (Sextus Empiricus 4 [PH 1.7]; Diogenes Laertius 483 [DL 9.69-70]). Nietzsche's Pyrrho in WS 213 turns out to be a very peculiar kind of teacher, one who teaches mistrust against his own teachings: he wants to tell his disciples "not to listen to [him]"—to the point that he thinks that he must keep silent and that they should even mistrust his silence. Throughout the dialogue, Pyrrho can be found making self-refuting statements of that sort and planning seemingly paradoxical or self-defeating educational projects.

Although Conway and Ward overlook WS 213 in their study of *peritropē* in Sextus Empiricus and Nietzsche, they provide us with a helpful explanation of the connection between self-refutation and non-assertion: "the skeptic can arrive at the non-assertive mode of discourse by deliberately constructing self-refuting statements or arguments" (195). This, I think, can help us to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche's flirtation with self-refutation and non-assertion in WS 213: Nietzsche's Pyrrho, like the Pyrrhonists, wants to arrive at a non-assertive mode of teaching by deliberately speaking against himself and thus undermining his authority as a teacher and as truth-teller. As Karl Jaspers rightly notes, the Nietzschean Pyrrho is thus "undertaking to teach men indirectly and without fanaticism" (220). Not only does he want to avoid fanaticism in his teachings, but, I suggest, he also tries to teach a non-fanatical stance to his disciples. In other words, mistrust toward fanaticism is the intended learning outcome of his teachings. To achieve such a learning outcome, in WS 213 Pyrrho does not limit himself to teaching *about* mistrust as a doctrine, but his teachings have a *practical* or *performative* value: he wants to actually create mistrust in his disciples to make sure they do not fanatically adhere to his words.

Starting from his first line in the dialogue, Pyrrho wants "to warn people against [himself]," acknowledging all his "errors" and exposing his "rashness, contradictions and stupidities to every eye" (WS 213). He wants to discredit himself in front of his disciples, and even to prompt them to disgust toward himself, for he is worried that, if they perceive him as respectable and worthy, they will be seduced and deceived into believing him (WS 213). In so doing, Pyrrho wants his disciples to "resist the truth for

as long as [they] can, out of disgust toward the one who is its advocate,” and to thus “mistrust the truth that passes through [his] mouth” (WS 213).

At this point, the old man asks Pyrrho whether “[he wants] then to be the teacher of mistrust against the truth” (WS 213). Pyrrho replies that he wants to be the teacher “Of mistrust, as it has never existed in the world, of mistrust against anything and everything,” but then he mischievously overturns the old man’s question, affirming that mistrust “is the only path to truth” (WS 213). Pyrrho goes on as follows:

The right eye dare not trust the left, and light will have to be called darkness for a time: this is the path that you must take. Do not believe that it leads to fruit trees and beautiful meadows. You will find small, hard seeds upon it—those are the truths: for decades you will have to swallow lies by the handful in order not to die of hunger, even though you already know that they are lies. But those seeds will be sown and buried and perhaps, perhaps one day there will be a harvest: nobody would dare *promise* it, unless he were a fanatic. (WS 213)

Nietzsche’s Pyrrho, the teacher of mistrust against anything and everything, claims that small, hard seeds of truths *will be found*, and that, from these, fully grown truths might be harvested in the future. He is thus neither a negative dogmatist,⁵ who asserts that things are inapprehensible, nor a Pyrrhonian skeptic, who keeps their investigation going by suspending judgment about every discovery, including the discovery that things cannot be apprehended. It is possible to argue that here Nietzsche commits Pyrrho to a modern-like conception of skepticism as a path to truth, as a method for discovering at least some kinds of truths with a degree of certainty. At least in this period, Nietzsche similarly thinks that “Mistrust is the touchstone for the gold of certainty” (WS 145; cf. HH 22); and that thanks to the sharpening of scientific methods, “truths really could be discovered” by scientific inquiry (HH 634), though these are “small, unpretentious truths” rather than the grandiose and pretentious “truths” of metaphysical philosophy (HH 3). Importantly, the Nietzschean Pyrrho adds that, although small, hard truths can be found and

disseminated, "nobody would dare *promise* [a harvest of truths ripe for basing our lives upon them], unless he were a fanatic" (WS 213).

The old man then interrupts Pyrrho, saying that his "words, too, are those of the fanatic!" (WS 213). (After all, Pyrrho dares to promise something.) Pyrrho agrees with the old man and now wants "to be mistrustful of all words." 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 line Pyrrho reaches the climax of his paradoxical, self-defeating pedagogy, so the old man asks him whether he is withdrawing from his endeavor to teach something important to humanity. Turning over this question too, Pyrrho responds that, in fact, the old man "[has] just shown [him] the door through which [he] must pass" (WS 213). From now on, the old man and Pyrrho cease to understand each other, and the latter ends up laughing in reaction to the former's utterances.⁶ The dialogue comes to an enigmatic conclusion. The old man asks, rather resignedly, whether "Keeping silent and laughing is [...] now [Pyrrho's] entire philosophy, and Pyrrho responds that such a philosophy "would not be the worst one" (WS 213).

