

Nietzsche's Agonal Wisdom

Current Nietzsche scholarship that places emphasis on Nietzsche's conception of the *agon*, the ancient Greek contest, tends to locate its significance in the realm of politics and (less frequently) ethics.ⁱ The political appropriation emphasizes how contests facilitate the creative and potentially peaceful circulation of power by providing arenas for expression of conflicting views of the public good. These readings also focus on how the institution of *agon* provides a decision mechanism that legitimates the view that prevails. Others consider the relation between competition and the production of excellence, emphasizing the ways in which agonistic interactions may induce striving for something higher or better. These two approaches have been cited in support of claims that a Nietzschean democracy is possibleⁱⁱ and that such views might be instructive for negotiating the complexities of identity and ethics in contemporary pluralist societies.ⁱⁱⁱ Others are somewhat less sanguine about Nietzsche's agonism and the degree to which it addresses concerns that present thorny problems in Nietzsche scholarship, including whether Nietzsche is an advocate of violence and slavery, as certain readings of will to power suggest.^{iv} That Nietzsche admires the Greek contest is undisputed, and that he adapts it for his own purposes in his discussions of morality, self-overcoming, and will to power is gaining currency. But numerous facets of Nietzsche's agonism remain to be explored, including what it is that he thinks one is doing in the course of participating in a contest and his justification for applying that model to his own form of philosophical thinking.^v

This paper aims to illuminate how Nietzsche links both the process and the products of agonistic interaction to knowledge and judgment. While much of the literature on Nietzsche's critiques of and recourse to epistemology has focused on his perspectivism, this paper reveals another aspect of how Nietzsche thinks about knowing and meaning, and how they are pursued through a philosophical practice that is essentially agonistic. The elaboration of what I shall call Nietzsche's "agonal wisdom"

does more than merely play on the metaphors of contest and war that are so prominent in his writings. Following a brief elaboration of Nietzsche's self-proclaimed agonistic praxis, I then briefly consider how Nietzsche conceives the *agon* in relation to his naturalism. I distinguish agonistic interaction from mere struggle and sketch an account of how Nietzsche thinks agonistic relations ground meaningful distinctions and differences that serve as the basis of judgments not only about what is beautiful or good but also concerning what is true and real. A key constituent of Nietzsche's wisdom, as he represents it, is an understanding of something about the means of measure that provide the contingent basis of our knowledge and how justice is tied to this process. I elaborate this connection, and then conclude with some brief remarks about how this sheds new light on Nietzsche's perspectivism and opens opportunities for fruitful consideration points of intersection and potentially informative disagreement between Nietzsche's views and those found in contemporary epistemology and philosophy of science.

I. Nietzsche's War-Making Principles

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche famously elaborates what he describes as his "practice of war" [*Kriegs-Praxis*].^{vi} It appears in the section "Why I am so Wise" ["Warum ich so weise bin"], and thus can be considered as identifying more precisely what Nietzsche believes to be a constitutive element of his wisdom. Claiming that he is "warlike by nature,"^{vii} Nietzsche cites his need to find resistance and exercise it. He goes on to elaborate grounds on which his practice is founded and the fruits of those labors. Nietzsche's first proposition is that he attacks only "things that are victorious [*siegreich*]". This signals his orientation toward seeking specific worthwhile goals. Something must be esteemed already, recognized as accomplished or successful, in order for him to challenge it. It must be marked and distinguished as superior; it must have achieved the status of a reigning ideal. He does not fight simply for the sake of initiating a skirmish. And the standing victory of his intended target must be complete; he writes, "I may even wait until they become victorious".^{viii} He does not seek to hinder an

emerging victor, or resist anything and everything he encounters merely in order to display his own strength.

The second proposition indicates what we might roughly translate as what Nietzsche calls his "criterion of fair trade" [*Kriterium des rechten Handelns*]: he attacks things such that he compromises only himself. He wants no allies and does not aim to jeopardize others. By this Nietzsche seems to mean that what is at stake, the purpose of his skirmish, is less simply defeating what he resists but rather *being engaged with* his opposition, being drawn into a relationship—one that has its risks, as I discuss in the sections that follow—and he takes on the risks as his own. And yet, the basis of the engagement is not merely a personal grudge, and he takes it on not merely for the purpose of seeking personal glory or recognition.

Nietzsche's third proposition is that he does not attack persons, "but rather make[s] use of the person only as a strong magnifying glass with which one can make visible what is a widespread but creeping and barely perceptible state of emergency."^{ix} (The cases of Strauss and Wagner are cited as exemplary in this regard.) In other words, what is at stake in these battles, allegedly, is not who is a better person or even who has better fighting skills but rather whatever their common concerns might be, their vision of a good life, for example, or characterization of the nature of human existence and its possible aspirations. Nietzsche's battles, he would have us believe, are modeled more after the gad-fly aiming to waken rather than the duelist seeking personal honor or glory. The purpose of the engagement is to draw attention to what actually is already a crisis (e.g., the failure of a particular commonplace way of conceiving the world to adequately address the contemporary challenges), but which is not yet fully recognizable as a threatening predicament.

