

NIETZSCHE ON ART AS THE GOOD WILL TO APPEARANCE

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Abstract. ‘Truth is ugly,’ says Nietzsche in his notebooks: ‘We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*’; while in *The Gay Science* he describes art as a ‘cult of the untrue’ and also, as if the two expressions were equivalent, as ‘the *good* will to appearance.’ The tempting way to read these and similar remarks is as claiming that art and truth are antithetical, that it is the business of art to falsify aspects of the world that would otherwise prove unbearable. But this reading is unsustainable. The present paper explains why that is, and how, if we look a bit harder than Nietzsche did at the notion of ‘appearance,’ we can read him as defending a plausible account of the relation between art and truth rather than an unsustainable one, and how the resultant account squares with, and indeed reinforces, his perspectivism. The Nietzsche who emerges from this reading is thus (a) more likely to be saying something believable and (b) more internally consistent than he is on any of the obviously available alternatives.

Introduction

The relation between art and truth has been a staple issue in aesthetics since its inception, and Nietzsche’s contribution to it has been interpreted from a variety of angles. According to one of these, Nietzsche regards art and truth as antithetical: art falsifies, he holds, and is of value (to life) at least partly because of that. The present paper contests that interpretation, and it does so, among other reasons, as an exercise in self-correction. Elsewhere I have defended a weak version of the falsification reading, and I now think that I misrepresented what I wanted to defend.¹ The following is an attempt, finally, to get it right – and to do so, moreover, by appealing to much the same textual evidence that I (and others) have always invoked in the service of less persuasive conclusions.

¹ For my long-standing commitment to the wrong end of the stick, see Ridley 1998: 135-142; 2007: 82-84; 2010: 436; 2013: 421-423.

1. *The falsification reading*

On the falsification reading of Nietzsche, his view is that one reason why art is valuable is that it tells lies – it deceives, it peddles untruths – and that it does this to the benefit of life. The evidence in favour of this reading is quite strong.

1.1 The strongest evidence comes from the third essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche argues that the ‘kernel’ of the ascetic ideal – i.e. the denial of the value of life in favour of a non-existent ‘beyond’ – is the assignation of unconditional value to truth.² This is why he says that science, the pursuit of truth for its own sake, is not an opponent or alternative to the ascetic ideal, but rather ‘*the latest and noblest form of it*’.³ In brackets, he makes a promise that he will never fulfil:

Art – to say it in advance, for I shall some day return to this subject at greater length – art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science: this was instinctively sensed by Plato, the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced. Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism – there the sincerest advocate of the ‘beyond’, the great slanderer of life; here the instinctive deifier, the *golden nature*.⁴

The natural way to read this is not just as a repudiation of art’s truthfulness, but as a positive celebration of its lack of it: art doesn’t merely decline to accord unconditional value to truth, it (perhaps) accords it no value at all. And in this much – by promoting life at the expense of truth – art is the antidote to the ascetic ideal.

When Nietzsche remarks in his notebooks that ‘Truth is ugly. We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*’,⁵ he appears to be making a point of a similar kind. Art substitutes

² Nietzsche 1969: Essay III §27.

³ Nietzsche 1969: Essay III §23.

⁴ Nietzsche 1969: Essay III §25.

⁵ Nietzsche 1967: §822.

beautiful falsehoods for ugly truths, and so saves us from perishing. And then, in *The Gay Science*, we have this:

Our ultimate gratitude to art. – If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of the general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science – the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation – would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counter-force against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance.⁶

Here, our enthusiasm for art – as a ‘cult of the untrue’ – saves us from nausea and suicide. Indeed, we realize that as ‘an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us’ (*ibid.*), that life *without* untruth would be insupportable.

Each of these passages seems to push us in the same direction. Art’s value, or part of it, consists in its antithetical relation to the truth. Its lies and deceptions and beautifications are ‘sanctified’ – have a ‘good conscience’ behind them – because, Nietzsche seems to hold, they are of value to life, i.e. they save us from perishing of the truths that honesty would otherwise reveal.⁷ (This may be why he asserts that ‘*life*’ simply *is* ‘the meaning of art’.⁸)

This reading is to be resisted, however, for two main reasons. The first has to do with its plausibility as a thesis about art. Do pictures falsify? Do novels? Do string quartets? Well, pictures might: a portrait might represent its subject inaccurately, for example. And the same for novels: a *Bildungsroman* might account for its protagonist’s development in terms that are psychologically unbelievable. But neither type of falsification seems inevitable; and it is hard to see how a string quartet could possibly falsify anything, inevitably or otherwise.⁹ But perhaps the idea would be something different. Perhaps – to restrict our attention to the visual arts – the idea would be that falsification is built into the very business of representation. Nadeem Hussain seems to have a thought of this sort in mind when he invites us to imagine that

⁶ Nietzsche 1974: §107.