Those commentators who do pay attention to this aphorism tend to concentrate on Pyrrho as a laughing philosopher and more generally on the philosophical significance that Nietzsche attaches to laughter in his writings (see, for example Jaspers 220; and Alfano 226). Here, I want to focus on Pyrrho as a philosopher of silence and on the philosophical significance that Nietzsche attaches to silence in his writings. Sommer mentions, though only in passing, that the Nietzschean Pyrrho in WS 213 embraces a philosophy of silence that can be somehow connected with historical Pyrrhonism: "According to Diogenes Laertius [...], *aphasia*—the wordlessness, the silence in light of the impossibility of making a decision—is typical of Pyrrhonian skepticism" (445; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*: 475 [DL 9.61], 489 [DL 9.76]). In the light of this connection, it can be argued that, as for the Pyrrhonian skeptic, for Nietzsche's Pyrrho too, silence—or, at least, a non-assertoric mode of speaking—"would not be the worst" since it helps to avoid making dogmatic and fanatic assertions.⁷

Such an argument, however, seems to be seriously challenged by Nietzsche's own characterization of Pyrrho in WS 213. Indeed, Pyrrho is characterized by the old man and, more importantly, by the title of the aphorism as a fanatic or, more precisely, as a "*fanatic of mistrust*" (WS 213). How can Pyrrho, who does everything he can to avoid and combat fanaticism, be a fanatic? In my reading, WS 213 contains an ambivalent characterization of Pyrrho. This ambivalence becomes immediately evident if we consider the title of this aphorism in a previous draft: "*The sage of the future*" (HH II: 513, n. 398).⁸ The contrast between the drafted and published titles could not be more striking. The drafted title portrays Pyrrho in a positive light as a sage who teaches mistrust toward fanaticism and thus shows the path to truth and to the future. The published title (in line with the old man's accusation) conveys the negative view that Pyrrho is himself a fanatic. As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford (31) note, Nietzsche is highly critical of the "the kind of skepticism which can ironically result in the thinker becoming a fanatic of mistrust (see the complex and witty dialogue between Pyrrho and an old man Nietzsche presents, WS 213)." But in what sense does Nietzsche's Pyrrho in WS 213 become a fanatic of mistrust?

In WS 213, I suggest, Pyrrho is regarded as "*the fanatic of mistrust*" because he brings his mistrust too far—so much that his mistrust and his mode of teaching become themselves fanatical. Although in *The Gay Science* we find the formula "The more mistrust, the more philosophy" (GS 346), and although in the middle and late writings mistrust and skepticism are consistently placed in antithesis to fanatical convictions (HH 663; A 54), for Nietzsche an exclusive or excessive use of mistrust would preclude some important philosophical possibilities and even degenerate into fanaticism. First, a philosophy reduced to mistrust only would be unsuited to a number of creative tasks that Nietzsche considers central to philosophical activity—such as the creation of new values. Second, in the context of his philosophy of the "small doses" in his middle writings (D 534),⁹ Nietzsche repeatedly endorses a moderate use of mistrust and skepticism as antidotes to fanaticism. In *Human, All Too Human*, 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); and in *Dawn*, he sides with the ancient Greeks and Romans, in contrast to the modern Germans, promoting "a little bit of skepticism for each and every thing" (D 207).

Moreover, it is possible to argue that for Nietzsche, mistrust remains a genuine philosophical activity as long as it does not deviate from the "path to [searching for and potentially discovering] truth" (WS 213), or at least from "the basic demands of intellectual integrity." Typically, as we have seen, Nietzsche praises the skeptics for their intellectual integrity and condemns fanatics for their lack of intellectual conscience (A 12; A 54). The fanatic, Nietzsche writes in *The Anti-Christ*, is "the opposite, the antagonist of the truthful person,—of truth [...]. A faithful person is not free to have any sort of conscience for the question 'true' or 'untrue': honesty on this point would be his immediate downfall" (A 54). While the skeptic is free from every sort of conviction and able to see freely, the fanatic has "a strict and necessary optic in all values," is "a partisan through and through," and is thus unable to see things otherwise—and to ponder or speak divergent views (A 54). Now, wanting to mistrust anything and everything, without responding to the demands of intellectual integrity, would come close to the "fanatical closing of one's eyes" involved in some religious convictions (WS 158). In contrast to religious fanatics, the fanatics of mistrust would close their eyes to any grounds for credibility, such as certainties, probabilities, experimental hypotheses, etc. (see, for example, HH 637; GS 2). Even mistrust may thus become a strict and necessary optic—a conviction—unresponsive to intellectual integrity and truthfulness.

In WS 213, Nietzsche's Pyrrho does acknowledge some truths, and on account of this he is accused of fanaticism by the old man. It is in response to this accusation that Pyrrho becomes more mistrustful and perhaps turns into a fanatic: he overuses his mistrust, applying it indiscriminately and obstinately to dogmatic and fanatical claims, as well as to the words of the old man, to all words, including his own, and even to his own wordlessness (cf. WS 296). Such a fanatical use of mistrust would lead to an equally fanatical philosophy of silence, which no longer pursues non-assertion for the sake of avoiding and combating dogmatism and fanaticism—nor for the

sake of intellectual integrity—but merely for the sake of not asserting. Not only can this degenerate into fanaticism, but it would seem to Nietzsche also a philosophically pointless activity, one that at its most extreme would result in complete silence.

The characterization of Pyrrho as a fanatic of mistrust thus opens to another, conflicting interpretation of his philosophy of silence, one that can still coexist with the argument I have been developing. On the one hand, for Nietzsche, a philosophy of non-assertion would not be the worst, since—when administered in the correct dose—it serves as an effective antidote against dogmatism and fanaticism. On the other, a philosophy reduced to silence would not be the best either. As we will see in sections 4 and 5, for Nietzsche, a non-assertoric style is helpful insofar as it permits the skeptic to make some kinds of non-fanatical assertions as well as to posit or reject things philosophical.