Finally, Nietzsche claims, he attacks only "when any personal difference is excluded, when every background of bad experience is lacking."^x In other words, Nietzsche seeks to exclude malice, petty jealousy, and revenge as motives for action in the contest. He aims to keep his intentions honorable and thus preserve the possibility that his resistance might even be considered a kind of reverence. He

claims to honor [*ehren*] and thereby distinguish [*auszeichnen*] those things and persons with which he becomes bound [*verbinden*] in the course of his struggles; whether he is taking the side of pro or con makes no difference in this regard. His practice of war against Christianity is justified, so he claims, because he has no personal grudge against it or with Christians themselves but rather with "Christianity *de rigueur*."^{xi} In other words, he chooses battles that are of wide-reaching import, that address themselves to the concerns of others generally rather than isolating idiosyncratic grudges.

Nietzsche's discussion of his practice of war provides us with insight into how he thinks of himself as an agonist and illustrates what he conceives as his approach to philosophic inquiry—in short, he conceives philosophical thinking as somewhat like fighting. This has become a fairly common way of reading him.^{xii} But our appreciation of Nietzsche's agonal wisdom requires going beyond rhapsodizing (or criticizing) Nietzsche's (not-so) new noble who fights the (not-so) good fight against the decadence with which he finds himself surrounded. Understanding what Nietzsche means by associating his practice of war with his *wisdom* requires us to do more than wax on about how Nietzsche reinscribes noble virtues in his appeal to the worthy opponents model. Critics are right to point to the latter as an ultimately neo-conservative strain and to cite it as evidence that Nietzsche's visions of the new hero and contest are drenched in nostalgia and hopelessly romantic.^{xiii} The best response to these challenges is made by focusing on what it is that Nietzsche thinks he *knows*—or, better, what he *comes to know*—in the exercise of his practice of war, why he ties this to *wisdom*, and how this reading opens us to new directions for thinking about Nietzsche's epistemology, politics, and ethics. In what follows, I focus primarily on the first of these directions by considering the relevance of agonal wisdom for how Nietzsche thinks about intelligibility, justice, and measure, and the relevance of these ideas for how we interpret Nietzsche's perspectivism and its political implications.

II. The Battleground: The striving world

Wolfgang Müller-Lauter writes incisively about Nietzsche's conception of the world as comprised of striving forces and affects and how these ideas inform his moral psychology. His recently translated *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*^{xiv} raises especially interesting questions about Nietzsche's naturalism, his reception of Darwin's evolutionary theory, and Nietzsche's efforts to advance an interpretation of development that could bridge his scientific and moral concerns. With Müller-Lauter, I think Nietzsche believes he accomplishes his goal when he comes to see the human as a plurality of wills,^{xv} each of which is struggling and seeking victory.^{xvi} This structure resembles what one finds in states, nations, and cultures,^{xvii} but the human 'state' is one in which no monarch rules, and in which multiple centers of gravity are realized.^{xviii} Müller-Lauter reveals that Nietzsche's grappling with the ideas of Wilhelm Roux and Darwin illuminates his efforts to advance an explanation for the development and evolution of organisms that needs not appeal to either of the common conceptual frameworks of his day, namely teleology and mechanism.^{xix} I think Nietzsche finds a third way of explanation, drawing his inspiration from Heraclitus to create his own agonistic model. It offers Nietzsche a way of conceptualizing the character of the becoming of the world that renders compatible semblance of order, purpose, and regularity with change, flux, and chance. What results is a conception of the human (and all other forms of life) as an arena in which countless drives and desires find their expression, opposition, coordination, and regulation to which lessons learned from his earlier studies of the Greek *agon* apply.^{xx} But like most others who recognize that Nietzsche's conception of the *agon* is a central and abiding concern in his philosophy, Müller-Lauter tends to use the words 'struggle' and 'agon' interchangeably. Elsewhere, I have argued at length that the Greek *agon* is a very special kind of struggle for Nietzsche and that it matters very much what sort of struggles are available to us, and those in which we choose to involve ourselves.^{xxi} A brief review of the salient features of that argument is warranted here.

When, in "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche ties the availability of contest to creative expressions of envy, he explicitly points toward how such contests provided for a circulation of power and an impetus toward excellence. They inspired people to exceed the common measure that had been constituted by the victory of the reigning champion. Hence, the entire culture was organized around producing excellence. Moreover, from participation in these activities and by virtue of being a part of a community that afforded such opportunities, Nietzsche's Greeks took their measure of themselves and drew their sense of what they would esteem. In short, they had a well-functioning mechanism for producing values. And, as Nietzsche's story goes, they sensed the importance of this institution for their very survival. Indeed, they valued it so much that they insured against its stagnation by expelling any force that exerted so much dominance over others that it could not be challenged. In that basic model for social interaction that Nietzsche finds at virtually every level Greek culture, he recognizes both a form for staging a productive engagement of striving forces and a culture of competition that cultivates creative action within those institutions.

