In the remarks that follow, I present and defend an argument, taken from Nietzsche's later writings, against granting a privileged value to truth and to truthfulness. In short, this argument identifies an unconditional value of truth and demonstrates that within this value lies the denial of its own justification, that is, that the value is self-vitiating. The argument is significant if, as Nietzsche holds, this value is the precondition for such pursuits as modern science and philosophy, as it has heretofore been understood. Because my interpretation of Nietzsche's argument is anything but well-accepted, I will need to rescue him from the prevailing and fateful interpretation that attempts to retain a reverence for the truth in Nietzsche's name. Such a reading was begun in Walter Kaufmann's well-known book and has been developed by Maudemarie Clark to the satisfaction of the editors of recent editions of Nietzsche's work. After defending my interpretation, I will conclude by sketching another possibility for living in which this value would not dominate, and in doing so I will turn to the figure of the artist and then toward a revaluation of a less palatable and disrespected term, namely, superficiality.

Before beginning to consider Nietzsche's argument itself, I must first clarify a few preliminary issues, the first of which is to recognize that by reading Nietzsche in light of the question of the value of truth, I presume that the distinction between truth and falsity, at least in its most minimal conception, is maintained in Nietzsche's writings. I am aware that the nature and status of truth is not a simple matter for Nietzsche and that in his work truth proves to be a social and linguistic phenomenon, in his words, "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms." Many charge that this amounts to perspectivism or the position that truth is mere illusion, and defending him against these charges would lead beyond the scope of this essay. I believe it can safely be said, however, that despite his consequential and radical reworking of truth, Nietzsche would find no reason to question the truth of the claim that there are fewer that forty words in this sentence. What is in question for him, rather—and made questionable for the first time, he wants to claim—is what he calls the "will to truth." This phrase always signifies the position that truth has unconditional value, a position to which Nietzsche attributes that slogan: "Nothing is needed more than truth, and in relation to it everything else has only second-rate value."

This leads immediately to the further question: Where is this will to truth embodied? Who, if anyone, shares this value? It is difficult if not impossible to furnish concrete examples of practices that necessarily result from a specific set of values, but I will nevertheless suggest the following institutions, provided that it be understood that I mean to indict only these practices as there are commonly recognized and that I could not possibly account for every imaginable variation of them. Modern atheism is a simple, yet non-trivial, example. The atheist rejects the claims to a transcendent deity solely on the basis of the lack of evidence for this belief: societal benefit and personal well-being are ignored. Atheism owes its success to a reduction of all criteria to that of truthfulness. Another modern proponent of the limitless importance of truth, and one to which Nietzsche often returns, is mathematical science. What would it look like to subordinate all other concerns to the search for knowledge if not the stale and sterile laboratories whose florescent lights and power generators facilitate endless experimentation on rodents or subatomic particles? And finally, is not philosophy itself, born of the Delphic commandment to "know thyself" and its transformation into the Socratic condemnation of ignorance, fueled by this very same value? One might easily respond that while it is certainly possible for the above pursuits to be engaged out of an abstract commitment to the truth, one might just as likely take them up simply because they are enjoyable? I would not deny that one can find great pleasure in the pursuit of discovery, despite—or because of—the sacrifices involved; I ask only that the source of this pleasure be left open to question. Let us not be so sure that our enjoyments are as straightforward as they appear. Nietzsche is perhaps at his best when although
acknowledging a pleasure, he identifies its source in the denial of another pleasure and the questionable ethical commitments this involves.

This is Nietzsche's general strategy with respect to the value of truth; he acknowledges this value while continuing to ask about its source. "Granted that we want truth," he writes in the opening section of Beyond Good and Evil, "why not rather untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?" Why is it the case that we view these conditions with scorn and contempt? Let it be clear that Nietzsche's questions ask neither "what is truth?" nor "how will we recognize truth?" It is not that there is any impropriety in such questions, but rather that they point to something more fundamental: why is it that we want truth so much in the first place. Nietzsche's answer to this question, stated most clearly in section 344 of The Gay Science, is that the unconditional value of truth rests on a moral commandment and on a morality that is, in turn, dependent upon metaphysics.

Nietzsche begins his investigation into the origin of this value by presenting the reader with a dichotomy designed to introduce two competing explanations of the will to truth. The desire to avoid uncertainty and ignorance, he claims, could have either of two possible roots: it might stem from a desire to avoid being deceived, or it may be the result of the desire to avoid deceiving. In other words, the state of deception may either be undesirable in itself or because it involves the active allowing of deception. In Nietzsche's words:

This unconditional will to truth—what is it? Is it the will not to allow oneself to be deceived? Or is it the will not to deceive? For the will to truth could be interpreted in the second way too—if only the special case "I do not want to deceive myself" is subsumed under the generalization "I do not want to deceive."