4. Zarathustra as Skeptic: Non-Assertoric Teaching versus Fanatical Preaching

As Fornari rightly notes, Pyrrho’s fueling mistrust against his own teachings in aphorism 213 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow* echoes a famous passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Fornari 45; see also Busellato 234, n. 41):

“Alone I go now, my disciples! You also should go now, and alone! Thus I want it. Indeed, I counsel you to guard yourself against Zarathustra! And even better: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he deceived you [...]. One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only. [...] You revere me, but what if your reverence falls down some day? [...] You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra! You are my believers, but what matter all believers! All believers do this; that’s why all faith amounts to so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you....”
(Z I “Of the Bestowing Virtue” 3: 58-59)

In this passage, according to Paolo D'Iorio (2016: 81), Zarathustra issues a "harsh and urgent call to independence and skepticism." Like Pyrrho in WS 213, Zarathustra adopts a self-discrediting, non-assertoric style of speaking. He counsels his disciples to guard themselves against him, to be ashamed of him, and to even think that he deceived them, so as to bring them to question his authority as a teacher. In so doing, Zarathustra wants to create mistrust in his disciples, rather than reverence, belief, and faith; and, simultaneously, he wants to encourage independence and autonomy of thought in them.¹⁰

In the light of this similar characterization, it can be argued that Zarathustra too is a teacher of mistrust—at least in some respect. This argument is supported by aphorism 54 of *The Anti-Christ*, wherein Nietzsche regards "Zarathustra [as] a sceptic" in opposition to people of convictions and fanatics (A 54). For Nietzsche, then, Zarathustra is a skeptic first and foremost because he is not a fanatic—and seeks to avoid and combat uncritical acquiescence, dogmatism, and fanaticism.

Despite the clear echo between WS 213 and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I suggest, Zarathustra is not a skeptic and a teacher of mistrust in the same way that Pyrrho is. Unlike Pyrrho—who, as we saw in section 3, is also negatively characterized as a fanatic—Zarathustra does not seem to teach mistrust against anything and everything, nor does he seem to be a philosopher who would ultimately keep silence rather than speaking. After all, Zarathustra is the main character of a book titled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Although he attaches great significance to silence (and laughter), he ultimately wants to speak: "Let us speak of this, you wisest ones, even if it is bad to do so. Keeping silent is worse; all truths that are kept silent become poisonous" (Z II "On Self-Overcoming"). In his speeches, Zarathustra is not *only* a teacher of mistrust but tries also to teach a number of doctrines such as self-overcoming, the eternal return, the overhuman, the will to power, and the creation of new values—doctrines that are often interpreted as the *pars construens* of Nietzsche's philosophy. If Zarathustra is not a fanatic, he is not a Pyrrhonian-like skeptic either, for he does not stop at mistrust, suspension of judgment, and non-assertion.

The case of Zarathustra is a particularly interesting one, for his skepticism is compatible with doctrine-teaching. In the last section of the preface to *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche attributes a special place to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in his writings—especially for Zarathustra’s distinctive way of talking (EH Preface 4). Here, Nietzsche cites a number of passages from his book, including the above-mentioned excerpt from “Of the Bestowing Virtue”—which is significantly placed by way of conclusion of the preface of his intellectual autobiography. In this section, Nietzsche seeks to distinguish Zarathustra’s voice from that of the “founders of religions”: “It is not a ‘prophet’ speaking here. Above all, you need to *listen* properly to the tone coming from this mouth, the halcyon tone...” (EH Preface 4).

He then quotes a passage from “On the Blissful Isles,” in which Zarathustra addresses his disciples as friends and compares his teachings to ripe figs that fall from the trees gently shaken by the wind. According to this simile, the task of the teacher is to bring their teachings to maturation, to let them fall, and to invite their friends to pick them up and enjoy them (EH Preface 4; Z II “On the Blissful Isles”). This passage is commented on by Nietzsche as follows: “These are not the words of some fanatic, nothing is being ‘preached’ here, nobody is demanding that you *believe*: drop after drop, word after word falls from an infinite fulness and depth of happiness,—the tempo of this speech is tender and slow” (EH Preface 4).¹¹ Zarathustra is presented as a teacher who addresses his disciples as friends—not as merely passive learners or followers. As friends, they do not need to be seduced with promises of truth; they are just invited to taste his teachings. Zarathustra is not a “*seducer*”—he wants friends, not lovers; his words are “The exact opposite of what a ‘wise man,’ ‘saint,’ ‘world redeemer’ [...] would say”; “He does not just talk differently he *is* different...” (EH Preface 4).