Given Nietzsche's conception of what humans are (complexes of forces and affects) and how they relate to the world, they will struggle with each other regardless of whether there are sacred games or competitions for dramatic works of art. But the opportunity to participate in the special kind of struggle that the *agon* encourages allows for specific kinds of engagements and the direction of desire to act creatively in the course of those interactions. In numerous other works, e.g., *The Birth of Tragedy*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche considers how the various components of the *agon* break down or are purposely corrupted in the course of Western history. In such cases, the *form* of the contest, the *modes of action* encouraged, or both of those elements are transformed and deployed for other purposes, e.g., the Socratic adaptation in the form of the dialectic has disastrous effects upon the *agon* of tragic art, and the Christian perversion of the internalized *agon* of Platonic philosophy results in a destructive battle against oneself that produces self-loathing and disgust. Both dialectic and Christian agony are struggles, perhaps even contests, but they are not

agones of the sort that Nietzsche admires. Nietzsche's critiques of Platonic philosophy and Christian morality largely follow a comparison between the structure of the Greek contest as he admires it in "Homer's Contest" and the organizing principles and purposes of these other kinds of struggles.^{xxii}

Hence, when considering Nietzsche's agonal wisdom it is not enough to notice that he thinks of philosophy as fighting—or, if we wish to portray Nietzsche as more refined, a kind of dueling—or throwing himself into the "struggle of life" that is consistent with his naturalism. Instead, it is necessary to consider the relation of these special features of agonized struggle to *knowing*. How does the *agon* lead to knowledge, if it does, and moreover, what is it that Nietzsche knows about such struggles that lends itself to wisdom?

III. Gathering Intelligence: The *agon* and difference

In his account of ostracism in "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche notes favorably the idea that the original function of this provision of the *agon* served to keep the "play of powers" alive, an idea, he notes, that is "hostile to the 'exclusivity' of genius in the modern sense" (HC, p. 789). This indicates not only a difference in how contest was valued in his modern day and in antiquity. As Nietzsche sees it, it illuminates a difference in how Greeks thought about what greatness was, how it was accomplished, and how it was relevant to the rest of the community. The Greek view, "presupposes that in a natural order of things, there are always *several* geniuses, who incite each other to reciprocal action as they keep each other within the limits of measure. That is the crux of the Hellenic idea of contest: it detests autocracy and fears its dangers, it craves as protection against the genius—a second genius" (*ibid.*). What are these limits of measure, how are they derived, and who enforces them?

Nietzsche thinks competitive striving plays an important role in the creation of relational contexts that activate aspiration and potentially encourage creative action. The Greek *agon* gathered more than just a few good men; it served as a site for the production of meaning, for the making and remaking of the social order and cultural fabric, and for articulating the range of individual possibilities within that

particular community. "Every talent must express itself in fighting—thus commands the Hellenic popular pedagogy" (HC, p. 789). Thus, the *agon* provided the condition for the possibility of a particular talent to emerge and to be cultivated. And the *agon* provided the means by which such talent might be recognized.

Modern genius, Nietzsche claims, is *immeasurable*. The very fact that a genius cannot be measured is a mark of his exceptional talent. As such, he is unable to be challenged—there are no grounds upon which he might be exceeded or defeated. Because such individuals cannot be measured, they are poor models against which others can test and appraise themselves. Thus, the modern genius is *incomprehensible*—he cannot really be *known*; his achievements are essentially meaningless. That kind of individual cannot serve the same function that Nietzsche claims exemplary victors perform: the modern genius *lacks the definition* required to identify the terms on which it might be engaged or contested; it fails to incite a creative response aimed at surpassing it, since a boundary that would indicate what would constitute such surmounting is *indiscernible*.

The *agon* is attractive to Nietzsche largely because it provides a *framework*—or gathers the elements of a context—out of which meaning can be produced and reproduced. Contest provides the means for energizing a kind of creative activity Nietzsche thinks is so vital to the production of forms of life that enhance the significance of human existence and its estimable prospects. It gives *form* to striving, and it *establishes a standard* according to which participants can direct their action in order to surmount it. In the contest, *in the relation* of the contestants, Nietzsche finds an immediately tangible ground for rendering distinction, difference, and excellence *meaningful*.

Meaning is a matter of measure, for Nietzsche; judgment is an exercise of will. A contest among equals serves as an occasion for measure and the *shared* cultivation and exercise of judgment.^{xxiii}

Returning to the section from *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Wise," in which Nietzsche articulates his *Kriegs-Praxis*, one should note what precedes the oft-cited four principles of his war-making, for it is there that Nietzsche indicates the ultimate significance of his endeavors. A type of measure [*eine Art*

Maaß] of strength is found in the opposition that is necessitated in an encounter with resistance. The structure of that resistance provides the ground out of which that measure or rule might emerge, but it does not specify or prescribe the particular measure or norm itself. The establishment of a norm and of what will constitute judgment itself is something *produced* in the interaction between the contestants—contingent upon their performances and capabilities. Measure, contextualized and thus conceived, necessarily admits a plurality of norms: the standard of measure drawn from any one particular contest need not apply universally as the sole criterion for judgment.