⁷ For a highly eloquent version of this reading, see Heller 1988: ch.9.

⁸ Nietzsche 1968: Part IX §24.

⁹ Of course, a string quartet might be sentimental, and on some accounts of sentimentality that would amount to falsification: the music falsifies the emotions that it expresses. But – even if so – there is no inevitability here.

we see a water jug in a painting. We are aware that before us there is only oil paint on canvas. We can come to know that, say, the precision of the illusion – the way the water jug seems to nestle into the carpet resting on the table – is created by a technique of colouring that when viewed up close presents an image that is out of focus but comes into focus when we step back. We can see the illusion even while knowing that it is an illusion.¹⁰

But the only cases in which such ‘illusions’ issue in anything like lies or deceptions are instances of *trompe l’oeuil* – and extremely few visual representations fall into this category. Otherwise, the points to which Hussain draws our attention *precede* considerations of truth or falsity.¹¹ In order to decide whether a representation is accurate or not, after all, we must already see it as a rendering of three dimensions in two and be viewing it from a distance at which its content can be made out clearly.

As a general thesis about art, then, the falsification reading looks like a non-starter; and the principle of charity should prevent us from attributing it to Nietzsche unless we absolutely have to.

The other reason to resist this reading is that it sits very uneasily with Nietzsche’s clear commitment to the value of truth. He certainly doesn’t regard it as unconditionally valuable – he is no ascetic idealist – but he does accord it a strikingly high value:

Truth has to be fought for every step of the way, almost everything else dear to our hearts, on which our love and our trust in life depend, has had to be sacrificed to it. Greatness of soul is needed for it: the service of truth is the hardest service. – For what does it mean to be *honest* in intellectual things? That one is stern towards one’s heart, that one despises ‘fine feelings’, that one makes of every Yes and No a question of conscience!¹²

¹⁰ Hussain 2007: 169.

¹¹ This isn’t a criticism of Hussain: as the quoted passage makes clear, he is concerned with matters by which we are *not* deceived.

¹² Nietzsche 1968a: §50.

These are surely not the words of someone who is about to applaud art (or anything else) for its intrinsically falsifying character. So, again, we have good reason to conclude that the falsification reading of Nietzsche must be wide of the mark.

1.2 There is, however, a weaker version of the reading that might appear more plausible. This agrees with common sense that art is not invariably or necessarily falsifying, but says that when it *does* falsify it may – under the right conditions – be of value to life precisely because of that, and that this may be so despite Nietzsche’s explicitly high valuation of truth. When he asks ‘How much truth does a spirit *endure*, how much truth does it *dare*?’, and remarks that ‘More and more that became for me the real measure of value’,¹³ he encourages us to think that resilience in the face of the truth comes in degrees, and that valuable spirits can take more of it than others. And when he suggests that

it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure – or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would *require* it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified¹⁴

– he indicates (a) that no one, however strong, can take the *whole* truth, and (b) that falsifying measures, perhaps of the sort furnished by art, might be necessary as a last resort in the face of the unfaceable.¹⁵ Even the best and strongest of us must reach for art (for the saving lie) in the end.

This is the interpretation of Nietzsche’s remarks that I used to favour, and its advantages are reasonably clear. It acknowledges Nietzsche’s commitment to the value of truth, as something whose service calls for greatness of soul. At the same time, however, it allows that truth is not unconditionally valuable: *in extremis*, its value may be trumped by the value of life. And it reserves the role of seventh cavalry to art, to its shrouding, sweetening, falsifying powers – to the last-ditch measures that it offers, in short, against destruction and despair. Christopher Janaway describes this as an ‘amicable settlement’ between the demands of truth and the demands of life (one, he says, that ‘displays a Nietzsche apparently

¹³ Nietzsche 1969a: Preface §3.

¹⁴ Nietzsche 1966: §39.