Not only does Zarathustra’s skeptical mode of thinking and speaking seek to avoid and combat fanaticism, but it also permits him to posit things philosophical. Unlike fanatics, though, Zarathustra is not a preacher: he is not interested in convincing his interlocutors, promising them truths, but simply invites them to enjoy his teachings as experiences—both aesthetic and intellectual—or experiments and to potentially learn something from them. As

we have seen, Zarathustra wants his friends to be skeptical about him and his doctrines, but this does not mean that the doctrines he teaches are less important or influential, nor does it mean that his friends' experiences of them have no pedagogical value. Rather, it means that the doctrines that fall from Zarathustra's mouth ought to be independently picked up, examined, questioned, tested, and used by his companions and fellow creators. In the next section, I want to argue that Zarathustra's case can help us to better understand and appreciate Nietzsche's own non-assertoric style in the late writings such as *Beyond Good and Evil*. In *Ecce Homo*, not only does Nietzsche expressly praise Zarathustra's special way of talking, but he also presents himself in the same way he presents Zarathustra, namely, as the opposite of a "saint"—in opposition to the seriousness and fanaticism of their way of speaking and preaching (EH Preface 2). Before I turn to this, let me say something more about Nietzsche's non-assertoric style in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

As Robert Pippin notes in the introduction to the Cambridge edition, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—even more than others of Nietzsche's texts—is "overwhelmingly literary, rhetorically complex, elliptical, and always a matter of adopting personae and 'masks'" (2010: xx). Zarathustra, like Pyrrho in WS 213, is one of Nietzsche's masks. Nietzsche's speaking through the mouthpiece of Zarathustra substantially contributes the "kind of distancing strategy [and] rejection of straightforward assertoric modes of utterance" that Bett detects in Nietzsche (2000: 83). The fact that Nietzsche indirectly puts his words into the mouth of Zarathustra, if anything, maximizes the skeptical effect of Zarathustra's style of speaking and teaching. Pippin suggests that having appreciated Nietzsche's literary, rhetorical, indirect style in *Zarathustra* as well as in others of his works, "we then appreciate that such notions as 'the will to power' and 'the eternal return of the same' belong on [the] list [of endless pictures and images], are not independent 'philosophical' explanations [...]. It is not an accident that Nietzsche often introduces these notions with the same hypothetical indirectness that he uses for the other images" (xx). In the next section, I will focus on the "hypothetical indirectness" Nietzsche at times uses when he formulates doctrines such as the will to power with his own voice.

5. Nietzsche's Experimental *Skepsis*: Non-Assertion and Hypothesis-Making

The Pyrrhonists, as we have seen, use a skeptical language to avoid dogmatism and to adequately express their practice of suspension of judgment in their continuous investigations. In particular, through their practice of *aphasia* they seek to refrain from any dogmatic assertion, be it affirmation or negation, so much that they neither posit nor reject anything philosophical. In contrast, as we saw in the previous section, Nietzsche praises Zarathustra for his attempt to avoid and combat fanaticism while positing things philosophical in his teachings. Zarathustra's non-assertoric mode of speaking and teaching, permits some non-dogmatical and non-fanatical forms of assertions. Zarathustra's form of skeptical assertion, I argue, provides us with a helpful model for studying Nietzsche's own non-assertoric style.

Like the Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche is committed to a form of *skepsis* or continuous mode of investigation. However, as we will see shortly, while he too wants to avoid and combat dogmatism and fanaticism, he does not think that to keep investigation going the skeptics need to always suspend judgment about everything. In aphorism 51 in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche openly favors a form of *skepsis*—in relation to his commitment to truthfulness:

Truthfulness.—I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply:
“Let us try it!” But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment.¹² This is the limit of my “truthfulness”; for there courage has lost its right. (GS 51)

As we can see in a note in preparation for GS, Nietzsche endorses a “skepticism of experiments” in opposition to the “inertia of despair” (NF 1880, 6[356]).¹³ Nietzsche continues to think about “skepticism as temptation” also in his plans for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (NF 1882, 16[83]; 16[84]; 21[1]), suggesting that skeptical investigation must proceed experimentally to overcome the inertia of despair and to exercise “the right to create” (NF 1882, 6[1]). It is possible to argue that, for Nietzsche, Zarathustra is a figure of the experimental skeptic, one that not only seeks to avoid and combat fanaticism but also courageously

tries to experiment with and create new (non-fanatical) possibilities for thinking and living (see Ansell-Pearson 2021).¹⁴

In GS 51, *skepsis* is construed as a form of truthfulness. Starting from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche is committed to the skeptical "pathos of searching for the truth" in antithesis to "the pathos that we possess the truth," which is typical of dogmatists and fanatics (HH 633). Such a skeptical search is truth directed or at least conducted in "the spirit of truthful inquiry" (HH 225),¹⁵ for it is aimed at avoiding dogmatic and fanatical convictions (HH 633), "error and self-deception" (HH 9), and beliefs formed on the basis of faith and tradition rather than on the basis of a careful consideration of reasons pro and con (HH 225; GS 2).¹⁶ Here, I am in agreement with Berry's (2019) view that Nietzsche's doxastic skepticism—one primarily targeting belief—is thus consistent with a respect for intellectual integrity and honesty, for knowledge, for genuine scientific inquiry, and ultimately even for truth (see A 12; A 54).

Nevertheless, in GS 51, Nietzsche places an important limit on his commitment to truthfulness and *skepsis*: he favors a continuous mode of truthful investigation so long as it grants the right to exercise one's intellectual courage and to try new experiments.¹⁷ This means that, in contrast to the Pyrrhonists, his commitment to truthfulness is at least in part compatible with making mistakes in formulating new hypotheses: "We have seized once again the good courage to make mistakes, attempts to take things provisionally" (D 501). Nietzsche worries that an overvaluation of truth and truthfulness, at the expenses of courage and experimentality, may produce a renunciative skepticism, one leading to despair of truth, to a standstill of the mind, and to a paralysis of the will.¹⁸ Hence, without the aid of other intellectual powers truthfulness may in fact end up stopping investigation, rather than ensuring its continuation. It is for this reason that, at least starting from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche endorses an experimental *skepsis* (GS 51), a "stronger kind of skepticism" that "does not believe, but it does not lose itself on that account" (BGE 209), and a free and strong—indeed, super-strong—skepticism that "uses convictions [as a *means*] and uses them up, but it does not subordinate itself to them (A 54).¹⁹