The advantage of such a situation is similar to that associated with polytheism in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* 143. In contrast with monotheism, which Nietzsche claims results in stunted growth or "premature stagnation" [*vorzeitige Stillstand*], polytheism is considered as enabling people to conceive of the possibility of "a *plurality of norms*; one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him!"^{xxiv} "In polytheism the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form—the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes—and ever again new eyes that are even more our own [...]."^{xxv} Being "free-spiriting" and "many spiriting"—symbolizing humanity as such and investing it with meaning—can take the form of drawing us into expressions of creative energy that recharge our capabilities to draw distinctions among entities and to invest this differences with significance, thereby enabling us to deploy new perspectives, "new eyes". The same passage continues, "hence man alone among the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives."^{xxvi} An absolute value regime cuts us off from that prospect, which on Nietzsche's account amounts to an exile from our humanity.

But why should a multiplicity of norms or standards of measure be desirable? Why should creativity in the realm of values be not merely tolerated but also celebrated? Doesn't liberality for a "plurality of norms" introduce unnecessary and perhaps even destructive confusion? Nietzsche's esteem for the *agon* as a site of perpetually renewable (i.e., revisable and redeemable) production of the true, the good, and the real stretches from his earliest published writings all the way to those he was

preparing for publication at the time of his physical and mental collapse. And throughout, Nietzsche's interest is less focused on the heroic urbanity of his exemplary ancient Greek agonists than he is upon the dynamism of the contest, the kinds of relations it constituted, and how this conception of the nature of human reality was consistent with the contemporary views of organic growth and development. In particular, Nietzsche focuses upon how agonistic interactions provided the occasion for forging relations from which the standards for measure were drawn and in some cases dramatically revised. He emphasizes the relation between the community and the individual that pervasive and institutionalized competition advanced.^{xxvii} And he imagines how the ways in which this manner of deriving basic, fundamental concepts affects not only social relations but also how human beings cognitively relate to the world in which they live. To acquire an appreciation for this aspect of human knowing, to gain deeper insight to the relation between the production of the tools of measure and the different potentialities they activate is what constitutes Nietzsche's agonal wisdom, and this has significant bearing on how Nietzsche's perspectivism can be better understood.

IV. Nietzsche's Just War: the *agon* and the claim(s) of truth

I noted above that one prominent feature of the *agon* is its ability to gather together and educe the multiplicity of perspectives that foster conditions that allow a plurality of norms to abide. Because it explicitly and publicly invites the surmounting of that which serves as the standard for superiority, it potentially calls into question not only what has been judged to be superlative in the past but also the terms on which such judgments generally are made. The latter is especially provocative for Nietzsche, and this very feature of contestatory possibility is especially interesting to numerous others in contemporary philosophical investigations.

That the *agon* might afford the opportunity for the expression of a multiplicity of perspectives seems clear. And that some sort of *agon* might be a good forum for negotiating differences among values and visions of the public good is a view shared by others who draw their inspiration from

figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, or Wittgenstein (e.g., Mill, Arendt, and Habermas). But could an agonistic framework prove itself not only to do no harm but also to promote some good when applied to considerations of achieving knowledge (distinguished from merely estimating the value of what one claims to know)?

We shall come closer to appreciating Nietzsche's own view of this matter when we consider his conception of the relation between justice and knowledge and how the mean [*das Mittel*] both organizes the contest (i.e., establishes the ground upon which claims are made for whatever serves as the good of the contest) and creates a set of relations that binds together both participants and judges, and the entire community to each other and their world (i.e., develops standards that apply beyond the interaction of the individual competitors thereby making those claims available to and upon others).^{xxviii} It is the mean, the just standard that individual competitors seek and strive to surmount in the course of agonistic engagement.

In *Gay Science* 333 Nietzsche appears to claim that some part of knowledge is the result of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), a decision of what is right, of what holds true for the community that bears witness to the struggle. This standard of justice *emerges out of* and is not merely *applied to* the fight (*Kampf*) of affected perspectives. Intelligence, for Nietzsche, is an exercise of judgment that occurs within (and is cultivated through) the struggle of multiple and multifarious perspectives. As Richard Schacht observes in his "Nietzschean Cognitivism,"^{xxix} *Erkenntniss* is tied to conflict that is *fröhlich*. Schacht does not explicitly cast the connection in the context I am emphasizing here, and this idea recalls what Nietzsche writes in GS 324, where he describes his own conception of *Erkenntniss* as "a world of dangers (*Gefahren*) and victories (*Siege*) in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play."^{xxx} The passage, not further cited by Schacht, continues, "And who knows how to laugh anyway and live well if he does not first know a good deal about war and victory?"^{xxxi} What constitutes the danger mentioned, of course, is the risk of defeat, the great risk faced by Socrates' numerous interlocutors who are pressed to subject the beliefs around which they have organized their lives (that

which they claim to truly know and toward which they direct their action) to the challenge of dialectic contention. For reasons discussed elsewhere, Nietzsche thinks Socrates' contestants do not have even a remote chance to win. The Nietzschean contest would hold open that prospect. The justice of the *agon* that he imagines one might effect would be fluid and responsive to the demands of the contestants, to the strength of their perspectives, and to the views of those who are called to render the judgment that marks the end of the particular engagement.