¹⁵ Nietzsche’s list of measures is in fact more nuanced than this. For discussion see Ridley 2010: 429-30.

comfortable with himself”),¹⁶ but I must say that I have never thought of it like that. As I have described it elsewhere,¹⁷ it represents a fraught negotiation at the outer limits of the bearable, indeed a heroic pressing of Nietzsche’s own ‘ultimate question about the conditions of life’: ‘To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment’.¹⁸

For all its advantages, though, this weaker version of the falsification reading is not sustainable, certainly not as it stands. There are two principal reasons to reject it. The first is that it inherits from the stronger version the implausible thesis about art – that art is inherently and non-accidentally falsifying – albeit in more modest form. On the weaker reading, art may, as a matter of fact, be truthful for some or even most of the time, and that is certainly better than what the strong reading says. But, still, when art *does* falsify, on the weaker reading, its doing so must be somehow characteristic of it *as art*, otherwise it would not be ‘art’, specifically, that we possess ‘lest we *perish of the truth*’, but rather lies and deceptions in general. Even when watered down, then, this reading retains a commitment to an implausibly intimate connection between art and falsehood.

Perhaps, though, we’ll think it feasible that only *artful* deceptions will do the job properly (and not just any deception that deceives). In which case, we might worry instead that the weaker version of the reading entails an implausibly close connection between the *value* of art and falsification. If so, this takes us directly to the second reason to reject that reading – namely, that it misrepresents the *kind* of value that art has for Nietzsche. According to the above, after all, art’s value resides in its being a *faute de mieux*, a regrettable necessity that answers to what is weakest in us, a sort of emergency crutch that we reach for when our strength and greatness of spirit run out. If we were better than we are, we would dispense with art altogether – and be the healthier for it. It is difficult to square this with the Nietzsche who, for example, celebrates ‘Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life’:

He that is richest in the fullness of life [...] cannot only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable but even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation. In his case, what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilizing energies that can still

¹⁶ Janaway 2014: 51.

¹⁷ See especially Ridley 1998: 135-142.

¹⁸ Nietzsche 1974: §110.

turn any desert into lush farmland [... –] an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future [...].¹⁹

Nor is this celebration at all uncharacteristic. Indeed, quite the reverse. Nietzsche is constant in his insistence that (good) art answers to what is best in us, not to our frailties; which means that the weak version of the falsification reading is going to be difficult to square not just with this or that passage from Nietzsche's writings, but with the tenor of his aesthetics as a whole. Once more, then, we should be reluctant to attribute it to him unless we absolutely have to.

2. *The ill will to appearance*

Since neither version of the falsification reading seems persuasive, let's start again – from somewhere else. As we have seen, Nietzsche characterizes art as 'the *good* will to appearance',²⁰ so it may be worth asking what the alternative might be. What would the *ill* will to appearance amount to? And in order to get *that* question into focus, we should ask ourselves first about the notion of appearance itself.

2.1 In ordinary visual contexts, something's 'appearance' can refer to the way it looks or to the way it seems.²¹ When used in the former sense, a report of something's appearance aims at an accurate account of how, in fact, it appears. If I describe my friend to you as scruffy but friendly-looking, for example, I try to capture the look of him – so that you might be able, e.g., to pick him out from the group in which he is standing. Police photo-fit pictures try to capture the look of people in this sense (as an aid to identification), as do pictures of birds in bird books ('It's a gannet!') and of food in recipe books (your own dish should end up looking like this). In this use, a report of something's appearance aims at truth, and a failed report is one that is either factually inaccurate or too vague to be informative. Call this use of 'appearance' appearance₁.

¹⁹ Nietzsche 1974: §370.

²⁰ Nietzsche 1974: §107.

²¹ Talk of 'appearance' carries over as a (more or less dead) metaphor into other contexts; but I focus on the visual case here for the sake of directness.

The other use refers to how a thing seems. If I say to you ‘That person over there appears scruffy but friendly’, my report, if it is to be helpful, must be an accurate account of my subject’s appearance₁, but with the implication that the truth might turn out to be different. If I don’t know the person, my use of ‘appears’ signals suspension of judgement about what he is really like. If the person is my friend, on the other hand, I might mean something stronger, as when I continue ‘But actually, he’s quite highly organized and doesn’t suffer fools gladly’. In this use, a report of a thing’s appearance aims to highlight the possibility – or sometimes the likelihood or even the fact – that there is a mismatch between the way that the thing appears to be and the way that it truly is. Call this use of ‘appearance’ appearance₂.