In this section, I want to specifically focus on Nietzsche's conception and practice of experimental *skepsis* in the late writings and, more precisely, in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche famously distinguishes between a weak (BGE 208) and strong (BGE 209) form of *skepsis*. This distinction is primarily based on cultural and physiological factors: weak skepticism, Nietzsche observes, is mostly a French cultural phenomenon and "the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in common language is called weakness of the nerves and sickliness" (BGE 208); strong skepticism has a German form and is the expression of the physiological strength to will (BGE 209). Such a distinction, though, has also to do with the style of non-assertion. Nietzsche criticizes weak skeptics of his time for their inability or unwillingness to make "Yes" or "No" judgments in their investigations (see BGE 204; BGE 207): "The [weak] skeptic, 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). In particular, Nietzsche is critical of a certain use of skeptical phrases to abstain from rejecting and positing anything philosophical: the weak skeptic

loves to treat his virtues to a feast of noble abstinence, perhaps by quoting Montaigne: "what do I know?"²⁰ Or with Socrates: "I know that I know nothing." Or: "I don't trust myself here, there is no door open to me here." Or: "supposing it were open, why enter right away!" Or: "what good are all hasty hypotheses? Making no hypotheses at all could easily belong to good taste. Do you absolutely have to straighten right away whatever is crooked? Absolutely plug every hole with some kind of putty? Isn't there time for that? Doesn't time have time? Oh you devilish rogues, can't you just *wait* a bit? What is uncertain also has its charms, the Sphinx too is a Circe, even Circe was a philosopher." (BGE 208)

Skeptical expressions such as those are used by weak skeptics to plead ignorance or insecurity, to postpone inquiry, to avoid making hypotheses, or to

overindulge in uncertainty. All of this, for Nietzsche, is indicative of a weak, renunciative skeptical mode of investigation. The style of Nietzsche's experimental *skepsis* in *Beyond Good and Evil* as well as in other writings must then be very different from the style of abstinence typical of weak skeptics.

Indeed, Nietzsche endorses a strong *skepsis* that is capable of both affirmation and negation: it "despises and nevertheless lays hold of things; it undermines and takes into possession; it gives the spirit a dangerous freedom, but it keeps the heart severe" (BGE 209). Strong skepticism is connected with "the courage and hardness of the dissecting hand, [...] the tenacious will to dangerous voyages of discovery" (BGE 209). Whereas for weak skeptics "Making no hypotheses at all could easily belong to good taste," I want to argue, the strong, experimental *skepsis* endorsed by Nietzsche has a taste for hypothesis-making.²¹

Berry interprets Nietzsche's distinction between a weak and strong form of skepticism as distinction between modern, Cartesian-inspired skepticism and ancient skepticism, respectively (2011: 12-13, 32-33, 208). She is not mistaken when she notes that Nietzsche largely sees weak skeptics as present-day philosophers and scholars; however, her attempt to connect strong skepticism to Pyrrhonism is rather unconvincing. In the posthumous fragments of 1888, Pyrrho is described as a decadent, and his philosophy and way of life as symptoms of a physiological-psychological "weariness" on account of his "ultimate indifference" (NF 1888, 14[99]) and "need for rest" (NF 1888, 15[58]). Nietzsche's diagnosis of Pyrrho as a decadent, if anything, suggests an analogy with weak skepticism and with the indifference toward "Yes" and "No" judgments typical of weak skeptics.

Similarly unconvincing is Berry's attempt to compare the Pyrrhonian skeptics with Nietzsche's philosophers of the future in *Beyond Good and Evil* (2011: 92). For Nietzsche, philosophers of the future "will not be dogmatists" (BGE 43)—they will not claim to have discovered a universal, objective truth—nor fanatics (A 54); they will be strong skeptics (BGE 209-10) but not only skeptics, they will be critics and experimenters, too (BGE 210).²² As critics, they will make "No" judgments; as "*tempters*"²³ or experimenters they will try to make "Yes" judgments (BGE 42; BGE 210).

All in all, philosophers of the future will be skeptics, critics, and experimenters as “commanders and legislators” engaged in the task of “creat[ing] values” (BGE 211). Although, as we have seen, Nietzsche values “philology as *ephexis* in interpretation” (A 52), his strong, experimental *skepsis* is largely incompatible with Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Nietzsche completely rejects all forms of suspension of judgment (see, for example, HH 9, 21; WS 7, 16; MOM 33; D 82; A 52). Miner spells this out clearly: there is “a distinction between (a) the Pyrrhonist or ephectic scepticism [...] and (b) a non-ephectic scepticism that combines resistance to ‘conviction’ (‘it does not believe’) with the capacity to make judgments when appropriate, to say Yes or No (‘it does not lose itself in the process’)” (2017: 27). “Ephectic scepticism,” Miner goes on to say, “is pedagogically useful, perhaps even indispensable at a certain stage. It functions as a powerful antidote to the habit of uncritical affirmation or reflexive denial [...]. It must, however, be transcended, since the point [...] is not to suspend judgment forever [but] ‘learning to defer judgment’ until the appropriate time. To engage in such judgment without relapsing into sheer dogmatism is not easy task” (27-28).