Imagine a case in which not only a value such as excellence is agonistically derived—numerous cases of which might immediately spring to mind—but rather one in which standards of truth are generated through agonistic exchange. Scientific inquiry serves as a good example.^{xxxii} Conceptual schemes define the terms of engagement. They compete with respect to their explanatory power, the breadth of their reach, and are subject to the analysis and examination of the scientific community at large. Explanatory power is acquired not merely through matching the results of an experimental application of relevant principles of a hypothesis to some objective set of facts about the world. Rather, it is achieved through linkages to other conceptual frameworks, through constituting relations binding it to what is already accepted as true. In many respects, reigning bodies of knowledge generate or legislate sets of norms that abide both in concept formation and criteria for verification. The enterprise is less about discovering something completely new than it is about producing or reproducing knowledge formations. This is not to say that those engaged in this activity are merely "making it up" but there is artistry manifest in the formation of a perspective that allows for the unification, harmonization, and coordination of discrete facts, and the creation of frameworks that produce them and enable them to emerge. The scientist is not limited to a choice between fabrication and excavation. Rather the process of producing such knowledge bears some similarities to the demands faced by artists such as sculptors who find they must be responsive to (although not entirely limited by) what is found in the material (the objects of her concern) and to what constitutes suitable material (the basis on which those objects of inquiry emerge such that they can be subject to investigation as the things they

reportedly are). The *agon* of perspectives produces constellations of real relations that expand, contract, and are reorganized to produce different situations in and through which knowledge emerges. It provides a context for representing perspectives, for strengthening and expanding them in the course of testing them against alternative accounts and relating them to past and prevailing views that have withstood the scrutiny of the community that arranges the contest.

Moreover, beliefs get their binding force—they acquire their ability to make a claim on how we act in light of them and what we can expect from others—through the course of agonistic justification and reassessment. I take it this is what Nietzsche envisions when he describes what it means to "give style to one's character" (GS 290), a situation in which the multifarious drives are each given full expression but become unified toward a common cause. It provides the possibility for cultivation of a single *taste*, a shared interpretation and value. The reference to taste does not aim at reducing everything to the level of aesthetics; there are important epistemic considerations tied to taste for Nietzsche. Taste provides the condition for the possibility of judgments—moral, aesthetic, and epistemic—not just about what it would be good to believe but also about what is, about what features of human experience are relevant for the pursuit of our interests, about what will *show up*, as Heidegger might put it, as significant at all. Because of its radical openness, the *agon* does not just protect the tastes of a select few, for the possibility of a new taste to emerge lies even with the process that produced the reigning taste. It allows for a constitution of reality, the forging of a set of relations that serves as the contingent basis for a shared perspective, one that will surely be undermined and in need of reconstitution in the future. This is not to reduce knowledge to politics or mere strategic action, as some might fear, but it does recognize significant political aspects of the acquisition of knowledge and the determinations of significance generally.

And if it is the case that the world is a process of relations that are undergoing constant change, then the *agon* of the real that epistemic agonism would support might actually better mirror the objects of human knowledge; at least such would be the most faithful mirror we could possibly hope to grasp.

Then again, the mirror conception of truth itself might have to be cast aside altogether if we pursue this path, not because the world as such cannot be known, or because it cannot be known by creatures such as we are, but because the very act of judging the real that happens in the course of agonistic interactions itself constitutes an interpretation that contributes to its reconstitution. In other words, if the world is conceived as it is for Nietzsche in terms of an endless chain, or sets of chains, of interpretations, at the moment at which we introduce a new interpretation, we reconstitute the sets of paths that lead from it for possible pursuit. In this case, the world, in some respects, becomes a different place.^{xxxiii}

It is my hope that a fuller appreciation of Nietzsche's agonal wisdom as I have sketched it here puts Nietzsche in dialogue with a host of other figures and positions in contemporary philosophy that are less frequently addressed either within Nietzsche scholarship or beyond it. For example, the ethico-political dimensions of this project open some interesting avenues for further exploration of the relevance of the agonistic model for Habermasian varieties of discourse ethics, particularly on the issue of the legitimation of the values and norms that govern the organization of such interactions. There remain fruitful paths to explore for the connection between these ideas and various discussions in philosophy of science. An especially illuminating comparison might be made with Feyerabend's conception of anarchistic epistemology,^{xxxiv} and with Kuhn's account of the "essential tension" that drives the development of science.^{xxxv} And finally, there are interesting possibilities for dialogue between a Nietzschean epistemology informed by agonal wisdom and developments in contemporary epistemology,^{xxxvi} particularly certain recent versions of coherentism and contextualism.