Nietzsche's insight into the nature of deception, at first counter-intuitive, is that being-deceived can be considered to be a special case of self-deception. The important move at this stage is the introduction of a rival explanation of the will to truth: that is, instead of the usual explanation that the value of truth results from the advantages of possessing the truth over being without it, Nietzsche suggests that the desire not to deceive, a fundamentally ethical position, might lie at the heart of our demand for truth. What remains to be shown is that this, in fact, can be the only viable explanation of the will to truth, for the desire simply to avoid being deceived could not, on its own, have arisen.

One's first instinct is that deception is to be avoided because of its supposed harmful effects. We believe we will be better prepared to confront the future and to circumnavigate its pitfalls if only we are given sufficient information. What is taken to be dangerous is ignorance. But is this really the case? Is an advantage always to be gained by knowing all the facts? Nietzsche consistently challenged this assumption throughout his career: the early section 517 of Human, All-Too-Human reads: "Fundamental insight.—There is no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of mankind." Nietzsche's argument at this point is difficult to reconstruct, but I take his position to be essentially a skeptical one. The knowledge of the future, he would say, which would be required to justify the harmony between truth and utility is unavailable. We have no reason, in other words, to assume that those who seek truth have any advantage over those who ignore it. He writes:

What do you know in advance of the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally mistrustful or of the unconditionally trusting? But if both should be required, much trust as well as much mistrust, from where would science then be permitted to take its unconditional faith or conviction on which it rests, that truth is more important than any other thing, including every other conviction? Precisely this conviction could never have come into being if both truth and untruth constantly proved to be useful, which is the case.

Should we wish to push him further on the point about the utility of untruth, I imagine that Nietzsche would present the example of the gods. He would maintain that many lives have been enhanced by belief in any one of a number of gods, all of which could not truthfully be said to exist. We might imagine a variety of other instances in which one's interests would better be served by holding a false opinion or by having no opinion at all. Children may benefit from ignorance of a parent's dishonorable reputation or from a misleading interpretation of their score on an IQ test.

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The oddity is that we often demand to know the truth even should we become convinced that it would help avoid no harmful consequences. In fact, we demand to know the truth "for its own sake," despite any harm it would cause. It is this insistence, that we know the truth even and especially when it appears to cause only harm, that Nietzsche finds most interesting. This value could not, he means to claim, ever be justified on its practical merits. Nietzsche is not claiming that truth is devoid of all practical value, but he will insist that the practical merits of knowing the truth do not always outweigh those of other concerns. And if this is the case, then to value truth above all else must stem from other than practical concerns. This is to say that Nietzsche can eliminate the first of his proposed explanations of the will to truth. Because it could not have arisen out of the desire not to be deceived, the will to truth must be at bottom the only other alternative: the moral commandment not to deceive. "Consequently," Nietzsche concludes, "will to truth does not mean 'I will not allow myself to be deceived' but—there is no alternative—'I will not deceive, not even myself'; and with that we stand on moral ground." He makes this same point in the 34th section of Beyond Good and Evil: "It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance; it is even the worst proved assumption there is in the world."

But what is most important in Nietzsche's analysis would go unnoticed were we to stop with this development. The ground of the unconditional will to truth has been determined not to be a calculus of utility but rather a moral imperative. Our question about the origin of the will to truth now leads to a question about the ground of a morality that forbids deceiving. What kind of morality, we must ask, would sanction such a commandment? This question might be easily answered if those who are honest meet with greater success or reward, but as Nietzsche notices, prosperity does not withold itself from those who practice deception, simulation, delusion and self-delusion. Similar to his demonstration that knowing the truth is not always beneficial is his subsequent argument that telling the truth is not always the best course to practical benefit. Throughout his work, Nietzsche cites numerous examples—from the soothing inven-

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a consequence of an essentially Christian trans-
formation, access to this world was deferred, and
its status became merely that of a promise. This
temporal deferment is only the first in a series of
displacements. Another decisive moment in this
history, which Nietzsche accredits largely to
Kantian efforts, is the move that would make the
true world essentially “unattainable, indeemon-
strable, unpromisable,” while maintaining the
thought of it as “a consolation, an obligation, an
imperative.” This leads quickly to the positivist-
ic position that denies the Kantian result that an
unattained and unknown world could function as
an imperative and asks: “how could something
unknown obligate us?” The next stage in this
history announces the eventual rejection of the
idea of another world. For throughout the pre-
vious steps, as we have only begun to see, this
idea has developed into one that Nietzsche says
“is no longer good for anything.” It has ceased to
be attainable, it is finally unknowable, and it has
come to lose all ability to be redeeming, obligat-
ing, or even consoling. In short, this idea has be-
come useless and superfluous, and “conse-
sequently—a refuted idea: let us abolish it!”