Non-Pyrrhonian forms of avoidance of dogmatic assertion, I suggest, are adopted by Nietzsche to engage in judgments without relapsing into sheer dogmatism. I am particularly interested in the (Zarathustra-like) skeptical style Nietzsche at times uses to make “Yes” judgments, affirmations, or positive assertions, when he posits things philosophical. But what is the status of these non-dogmatic judgments?

In the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche once again opposes conviction to the mistrust created by scientific inquiry:

In science convictions have no rights of citizenship, as one says with good reason. 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. (GS 344)

In this aphorism, Nietzsche famously suspects that science itself might rest upon a conviction—that is, upon an unconditional will to truth and truthfulness, the conviction that “*Nothing* is needed *more* than truth, and in relation to it everything else has only second-rate value” (GS 344). Despite this, when truth and truthfulness are not pursued fanatically, for Nietzsche, scientific inquiry—especially, on account of its methods (A 13; A 59)—serves as “the police of mistrust,” preventing, detecting, and investigating convictions to maintain the integrity of knowledge. Under the constant supervision of mistrust, modest hypotheses, provisional experimental points of view, regulative fictions “may be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge.”

It is in this sense that Nietzsche’s strong, experimental *skepsis* can be both skeptical (non-dogmatic, non-fanatical) and judgment-friendly: “Not a philosophy as dogma, but as a provisional regulation of research [*Nicht eine Philosophie als Dogma, sondern als vorläufige Regulative der Forschung*]” (NF 1884, 26[432]). The skepticism advocated by Nietzsche keeps the investigation going, whilst making hypotheses and experiments as well as positing regulative fictions to orient research and life. All of those, of course, remain under the police of mistrust as modest and provisional interpretations, rather than immodest and final accounts of things, as hypothetical and experimental tools of the skeptic for exploring new possibilities for thinking and living. Sommer suggests that “This is the way Nietzsche’s own new concepts, *will to power* and *eternal recurrence of the same*, are to be understood: as intellectual, but also as existential, experiments” (446).

Nietzsche’s commitment to *skepsis* permits him to posit things, such as the will to power and the eternal recurrence, as hypotheses, experiments, and regulative fictions. But how can Nietzsche assert those things and remain skeptical? This, I propose, can be done through a variety of stylistic devices. As Rebecca Bamford (2016) notes, one of the features of Nietzsche’s experimental mode of investigation is his use of diverse styles of writing and authorial voices. This, I maintain, is also a feature of his skeptical mode of inquiry. In particular, as we saw in the previous section, Nietzsche’s use of literary styles of writing and characters in *Zarathustra* as well as in other works contributes to avoiding straightforward assertoric ways of speaking and

to maintaining the hypothetical indirectness proper for his experimental skepticism. This can further be seen, for example, in aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*, in which Nietzsche uses a complex rhetorical structure involving the character of a daemon to present the eternal recurrence as an “as if” hypothesis and, indeed, as an actual experiment to be tried out, rather than as a dogmatic doctrine to be accepted and followed.²⁴ But even when Nietzsche speaks more simply with his own voice, he can be found using a skeptical language to signal the experimental and hypothetical status of some of the notions he posits. The most remarkable example of this is perhaps section 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, wherein Nietzsche posits the notion of the will to power. Here, it is important to note, even the doctrine of the will to power—which is often regarded as one of his most metaphysical, systematic, and dogmatic attempts—is posited in an entirely hypothetical language, including questions, conditionals, and quotation marks:

Suppose nothing were “given” as real besides our world of desires and passions... is it not permissible to make the attempt and to ask the question whether this given or something like it is not *sufficient* for understanding even the so-called mechanistic (or “material”) world? [...]

In the end it is not only permitted to make this attempt: it is demanded on the basis of the conscience of *method*. [...]

[...] we *must* make the attempt hypothetically to posit [...]

[...] we have to venture the hypothesis that [...]

Supposing finally that [...] supposing that [...] (BGE 36)

In my reading, the claim that “the world seen from inside [...]” would be precisely “will to power and nothing else” is not straightforwardly asserted as a philosophical dogma that ought to be uncritically accepted and firmly believed, but rather as a hypothesis, an experiment, and an interpretation (BGE 36).

The hypothetical indirectness created by Nietzsche in this section thus allows him to experimentally posit the notion of the will to power, without relapsing into sheer dogmatism. But now, what is the aim of the non-assertoric

style Nietzsche adopts to voice his strong, experimental skepticism? What should we—as his readers—do with hypothetical and experimental notions such as the will to power? Like Zarathustra with his disciples, I believe, Nietzsche wants his readers to read him skeptically. Not only does he want them to read him slowly, to practice philosophy as *ephexis* in interpretation, and to ponder divergent views—to avoid and combat dogmatism and fanaticism—but he also wants them to independently pick up, examine, question, test, and use his hypotheses to actively engage themselves in a strong, experimental *skepsis*, one that keeps philosophical investigation open, whilst permitting—indeed, enabling—the making of new daring hypotheses.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want to consider a possible challenge to the argument I have developed in this article—that, like the Pyrrhonists, Nietzsche can be found adopting a non-assertoric style of writing to avoid dogmatism and fanaticism, but, unlike Pyrrhonian *aphasia*, his skeptical style is compatible with experimental hypotheses-making. While in BGE 34 Nietzsche largely speaks hypothetically, there are other sections in which the will to power is not presented with the same hypothetical indirectness (see, especially, BGE 9; BGE 13; BGE 23; BGE 51; BGE 186; BGE 198; BGE 212; BGE 259). In BGE 13, for example, Nietzsche does seem to assert that “life itself is will to power” (BGE 13). In cases such as this, Conway and Ward’s interpretation may prove to be useful: Nietzsche strategically makes dogmatic assertions to attack dogmatic positions. In BGE 13, in fact, Nietzsche asserts that “life itself is will to power” to counter those physiologists who posit “the drive for self-preservation as the cardinal drive of an organic being” (BGE 13). Here, a hypothetical indirectness would in fact cancel out the skeptical effect he aims at. A skeptical style here would allow—and even require—a more assertive mode of speaking and writing to counter the dogmatic position of physiologists. It could be that in contexts such as this even dogmatic assertions can serve as a tool for skepticism.