I wish to highlight one of these developments, Linda Martín Alcoff's *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory*,^{xxxvii} since Nietzsche's work is mentioned specifically in the conclusion. Informed by the agonistic framework with which I have coordinated Nietzsche's perspectivism, I think his view might be more compatible with Alcoff's vision than she recognizes. The version of

coherentism developed by Alcoff is built upon a general claim that the Western tradition's equation of knowledge with the possession of ideas that mirror or correspond with reality is itself a perspective, and that as much as generally been acknowledged insofar as certain persons, *by virtue* of their position of power or authority, have had their perspectives privileged as corresponding with or constituting reality, while others—again, on the basis of their lack of power or authority—have been ignored in the pursuit of claiming an absolute vantage on the real. Alcoff calls this "covert perspectivism" (p. 204), and she draws attention to the ways in which history and politics work to inform perspectives and their relations to the perspectives of others. Like Nietzsche, she grants that there are only perspectives—there is no perspective-less perspective—and, although she is pursuing greater equality in epistemic negotiations (the expansion of the range of perspectives for consideration in decisions that affect the lives of others), she does *not* claim that all perspectives are equal in the sense that not all perspectives are equally compatible with the beliefs that currently cohere in the prevailing accounts of our world and how we relate to each other within it. Alcoff writes, "A more attentive and contextualized reading of Western epistemology's history shows that, contrary to the usual assumption, it has never really eschewed perspectivism, as long as the perspectives that were privileged were those of the dominant elites. Nietzsche knew this, but he had no motivation to extend epistemic authority beyond the heroic masculine few who could brave god's demise. Nietzsche's only goal in revealing the inherent perspectivism in philosophy was to criticize the cowardice of universalist systems that refuse to acknowledge their own self-regarding motivations" (p. 204).^{xxxviii} Her claim is that "it is not perspectivism per se that is the problem with modernist epistemologies: it is the authoritarianism of their perspective" (p. 205). Coherentism, as she conceives it, provides an alternative to the false dilemma of embracing either "authoritarian perspectivism" or "an all-pervasive repudiation of knowledge" (207). I think we can recognize this aim in Nietzsche's work, too, even if his motivations were different. Nietzsche similarly "detests autocracy and fears its dangers, [he also] craves as protection against" *totalitarian* perspectivism the expansion of the play of perspectives in the creation

of a unified or coherent vision of reality. And like Alcott, Nietzsche does not eschew the possibility of knowledge. By way of conclusion, I wish to draw attention to a few implications of what I have argued here as they relate to common charges that Nietzsche's perspectivism leads to relativism.

Once perspectivism is situated in the context of Nietzsche's agonism, once perspectives acquire their claim to truth and gather the authority for their claims on others through agonistic legitimation, then perspectives are not merely adopted *ad hoc*, and they are not just arbitrary subjective preferences. Mindful of Nietzsche's conception of justice and measure in the *agon*, we can see that perspectives derived in this manner take shape in relation to a standard that is determined and produced in the contest. And although Nietzsche does not think there are species-specific perspectives,^{xxxix} consideration of agonistically derived perspectives invites further discussion of the possibilities of intersubjective perspectives. Such would be perspectives that are shared among individuals on the basis of the relations that are constituted in agonistic interactions and the ways in which the institutions that afford such exchanges are related to the communities that foster them. We can then recognize the communal aspects of agonistic exchange, a prominent feature in Nietzsche "Homer's Contest". Perspectivism considered in light of Nietzsche's agonism is much less radically relative, much less vulnerable to the charge of solipsism, and much less prone to tyrannical abuse of power than Nietzsche's critics allow. I think these are highly promising avenues for further pursuit that would carry us far along the way toward being done with the usual bickering about relativism and problems of self-reference that generally organize discussions of Nietzsche's views of cognitivism.^{xi}

If "the wisest man would be the one richest in contradictions," as Nietzsche writes in a note from 1884,^{xli} then wisdom consists in inciting and igniting contradiction, and not merely in order to fight but rather to expand the diversity of perspectives and draw them into a whole. What Nietzsche *knows* as the result of his war games is both a sense of his own measure—of what is truly significant to him^{xlii}—and something about the possible standards of measure themselves, about multiple perspectives on

meaning and their transformative possibilities. Nietzsche's agonal wisdom expressed in his articulation of his *Kriegs-praxis* with which I began, is less a credo of fair play than it is an account of how to be a force of contention, how to manage a fight with stakes of far-reaching significance, and how to draw other competitive forces into the fray. Nietzsche's self-proclaimed agonal wisdom consists of the knowledge to organize contests whose stakes potentially maximize meaning for those who participate as well as for those who gather as the community to evaluate the outcomes. Success in such "skirmishes" requires a heightened sense of the measure that conditions participation in the particular engagement of which one is apart. In extraordinary cases victory might be achieved not merely by surmounting the standard established by previous competitors but by reconstituting, transfiguring, the terms on which the contest is evaluated. The significance of that accomplishment is enhanced when the exercise of that standard is extended beyond the specific contest in which it was created. The pursuit of agonal wisdom, for Nietzsche, appears to aim at this also, mastering not only what poses as a challenge but reorganizing and reforming what constitutes the exercise of judgment generally.

ⁱ See, for examples, Alan Schrift's "'Nietzsche for Democracy?'" in *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000): 220-233, and Herman Siemens' "Nietzsche and Agonistic Politics: A Review of Recent Literature," *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001).

ⁱⁱ See Lawrence C. Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and essays in Alan Schrift, editor, *Why Nietzsche Still?* (University of California Press, 2000).