Both uses are common and legitimate, even if they may sometimes be tricky to hold apart (largely because, as above, appearance₂ encompasses appearance₁). And this difficulty is especially pressing in philosophy, where there is a long tradition of treating *all* appearance as if it were appearance₂. On this conception, appearances – ‘mere’ appearances – are often or always misleading; they are unreliable indicators of the underlying reality; if we want to get at the truth of things we must get *behind* the appearances; we must dig deeper, and the deeper the better. On this conception, appearances are deceptive, are even – if we are, say, Plato – *necessarily* deceptive; and it is a short step from there to the conclusion that reports of something’s appearance₁ must be either fundamentally illusory or irredeemably trivial, of no possible interest or value to a self-respecting truth-seeker even if/when accurate.

Of course, this step is easier to take if one is a full-blown metaphysician, someone committed to the existence of an ultimate reality that is independent of, or perhaps orthogonal to, the appearances. But even if one has no such commitment, it can still be tempting to think of appearances as merely ‘mere’; to suspect that the truth is concealed rather than revealed by them; to believe that the deeper one digs, the truer one’s findings will be. This is the mind-set – in many ways a properly philosophical mind-set – that I will call the *ill* will to appearance (strictly, to appearance₁). It is a habit of thought that treats the appearances as something to be got *beyond*.

2.2 Nietzsche’s attitude to appearances is complex. On the one hand, he is hostile to the metaphysicians’ conception of reality:

What is ‘appearance’ for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance!

Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown *x* or remove from it!²²

And this strand of his thought culminates six years later, in the following well known passage: ‘We have abolished the real world: what world is left?’ he asks – ‘the apparent world perhaps?... But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!*’²³ So there *is* no ultimate reality – no ‘essence’, no ‘unknown *x*’ – that might be contrasted, metaphysically, with the appearances; the world as it appears is the only world that there is.

So Nietzsche is not a metaphysician (at least not in the full-blown sense). But he *is* a philosopher – and a philosopher, moreover, who is a committed and virtuosic excavator of the realities that the everyday appearances, especially of ourselves, conceal.²⁴ You think that your morality springs from altruism? That aesthetic contemplation is disinterested? That science is the opponent of the ascetic ideal? That happiness excludes suffering? Well, it may *appear* that way, but... He is the great unmasker, the great penetrator of disguises, the great disenchanter. Show him the appearance of something that we value or take for granted, and at once he’ll be digging away behind it to bring the all-too-human truth to light, and, if needs be, behind *that* to reveal a truth that lies deeper still. When it comes to *us*, in other words, he is inclined to treat all appearance as appearance₂ – as a deceptive veil that stands between us and the truth. The philosopher in him bears a great ill will to appearance₁.

These twin currents in his thought – the anti-metaphysical and what I am calling the philosophical – sometimes come together in interesting ways, as in the following passage:

When we love a woman, we easily conceive a hatred for nature on account of all the repulsive natural functions to which every woman is subject. We prefer not to think of all this; but when our soul touches on these matters for once, it shrugs as it were and looks contemptuously at nature: we feel insulted; nature seems to encroach on our possessions, and with the profanest hands at that. Then we refuse to pay any heed to physiology and decree secretly: ‘I want to hear nothing about the fact that a human

²² Nietzsche 1974: §54.

²³ Nietzsche 1968: Part IV §6.

²⁴ Hence Paul Ricoeur’s grouping of him with Marx and Freud as one of the ‘masters of suspicion’, as a thinker who refuses to take the world or ourselves at face-value (1965).

being is something more than *soul and form*.’ ‘The human being under the skin’ is for all lovers a horror and unthinkable, a blasphemy against God and love.²⁵

The true woman, the woman as she really is, is the ‘human being under the skin’ that physiology reveals – ‘repulsive natural functions’ and all – but the lover prefers to dwell only upon the appearances of ‘*soul and form*’. Nietzsche’s tone is indulgent towards his lovers, but it is clear (a) that he regards soul and form as appearances₂, as deceptive with respect to what they conceal, and (b) that he privileges the physiological appearances because they lie deeper and take more excavating (in this case, literally). Whence, then, the indulgence? We are dreamers, he says:

we climb up on the most hazardous paths to scale the roofs and spires of fantasy – without any sense of dizziness, as if we had been born to climb, we somnambulists of the day! We artists! We ignore what is natural. We are moonstruck and God-struck. We wander, still as death, unwearied, on heights that we do not see as heights but as plains’.²⁶

Perhaps we cannot help but be like this (Nietzsche seems to think not), yet it makes us fantasists all the same: we ignore nature (truth) in favour of a dream-world (appearance). I’ll return to Nietzsche’s talk of the appearances of ‘*soul and form*’ in a moment.