It is perhaps for this reason that, as Bett rightly notes, in the 1888 writings—but also in *On the Genealogy of Morality*—Nietzsche seems to

abandon the stylistic and methodological features which had earlier seemed reminiscent of ancient skepticism” (2000: 85). This does not mean that his style there is less skeptical. As Sommer indicates: “Taking [his] experimental skepticism seriously, Nietzsche’s readers have to take the seemingly dogmatic late work *The Antichrist* as ruled by a skeptical strategy of proclaiming certain interpretations against others [see A 54]. Undoubtedly, Nietzsche’s experimental skepticism is far away from the Pyrrhonian attitude of withholding judgment” (446). After all, as we have seen, “No” judgments, negations, and rejections are a crucial function of Nietzsche’s strong *skepsis* (BGE 209); and the Nietzschean skeptic will go as far as to use “Convictions as a *means*”—freely using and consuming them—for both their critical and constructive ends (A 54).

It seems that in Nietzsche a skeptical style may take multiple forms. It is possible to argue that his aphoristic style, his literary modes of writing and characters, his complex rhetorical structures, and his hypothetical indirectness are useful stylistic devices for avoiding dogmatism, whilst experimenting with new hypotheses; and that, on the other hand, a more assertive, even dogmatic voice is needed to effectively counter entrenched dogmatic beliefs in his readers. According to this argument, polemical writings such as *The Anti-Christ* are not necessarily more dogmatic, but perhaps less experimental (cf. BGE 2010). In other words, here Nietzsche primarily speaks as a critic rather than as an experimenter: he is mainly devoted to devising counter-positions, and not to experimentally engaging—like Zarathustra—in making daring hypotheses about new possibilities for thinking and living. Of course, this does not mean that Nietzsche is always successful in avoiding dogmatism; rather, it means that his commitment to *skepsis* is compatible with experimental forms of assertion, which are hardly reconcilable with Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Finally, as we have seen, for Nietzsche a genuinely skeptical style of investigation is able to ensure intellectual integrity (A 12), whereas the “will to a system is a lack of integrity” (TI “Arrows” 26). In light of this, Nietzsche’s decision to abandon his philosophical and editorial project of the *Will to Power* can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain his

intellectual integrity as a skeptic and to avoid the dogmatic temptation to turn a hypothesis into a system.

University of Warwick

Notes

¹ In the context of his observation on Nietzsche's style, Bett quotes a passage from Bernard Williams that is worth reproposing: "With Nietzsche [...] the resistance to the continuation of philosophy by ordinary means is built into the text, which is booby-trapped not only against recovering theory from it, but, in many cases, against any systematic exegesis that assimilates it to theory" (1995: 63, cited in Bett 2000: 83). This is, moreover, one of the reasons why I second Robert Pippin's dissatisfaction with recent attempts in the secondary literature to show that "Nietzsche is *de dicto*, not just *de re*, committed to a series of conventional philosophical claims in metaphysics and epistemology, however unconventional the content and however oddly dressed up and presented" (2011: xiii).

² On Nietzsche's free-spirited campaign against fanaticism see Reginster (2003); Ansell-Pearson (2018).

³ Suspension of judgment is not deemed an aim of skepticism at least by Sextus (2000: 11, PH 1.30). This is because directly aiming at suspension of judgment, rather than at discovery of truth, seems to be hardly reconcilable with a genuinely truth-directed philosophical investigation. For a persuasive account of the truth-directedness of Pyrrhonian skepticism (see Vogt 2011).

⁴ Bett is right when he says that "[Nietzsche] wants his new philosophers to be opinionated—provided, of course, that they recognize their opinions for what they are, not as statements of some absolute truth. He wants them self-consciously to create visions of things, even perhaps self-consciously to create visions of things in their own image" (2000: 78). In a way, the same could be said of Nietzsche.

⁵ According to Bett (1997), in fact the historical Pyrrho is not a Pyrrhonist but a negative dogmatist.

⁶ For Nietzsche, “laughter means: being *schadenfroh* but with a good conscience” (GS 200). In a footnote to his translation of *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann notes that “*schadenfroh*” can be translated as “taking a mischievous delight in the discomfort of another person” (GS: 207, n. 51). In WS 213, at times Pyrrho seems to be taking such a mischievous delight in the discomfort of the old man.