^{iv} Frederick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

^v I make progress toward the former goal in my forthcoming "Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche's Contests" in *International Studies in Philosophy*, and this paper aims to make progress toward the latter aim.

^{vi} Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Wise," section 7. In general, I rely on Kaufmann's translations of EH and GS, although I emend the text in some places. Other translations are my own. Compare KSA 6, pp. 274-275.

^{vii} KSA 6, p. 274: "Ich bin meiner Art nach kriegerisch."

^{viii} KSA 6, p. 274: "ich greife nur Sachen an, die siegreich sind,—ich warte unter Umständen, bis sie siegreich sind."

^{ix} KSA 6, p. 274: "ich bediene mich der Person nur wie eines starken Vergrößerungsglases, mit dem man einen allgemeinen, aber schleichenden, aber wenig greifbaren Nothstand sichtbar machen kann."

^x KSA 6, p. 275: "ich greife nur Dinge an, wo jedwede Personen-Differenz ausgeschlossen ist, wo jeder Hintergrund schlimmer Erfahrungen fehlt."

^{xi} KSA 6, p. 275.

^{xii} For the best example, see Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche's Hammer: Philosophy, Destruction, or the Art of Limited Warfare," in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 2 (June 1998): 321-347. Another interesting development of this idea is found in Daniel Conway's account of what he calls Nietzsche's *parastrategis* in his work *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge, 1997), especially pp. 143-177.

^{xiii} See Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, pp. 156 and 157. I think Conway's conclusion that the *agon* functions "as little more than a decadent romance" is correct *if* it is true that Nietzsche *merely* idealizes the heroic Homeric ethic, but I argue here and elsewhere that Nietzsche develops a much more subtle and complex theory of meaning out of the contest motif. James I. Porter expresses a sentiment similar to Conway's, yet he pushes it even further to link the conservatism (and exclusivity) of the *agon* idea to racism in the nineteenth century. See his *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford University Press, 2000), especially pp. 273ff. Porter finds "Homer's Contest," and much of Nietzsche's thinking about the Greeks generally, to be riddled with (irreconcilable) contradiction and paradox. In the case of "Homer's Contest" I think this is due in part, though not entirely, to the fact that he fails to see any distinction Nietzsche draws between contest and violence. Thus, Porter claims, "joyful, violent combat (the contest) is what protects Greek culture from its own (pre-Homeric) horrors; horror ('horrible savagery, hatred, and pleasure in destruction') is a defense against horror, which is to say, *against itself*. Nothing self-consistent could possibly follow from such a premise, and nothing does" (247). But, it clear that Nietzsche *does* distinguish contest (which is essentially *creative*, not violent) from destruction, and so "horror" is not the remedy for the pre-Homeric worldview. (See Christa Davis Acampora, "Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche's Contests") Contradiction certainly abounds in (and perhaps plagues) Nietzsche's works, but the particular case Porter criticizes is not such an instance. The issue of exclusivity is addressed in "Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds" and below.

^{xiv} Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*, translated by David J. Parent (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). See also his "On Judging in a World of Becoming: A Reflection on the 'Great Change' in Nietzsche's Philosophy" in *Nietzsche, Theories of Knowledge and Critical Theory*, edited by Babette Babich and Robert S. Cohen (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 165-185.

^{xv} Müller-Lauter cites: KGW VIII.1, p. 21; KGW VII.3, p. 284f; KGW V.1, pp. 541-43.

^{xvi} Müller-Lauter cites KGW VII.1, p. 176.

^{xvii} Müller-Lauter cites KGW V.2, p. 502.

^{xviii} Müller-Lauter cites: KGW VII.2, p. 277; KGW VII.3, p. 182; KGW VII.3, p. 382; KGW VIII.1, p. 213.

^{xix} See his chapter 9, "The Organism as Inner Struggle: Wilhelm Roux's Influence on Nietzsche," pp. 161-182.

^{xx} I discuss these ideas at greater length in my forthcoming "Between Mechanism and Teleology: Nietzsche's 'Gay' Science" in *Nietzsche and Science*, edited by Gregory Moore and Thomas H. Brobjer (Adlershot, Hants, U.K.: Ashgate, 2003). My own views are also informed by Christoph Cox's illuminating discussion in his *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (University of California Press, 1999).

^{xxi} See, for example, Christa Davis Acampora, "Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche's Contests".

^{xxii} I develop these ideas at greater length in my forthcoming "Nietzsche Contra Homer, Socrates, and Paul" in the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (2003).

^{xxiii} Paul van Tongeren's forthcoming "Nietzsche's Greek Measure," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (2003), helpfully traces Nietzsche's use of the word *Maaß* and related terms, and he accounts for how

the senses of these terms develop from Nietzsche's conception of Hellenistic philosophy, particularly from the concept of *sophrosyne*.

^{xxiv} KSA 3, p. 490: "durfte man eine Mehrzahl von Normen sehen: der eine Gott war nicht die Leugnung oder Lästerung des anderen Gottes!"

^{xxv} KSA 3, p. 491: "Im Polytheismus lag die Freigeisterei und Vielgeisterei des Menschen vorgebildet: die Kraft, sich neue und eigene Augen zu schaffen und immer wieder neue und noch eigenere".