The idea that there is another world than the
sensible one—the idea Nietzsche finds at the
heart of any metaphysics—has been rejected pri-
marily because it is a poor scientific thesis with
little explanatory power. Due to developments in
scientific theory, including the work of Copemi-
cus and especially that of Darwin, we have be-
come able to account for numerous phenomena
without recourse to transcendent explanation.
While it may be the case that no such account has
adequately explained everything, what is im-
portant is that today more than ever we look for
explanations within the world around us and have
diminishing faith that the move to transcendence
needs to be made. To make this point, Nietzsche
asks rhetorically: “Has man perhaps become less
desirous of a transcendent solution to the riddle
of his existence?” What is it that has caused this
dissatisfaction and suspicion concerning trans-
cendence? Nothing other than a refinement in
the pursuit of truth. As Nietzsche explains:

You see what it was that really triumphed over
the Christian God: Christian morality itself, the con-
cept of truthfulness taken more and more strictly,
the confessional subtlety of the Christian con-
science translated and sublimated into the scien-
tific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any
price.15

The will to truth, then, is caught in a bind: on the
one hand, its progression, from a vague moral im-
perative to the scientific demand for intellectual
hygiene, is responsible for the refutation of meta-
physics. But on the other hand, as we have seen
above, the value of truth animating this progress-
ion is dependent on the very metaphysics it has
come to refute.

Wanting only what is true and having realized
that its own metaphysical foundation is untrue,
the will to truth is now forced to draw one final in-
fERENCE: it must now exclude itself from the do-
main of that which it accepts. Nietzsche writes of
the metaphysical foundations of the will to truth:
“We have created the world that possesses val-
ues! Knowing this, we know, too, that reverence
for truth is already the consequence of an illu-
sion.” It is not sufficient that one merely reject
transcendence in order to perpetuate the will to
truth, for if it is to be true to itself, the will to truth
must recognize that it is based on a lie, and this is
a condition it cannot accept. Just as its develop-
ment led to the refutation of metaphysics, so too
must the will to truth now refute the value em-
ployed in this refutation, namely, its own uncon-
ditional value on truthfulness. As the will to truth
gains self-consciousness, as it becomes aware
that it is founded on an untruth, it must infer its
own demise. This is to say that the will to truth
ends by overcoming itself, and the result of this
self-overcoming is a revaluation of the will to
truth in which the value of truth can no longer be
unconditional.

For reasons never fully developed, Walter
Kaufmann was able to maintain, in the face of
this argument, that “Nietzsche still sees himself
as a devotee of truth.” A more recent proponent
of this view is Maudemarie Clark who, in her
book Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy, de-
fends the view that Nietzsche’s analyses are not
in fact designed to challenge the value of truth, as
I have argued, but rather serve only to debunk one
particular motivation for esteeming truthfulness.
The editor of the most recent English translation
of The Genealogy of Morals accepts her argu-
ment, writing in his introduction that “Maudema-
rie Clark has convincingly demonstrated that Ni-
etzsche’s aim is not to abandon the will to truth
but to reestablish it on foundations which will di-