For now, though, let’s just emphasize the way in which Nietzsche’s ill will to appearance₁ exhibits itself in the classic philosopher’s suspicions: that appearances are deceptive, false, untrue; that appearances conceal rather than reveal; that the further behind them, or behind their successive layers, one can get, the closer to the *real* truth one will be. Truth lies deep.

3. *Surface and depth*

²⁵ Nietzsche 1974: §59.

²⁶ *ibid.*

Nietzsche characterizes art as the ‘good will to appearance’,²⁷ and we should now have a better sense of what that might mean. Here, I try to make that sense explicit, in the first instance by returning to the passages discussed at the outset.

3.1 I’ll begin with the passage in which that characterization is offered, since it is there that Nietzsche the philosopher and Nietzsche the aesthetician are most openly at odds with one another. In it, art is described not only as well disposed to ‘appearance’ but also as ‘untrue’ and as ‘a counter-force against our honesty’. It is quite easy to see what’s going on here. Art trades in (mere) appearance₂ – just as Plato said – and so in untruth and in a vision of the world and ourselves that our honesty would reject: this is the philosopher in Nietzsche speaking. Our honesty, here represented by science, tells us that what we see is not what there is, that ‘delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation’.²⁸

So, for example, physiology tells us that our lover is in fact the locus of ‘repulsive natural functions’.²⁹ Beneath the surface, she is a seething mess of organs, tubes, mucus and waste, all of it pulsing and squelching away like an offal factory. Dig deeper, and what science tells us is if anything worse. Our lover is the site of entirely impersonal electro-chemical processes: she is the mere appearance of a reality that is mechanistic from top to bottom. Another layer down, and, alarmingly, she is more or less empty space. Her apparent visual and tactile solidity is just a function of invisible forces operating between infinitesimally small fundamental particles. And another layer down, she is no more than the mirage of a dimension of nature – the quantum one – in which appearance and reality seem to part company altogether.³⁰ Small wonder if ‘honesty’ in these respects should lead to ‘nausea and suicide’.³¹

But of course that is not how we see her, how we interact with her or how we value her. Rather – if life is to be worth living at all – we see her as the ‘*form and soul*’ that her appearance presents,³² as the interesting, funny, loveable and perhaps beautiful person that she is. In short, we follow Nietzsche the aesthetician here: we show our ‘good will to appearance’ – i.e. to appearance₁ – by seeing the underlying physical, chemical and

²⁷ Nietzsche 1974: §107.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Nietzsche 1974: §59.

³⁰ Nietzsche couldn’t have been aware of this level, obviously, given when he lived; but I don’t think that its existence would have surprised him

³¹ Nietzsche 1974: §107.

³² Nietzsche 1974: §59.

physiological realities of her as beside the point, as of no present interest, and instead focusing on what made and has kept us lovers from the first. We focus, that is, on *another* set of properties that she genuinely does possess – those presented in her appearance₁ – and privilege these over the (equally real) properties revealed by science.³³ Of course, Nietzsche the philosopher instinctively regards these privileged properties as somehow ‘untrue’, as a sort of fantasy; but that is because he slides too easily from the fact that these properties are, indeed, apparent to the conclusion that they are merely apparent₂.

(In a fascinating pair of passages, Nietzsche rehearses the battle between his inner aesthete and his inner philosopher. First we have the aesthete: ‘any insistence on profundity and thoroughness’, he says – i.e. on digging deeper – ‘is a violation, a desire to hurt the fundamental will of the spirit which unceasingly strives for the apparent and the superficial’.³⁴ So we have a fundamental will, a *Grundwille*, to appearance₁. Then we hear from the philosopher:

*This will to mere appearance, to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to the surface – for every surface is a cloak – is countered by that sublime inclination of the seeker after knowledge who insists on profundity, multiplicity, and thoroughness, with a will which is a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience [...].*³⁵

At once, reference to our ‘fundamental will’ to appearance₁ is undercut, as that will falls prey to another: ‘every surface is a cloak’, insists the philosopher, muttering darkly of ‘masks’; all appearance is ‘mere’, is merely appearance₂. And so this second, philosophical will – the will that picks the fight – emerges as a ‘sublime inclination’ to self-cruelty exercised by the inner philosopher upon the inner aesthete.)