^{xxvi} KSA 3, p. 491: "sodass es für den Menschen allein unter allen Thieren keine ewigen Horizonte und Perspectives giebt."

^{xxvii} It is noteworthy how Nietzsche thinks about this relation. In "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche claims that the goal of agonistic education was "the welfare of the whole, of civic society". But how was this achieved? Not by pressing every person into the mold of a well-disciplined citizen, but rather by fully developing the citizen's own talent, to encourage a culture of action whereby individuals sought to "increase the city's share of glory by increasing his own glory" (HC, p. 789). Athens became great, Nietzsche claims, not by succeeding in producing a great number of citizens who pursued its predetermined ends but rather by allowing for the full realization of their talent, perhaps the full expression of their perspective, oriented toward excellence, that stood as the marker of Athenian excellence. KSA 1, p. 789: "Für die Alten aber war das Ziel der agonalen Erziehung die Wohlfahrt des Ganzen, der staatlichen Gesellschaft [...] an das Wohl seiner Mutterstadt dachte der Jüngling, wenn er um die Wette lief oder warf oder sang; ihren Ruhm wollte er in dem seinigen [...]."

^{xxviii} An interesting comparison of what follows might be made with Heidegger's conception of the *agon* of "world" and "earth" in art as described in his "Origin of the Work of Art".

^{xxix} Richard Schacht, "Nietzschean Cognitivism" in *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000): pp. 12-40.

^{xxx} KSA 3, p. 553: "für mich ist sie [die Erkenntniss] eine Welt der Gefahren und Siege, in der auch die heroischen Gefühle ihre Tanz- und Tummelplätze haben."

^{xxxi} KSA 3, p. 553: "Und wer verstünde überhaupt gut zu lachen und zu leben, der sich nicht vorerst auf Krieg und Sieg gut verstünde?" Kaufmann notes in his translation that the passage makes an interesting comparison with GS 283, 310, and 319.

^{xxxii} My example focuses on intrinsic goods of the contest of scientific inquiry rather than those goods that lie outside of the theoretical/experimental enterprise. Although scientists might very well compete for personal prestige or financial success, such contests are not essential to the enterprise of doing science.

^{xxxiii} Of course, this is not to say that such activity constitutes the creation of alternative planes of reality. Nuclear physics is not just a "discovery"; it is an interpretation of the world that has significant implications for how human beings live with each other and how they interact with other entities. Christoph Cox skillfully addresses critics of Nelson Goodman's views about multiple worlds in his *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, chapter 3, notes 97 and 98. The link between interpretation and the disclosure of relations that constitute what can be known is developed more explicitly by Heidegger in his *Being and Time*, especially §§32-34. Heidegger's conception of truth as *being-true*, or being in a truth-disclosive relation is very close to the rough account I sketch in this paper. An interesting study might explore further possibilities for developing the relation between the idea of claims of truth derived through agonistic exchange with Heidegger's account of truth in *Being and Time* §44.

^{xxxiv} See Feyerabend's *Against Method* (New York: Verso, 1988 [revised edition]). In *Science in a Free Society* (London: New Left Books, 1978), Feyerabend even distinguishes wisdom as what one gains through interacting with different points of view. This comes not simply through casual contact of the sort provided in most "social studies" curricula found in modern schools, but rather through a serious engagement that depends upon surmounting the totalitarian rule of scientific rationalism that would prejudge these other points of view as not worthy of serious consideration. I am indebted to Mihai I.

Spariosu's *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern and Scientific Discourse* (Cornell University Press, 1989) for drawing my attention to these points of contact, and it should be noted that Spariosu does indeed make such comparisons. His study is hindered by two obstacles, as I see them: 1) the need to classify various positions as endorsing either "prerational" or "rational" values, and 2) a mischaracterization of Nietzsche's agonism as a return to the prerational values of Homer. My own work here attempts to address the latter in some small part. I leave it to others to see what fruits they might bring to bear freed from the constraints of the former framework. Still, Spariosu's broad-ranging book is an interesting account of how agonism, conceived as *very* generally as (chiefly aesthetic) play, animates much of modern Western philosophy and science.

^{xxxv} See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), and Spariosu, pp. 305-309.

^{xxxvi} Some significant work in this area has begun in Christoph Cox's *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, especially chapter three. More work is warranted.

^{xxxvii} Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Cornell University Press, 1996). Page numbers cited in this paragraph refer to this edition.

^{xxxviii} Alcoff refers her reader to BGE 198 for further evidence of her claim.

^{xxxix} Christoph Cox elaborates this issue in chapter three of his *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*.

^{xl} Richard Schacht makes a similar appeal at the end of his "Nietzschean Cognitivism," p. 40. It is my hope that this paper makes some contribution toward treating 'the more significant tasks of working out and refining a Nietzschean cognitivism, and of seeing what can be done with it.'

^{xli} KSA 11, p. 182: "Der weiseste Mensch wäre der reichste an Widersprüchen [...]."

^{xlii} Cf. KSA 12, p. 573.