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ascetic ideal in its denigration of life." As this summary statement reveals, Clark’s intent to distance the will to truth from a foundation in asceticism and to argue for Nietzsche’s acceptance of a newly-established will to truth. She is critical of those who, like myself, “assumed that the will to truth and the ascetic ideal went together, that if Nietzsche attacked one, he had to attack the other. This made it impossible for [them] to explain adequately both Nietzsche’s obvious commitment to truth and his equally obvious attack on the ascetic ideal.” But as we have seen, Nietzsche’s argument in section 344 of The Gay Science shows that the will to truth can have only one ground: a metaphysics that would privilege another realm at the expense of this world, which is also a description of what Nietzsche means by asceticism. And if any doubt remains about the dependence of the will to truth on the ascetic ideal, we need consider only the following passage from The Genealogy of Morals: “This unconditional will to truth is faith in the ascetic ideal itself, even if as an unconscious imperative—don’t be deceived about that—it is the faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone (it stands or falls with this ideal).” Clark’s primary reason for insisting upon a reconstructed “commitment” to truth on Nietzsche’s behalf is to account for his frequent denunciation of those who proceed with a limited allegiance to truthfulness. She is surely right to conclude that Nietzsche is critical of those who claim to be truthful and who are at the same time sloppy with the truth, but this does not commit him to a higher valuation of truthfulness. For if this value were shown to be in a process of self-overcoming—as I have tried to do—to criticize those with only limited allegiance to truth would require only an affirmation of the process that results in the over-comeing of truth’s absolute value. Nietzsche believes that only though the most rigorous allegiance to the demands of truth will the untruthfulness of the ground of those demands become manifest. This is why Nietzsche is able to employ standards that he acknowledges will be overcome. Clark, however, denies that the will to truth is involved in a process of self-overcoming; she writes that “Nietzsche never refers to the self-overcoming of truthfulness, either in GM III or in the various other texts that refer to the self-overcoming of morality (the ascetic ideal) out of truthfulness.” But I will suggest that his reference is clear in the following passage which Clark ignores:

Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as morality must now perish, too: we stand on the threshold of this event. After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its most striking inference, its inference against itself. If Nietzsche here writes of Christian truthfulness, he means nothing other than truthfulness itself, for as we have already seen above, he takes Christian morality to be synonymous with “the concept of truthfulness taken more and more strictly.”

If I am right that Nietzsche’s argument leads to a revaluation of truth, what remains for me to provide is a picture of what it might look like for truth to have anything less than an unconditional value. In conclusion, I offer Nietzsche’s figure of the artist as an example of one without reverence for the truth. In The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche presents the artist in contrast with the theoretician: “Whereas in every uncovering of truth, the artist always clings with rapt gaze to what, even after the uncovering, still remains a cover, the theoretical man enjoys and takes satisfaction in the discarded cover and places the highest goal of his pleasure in the process of an ever prosperous uncovering that succeeds through his own efforts.” The artist here does not merely signify the sculptor or the architect but all who are able to sense and admire the ways in which beings show themselves, without the perpetual need to uncover that truth which lies behind the appearances. For this reason we might want to say that the artist is superficial, more concerned with surfaces that with depths. To bring these terms—artist and superficiality—together, let me conclude with a final passage, taken from the preface to the second edition of The Gay Science:

And for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths who endanger temples by night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, this bad taste, this will to truth, to “truth at any price,” this youthful madness in the love of truth, have lost their charm for us: for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too profound. We no longer believe that truth remains
truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and "know" everything. . . . 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.25

Like the Greeks, Nietzsche is superficial out of profundity: superficial, because he counsels resistance to the desire to expose the truth, yet profound, because this counsel has come as the result of an argument by which the love of truth now appears to be mere “youthful madness.” Neither simply perpetuating the unconditional value of truth, nor continuing without any basis in the truth, Nietzsche provides a new option in his own writing. The investigation into the will to truth and the exposition of its spurious foundation allow Nietzsche to admire the historical movement of the will to truth without being dominated by its demands. An artist, he resists the theoretical drive to uncovering and delights in the surfaces that remain. The conclusion to the passage I have just cited reads: “Those Greeks were superficial—out of profundity. And is this not precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there—we who have looked down from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—artists?”

ENDNOTES

3. Incidentally, Nietzsche presents another sort of “argument” against the theist’s position which cannot as easily be subsumed under the will to truth. Zarathustra says: “If there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! Hence there are no gods.” Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 86.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., pp. 281–82.
8. Walter Kaufmann’s footnote here is among his most helpful, pointing out that “Nietzsche’s point is, of course, that Odysseus owed his survival on many occasions to his virtuosity in deception” (ibid., p. 282).
9. Ibid., p. 283.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
22. Clark, Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy, p. 196.
24. I now cite the entire passage, quoted from The Gay Science by Nietzsche himself in the third essay of The Genealogy ofMorals: “You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness understood ever more rig-
orously, that father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and governance of a god; interpreting history in honor of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences as pious people have long enough interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint, designed and ordained for the sake of the salvation of the soul—that is all over now, that has man's conscience against it, that is considered indecent and dishonest by every more refined conscience—mendaciousness, feminism, weakness, and cowardice. In this severity, if anywhere, we are good Europeans and heirs of Europe's longest and most courageous self-overcoming" (Genealogy of Morals, p. 161).