If Nietzsche the aesthete had won out, or had won out more consistently, we wouldn’t have found him describing art as ‘a counter-force against our honesty’. If art celebrates appearance₁ – as it plausibly does – there is nothing in that for our honesty to

³³ I say ‘equally real’ here to underline the point that, certain habits of philosophical thought notwithstanding, reality doesn’t come in degrees. (Nor, of course, does truth.) For some purposes, in some contexts, this or that dimension of reality may take precedence over others, but which one that is is relative to – is a function of – those purposes and contexts, not a sign that the privileged dimension is somehow more real (or that the truths pertaining to it are somehow truer).

³⁴ Nietzsche 1966: §229.

³⁵ Nietzsche 1966: §230.

object to, since the way that the world appears is one of the ways that it (honestly) is.³⁶ Nor, for the same reason, would we have read him referring to art as a ‘kind of cult of the untrue’,³⁷ since a thing’s appearance₁ is a property that it truly possesses. It is the philosopher’s conceptions of honesty and truth that are getting in the way here – honesty as a determination to construe all appearance as appearance₂, and truth as what can be dug out from behind it. On the aesthetician’s more plausible constructions, by contrast, art is, or can be, an honest exploration – and celebration – of the truth, the truth of appearance₁.

‘Truth is ugly’, says Nietzsche. ‘We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*’.³⁸ This means: we possess the good will to appearance₁ lest we perish of the (ugly) truths that lie deeper. In art, he says, ‘the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience’.³⁹ This means: in art, appearance₁ is sanctified and the (good) will to it has a good conscience.

3.2 This way of interpreting Nietzsche’s remarks has advantages that far outweigh the cost of having to rewrite them – not least since that cost is offset by a clear and plausible diagnosis of what went wrong in the originals, and why. These advantages include: not imputing to art an intrinsic affinity with falsehood; doing justice to Nietzsche’s high valuation of truth; doing justice to the *kind* of value that he holds art to have; and offering a story that might credibly be told about (at least some) works of art. It also has the advantage of lining up nicely with this:

Oh those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity*. And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit [...]? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore – *artists*?⁴⁰

³⁶ To be clear: ‘art,’ as the celebration of appearance₁, just *is* the expression of ‘the *good* will to appearance’ that is Nietzsche’s topic. And an ‘artist,’ in the sense that concerns him, just *is* someone who expresses such a will – perhaps, although not necessarily, by creating works of art. Nietzsche’s lovers are artists in this sense, as are aestheticians who do not surrender to their inner philosopher.

³⁷ Nietzsche 1974: §107.

³⁸ Nietzsche 1967: §822.

³⁹ Nietzsche 1969: Essay III §25

⁴⁰ Nietzsche 1974: Preface §4.

Here, the aesthete in Nietzsche speaks without interference from the philosopher: the ‘whole Olympus of appearance’ is appearance₁, and in stopping at it – in grasping the *need* to stop at it – his Greeks are applauded for their profundity.

It may be tempting on the strength of this to construe Nietzsche’s position as an aesthetic of (profound) superficiality, as a paean to surfaces – and perhaps it is that, at least among other things. But it isn’t only that, or not *simpliciter*. For there is no reason to restrict the good will to appearance₁ to those appearances that the world wears on its face, to the ones that are, as it were, sitting in plain view. Why not also have a good will to the deeper appearances? The biochemist confronted with the appearances that fascinate the physiologist may not do this: for him, these are likely to strike as appearance₂, as a misleading or uninformative veil drawn over the stuff that really interests him – the stuff that the physicist might, in turn, regard as mere appearance₂. But in the realms respectively proper to them, it is not unreasonable to suppose that each attends to his own with a good will to appearance₁, as the subject-matter that he hopes to explore and to understand better, just as a painter (or a lover) might with respect to the looks of things.⁴¹

If this is right, it indicates a deep point of contact between Nietzsche’s aesthetics and his perspectivism⁴² (a point of contact that is occasionally obscured, as we have seen, by the appearance₂ [!] of some of what he writes). His perspectivism says that there is no such thing as the view from nowhere, that in the absence of an interpretative framework that establishes criteria of salience – whether this is provided by one’s principles of enquiry, one’s practical concerns, or even just how one feels about things – nothing will come into view at all.⁴³ His aesthetics says that, when things do come into view, they do so as appearance₁. And if *that’s* right, it is yet another nail, if another were needed, in the coffin of the falsification reading, since perspectivism is an account, precisely, of how knowledge – i.e. the acquisition of truths about reality – is so much as possible.