⁷ Now, how much weight should we give to Nietzsche’s flirtation with Pyrrhonian *aphasia*? The literary frame of the aphorism—the fact that it is presented as a dialogue between two fictionalized characters—makes it difficult to establish whether Nietzsche is committed to such a Pyrrhonian-inspired philosophy of silence. Having said that, several times in his writings Nietzsche attaches philosophical significance to (various forms of) silence, albeit not directly to Pyrrhonian *aphasia*. For example, in the 1886 preface to HH, Nietzsche 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; see also HH II Preface 1). “Behind every word,” Nietzsche warns us in *Dawn*, one can hear “the laughter of error, wishful thinking, delusion” (D 423), so “If one remains silent for a year, one unlearns how to chatter and learns how to speak” (D 347). Silence—or, at least, a temporary refrain from speaking—is in these places construed as a philosophical antidote against falsehood, self-deception, and rashness, and as a tool for learning how to think and speak better. Once again in *Dawn*, Nietzsche praises Epictetus for his being “not fanatical,” regarding his “silence or taciturnity” as one of “the signs of the most rigorous valor” alongside his “reserve” and “circumspection” (D 546). Nietzsche’s own views on silence seem to converge with Pyrrho’s final remark in WS 213—and, in turn, with Pyrrhonian *aphasia*.

⁸ As we will see in section 4, Nietzsche’s characterization of Pyrrho as the sage of the future echoes and anticipates some traits of the figure of Zarathustra.

⁹ On Nietzsche’s anti-fanatical philosophy of the small doses see Ansell-Pearson (2015).

¹⁰ For example, 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).

¹¹ On the antithesis between cheerfulness and fanaticism see Ansell-Pearson and Serini (2022: 30-31).

¹² The German word "*Versuch*" [experiment] contains the verb "*suchen*" [to search].

¹³ The German word "*Verzweiflung*" [despair] contains the word "*Zweifel*" [doubt]. In German the feeling of despair is thus semantically connected to a state of doubt.

¹⁴ Experimentalism plays a central role in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra speaks to "bold searchers, and researchers [or tempters, attempters, experimenters] [*Versuchern*]" (Z III "On the Vision and the Riddle" 1); he exhorts his brothers and sisters to be creators "experimenting with knowledge" (Z I "On the Bestowing Virtue" 2); and he conceives of human beings and societies as experiments (Z I "On the Bestowing Virtue" 2; Z III "On the Old and New Tablets" 25).

¹⁵ In any case, as Bernard Williams notes, a commitment to truthfulness "implies a respect for the truth" (2002: 11).

¹⁶ My view of the truth-directedness of skeptical investigation in Nietzsche is further inspired by, and very similar to, Katja Maria Vogt's view (2011) of the aim of Pyrrhonian skepticism. According to Vogt, Pyrrhonian skepticism is truth-directed insofar as it aims at avoidance of falsehood, and this counts as a genuine form of philosophical investigation even though it does not end with the discovery of the truth of what is being investigated.

¹⁷ On the virtue of intellectual courage in Nietzsche see Alfano (168-91). Reginster (2013) and Alfano link the form of truthfulness favored by Nietzsche in GS 51 to the intellectual virtue of curiosity. On experimentation and curiosity see also Bamford (2019).

¹⁸ On Nietzsche's conception of skepticism as despair of truth see Serini.

¹⁹ The Nietzschean skeptic's use of convictions partly echoes the Pyrrhonian way to use *peritropē*. See Conway and Ward.

²⁰ As Robert Miner notes (27), Nietzsche's critique seems to be aimed at Montaigne's modern imitator, rather than at Montaigne himself (see WB 3: 271-72): in a note of 1885—just one year before the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*—Nietzsche describes Montaigne's skepticism as "bold" (NF 1885, 36[7]); and in BGE 209 boldness is the primary quality of the skepticism endorsed by Nietzsche. Miner proposes the hypothesis that Montaigne is one of the sources of the experimentality Nietzsche favors in GS 51 and BGE 42. This hypothesis, Miner 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' (29). On the other, 'Montaigne's practice of self-essaying, fueled by skeptical mistrust, makes him an 'attempter' in Nietzsche's sense" (39). Ansell-Pearson (2021) specifies that, however, while the skepticism of the Pyrrhonists and of Montaigne ends up with forms of acquiescence in the customs and traditions of their society, the skeptical mode of investigation favored by Nietzsche is informed by a deep commitment to experimentalism with respect to both individual and social modes of living (see also Ansell-Pearson and Serini 2022: 9-10, 20-23).

²¹ As noted by Benedetta Zavatta (2019: 101), "This 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." 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" (101). Moreover, as Ansell-Pearson (2021) suggests, not only is there a consonance between Emerson's and Nietzsche's commitment to experimentalism, but Nietzsche's strong, experimental *skepsis* is molded

upon Emerson's conception of skepticism (see also Ansell-Pearson and Serini 16-23).

²² It is interesting to note that, while in GS 51 he speaks of an experimental *skepsis*, in BGE 210 Nietzsche makes it clear that skepticism and experimentalism are two distinct characteristics of future philosophers.

²³ Nietzsche goes as far as to say that the name "tempter" "itself is only an attempt and, if you will, a temptation" (BGE 42).

²⁴ On Nietzsche, skepticism and eternal recurrence see Philip J. Kain (1983). For Kain (385), the eternal return—like the will to power—is a fictional interpretation that permits us to affirm life: "Belief in the eternal recurrence is not belief in a higher, alien truth—it is not held to be true. It allows belief in oneself, a godlike self-confidence that the only values are those that one posits oneself." This reading, however, leaves unexplained how one is meant to use this fictional interpretation in order to affirm life. As I see it, the eternal recurrence, at least as it is presented in GS 341, is not so much a fictional interpretation to be somehow believed—albeit not as an absolute truth; it is rather an experiment or a spiritual exercise to test one's existential attitude toward life.

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