⁴¹ Of course, such explorations might well involve digging behind one aspect of an appearance to get at another; and this may – although it need not – amount to the former aspect’s being treated for the moment, or for that purpose, as appearance₂. But even where that is true, it doesn’t impugn the good will to appearance₁ that animates the enterprise as a whole.

⁴² A connection also noted in Janaway 2014: 54-56, to which I am indebted. (It was re-reading this excellent and subtle essay that first got me thinking about Nietzsche on art and truth again.)

⁴³ See Nietzsche 1969: Essay III §12 for Nietzsche’s fullest statement of the position. For classic discussion, see Clark 1990. For discussion that is more attentive to the detail, and perhaps the spirit, of Nietzsche’s text, see Janaway 2007: 203-22.

3.3 But mightn't there be some appearances (i.e. facts) that really are just unbearable?

Nietzsche's remark that 'it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish' certainly suggests that he thinks so.⁴⁴ Of what avail is art, or the good will to appearance, in those cases?

The answer, I think, is that Nietzsche believes that artists can teach us how to manage the appearances.⁴⁵ In the section of *The Gay Science* called 'What one should learn from artists' we find this:

How can we make things beautiful, attractive and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are. [...] Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all; or seeing things around a corner and as cut out and framed; or placing them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspectives; or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of the sunset; or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent – all of this we should learn from artists [...].⁴⁶

An artist's good will to appearance is not merely a passive receptivity, then, but rather an active, interpretative form of engagement.⁴⁷ '[W]hat does all art do?' Nietzsche asks – 'does it not praise? does it not glorify? does it not select? does it not highlight?'⁴⁸ By these means, the artist manages the appearances so that what is not in itself 'beautiful, attractive and desirable' nevertheless acquires the appearance of being so. And, if we learn these techniques from him, we may hope to bring off something similar ourselves in the face of the apparently unfaceable – backing off a bit, perhaps, or catching whatever it is from the corner of our eye, or imagining it in a different context, or concentrating on only a detail, or 'looking down [...] and, from an artistic distance, laughing over ourselves'.⁴⁹ Or, failing any of these, and

⁴⁴ Nietzsche 1966: §39.

⁴⁵ The artist's role here is not pedagogical, it is exemplary. As Kant has it – and Nietzsche would have agreed with the substance – the artist provides a model not to be 'imitated' but to be 'followed' by 'one whom it arouses to a sense of his own originality' (1957: §49).

⁴⁶ Nietzsche 1974: §299.

⁴⁷ It is no accident that in the perspectivism section of the *Genealogy* (Essay III §12) he says exactly the same about our cognitive dealings with the world.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche 1968: Part IX §24.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche 1974: §107. At the limit, these exercises in appearance-management may flirt with falsification – the grain of truth that underpinned my earlier attempts to make sense of these issues.

recalling that not every work of art is brought to completion, we may simply turn our attention elsewhere, and engage with other appearances instead.⁵⁰

Conclusion

My ambition in this paper has been strictly limited. I have tried, merely, to explain how a Nietzsche who is deeply committed to the value of truth can nevertheless speak as he does in the three passages that I have highlighted,⁵¹ and to do so more satisfactorily than I have managed in previous efforts. There are altogether richer and more interesting things to be said about the matters that these passages touch upon, but here my target has been quite specific. If the diagnosis offered above is found persuasive, the essay will have done what I wanted it to.⁵²

⁵⁰ When Nietzsche says, in his New Year's resolution to become a lover of fate, that '*Looking away* shall be my only negation' (1974: §276), he is making a closely related point.

⁵¹ Nietzsche 1974: §107, 1969: Essay III §25 and 1967: §822.

⁵² For comments on earlier versions of this paper, my thanks to Chris Janaway, Genia Schönbaumsfeld, an anonymous referee and the participants at an in-house Research Day held in Southampton in March 2023.

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