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## Nietzsche on Objects

**Abstract:** Nietzsche was persistently concerned with what an object is and how different views of objects lead to different views of facts, causality, personhood, substance, truth, mathematics and logic, and even nihilism. Yet his treatment of objects is incredibly puzzling. In many passages, he assumes that objects such as trees and leaves, tables and chairs, and dogs and cats are just ordinary entities of experience. In other places, he reports that objects do not exist. Elsewhere he claims that objects exist, but as mere bundles of forces. And sometimes he proposes that we bring all objects into existence. Nietzsche's writings, then, appear to support various secondary readings, which are jointly inconsistent. My chief aim is to present and defend the reading that Nietzsche embraces constructivism about objects, the neo-Kantian view that all objects are socially constructed. I first explain this view and argue that all non-constructivist readings are not supported by Nietzsche's texts. I then present Nietzsche's object constructivism, reconstruct his argument for the position, and defend it from an internal objection. I finish by suggesting that Nietzsche might have embraced such a radical conception of objects because it plays a crucial role in overcoming nihilism.

**Keywords:** metaphysics, objects, constructivism, science, nihilism.

**Zusammenfassung:** Nietzsche befasste sich ständig damit, was ein Objekt ist und wie verschiedene Sichten auf Objekte zu verschiedenen Sichten auf Tatsachen, Kausalität, Persönlichkeit, Substanz, Wahrheit, Mathematik und Logik und sogar auf den Nihilismus führen. Doch seine Behandlung der Objekt-Frage ist unglaublich verwirrend. In vielen Passagen nimmt er an, dass Objekte wie Bäume und Blätter, Tische und Stühle, Hunde und Katzen schlicht gewöhnliche Erfahrungsgegebenheiten sind. An anderen Stellen sagt er, dass Objekte nicht existieren. An wieder anderen Stellen behauptet er, dass Objekte existieren, aber nur als Bündel von Kräften. Und manchmal schlägt er vor, dass wir es sind, die alle Objekte zur Existenz bringen. So scheinen Nietzsches Schriften unterschiedliche Interpretationen zu stützen, die miteinander unvereinbar sind. Mein Hauptziel ist, die Lesart zu bieten und zu verteidigen, nach der Nietzsche sich in Sachen Objekte den Konstruktivismus zu eigen macht, die neokantianische Sicht, dass alle Objekte sozial konstruiert sind. Zunächst erläutere ich diese Sicht und zeige, dass alle nicht-konstruktivistischen Lesarten keinen Rückhalt in Nietzsches Texten haben. Dann lege ich Nietzsches Objekt-Konstruktivismus dar, rekonstruiere seine Argumentation dafür und verteidige sie gegen einen internen Einwand. Ich schließe mit dem Vorschlag, dass Nietzsche sich eine so radikale Konzeption der Objekte zu eigen gemacht haben könnte, weil sie eine Schlüsselrolle in der Überwindung des Nihilismus spielt.

**Schlagwörter:** Metaphysik, Objekte, Konstruktivismus, Wissenschaft, Nihilismus.

Nietzsche was persistently concerned with what an object is, including how different views of objects lead to different views of facts, causality, personhood, substance, truth, mathematics and logic, and even nihilism.<sup>1</sup> Yet his treatment of objects is perplexing. In many passages, he assumes that objects such as trees and leaves, tables and chairs, and dogs and cats are just ordinary entities we commonly experience. In other places, he reports that objects are “erroneous articles of faith” [“irrhümliche Glaubenssätze”] (GS 110). Elsewhere, he claims that objects are mere “complexes of events” [“Complexe des Geschehens”] (Nachlass 1887, 9[91]). And sometimes he suggests we have the power to bring objects into being: “in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and probabilities in order to create new ‘things’”<sup>2</sup> (GS 58, translation modified).

These passages support opposing readings. Some commentators believe Nietzsche is a *common sense realist* who thinks objects are ordinary entities that exist independently of our minds.<sup>3</sup> Others defend the *eliminativist* interpretation that for Nietzsche objects do not exist.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche appears to embrace a fundamental ontology of bundles of forces, uniformly described as “will to power,” which is incompatible with the existence of objects. Other interpreters offer a revisionary reading, according

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**1** See TL; HH I: 11, 19; GS 57, 58, 110; BGE 12, 16, 17, 21; GM III: 12, 24; TI “Reason” 2, 5, “Errors” 3; Nachlass 1885, 34[131], 1885, 35[35], 1885, 36[21], 1885, 36[23], 1885/86, 1[28], 1885/86, 2[77], 1885/86, 2[87], 1885/86, 2[139], 1885/86, 2[149], 1885/86, 2[150], 1885/86, 2[152], 1886/87, 5[19], 1886/87, 6[11], 1886/87, 7[48], 1886/87, 7[54], 1886/87, 7[63], 1887, 9[91], 1887, 9[97], 1887, 10[202], 1887/88, 11[73], 1887/88, 11[120], 1888, 14[79], 1888, 14[98], 1888, 14[122]. This essay focuses on Nietzsche’s view of material objects. I use the following translations and abbreviations of Friedrich Nietzsche’s texts: *Antichrist*, in: Walter Kaufmann (Ed., Trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche*, New York 1976, pp. 565–656; *Beyond Good and Evil*, Walter Kaufmann (Trans.), New York 1989; *Daybreak*, Maudemarie Clark / Brian Leiter (Eds.), R. J. Hollingdale (Trans.), Cambridge 1997; *Human, all too Human*, R. J. Hollingdale (Trans.), Cambridge 1996; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann (Trans.), New York 1989; *The Gay Science*, Bernard Williams (Ed.), Josefine Nauckhoff (Trans.), Cambridge 2001; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in: Kaufmann (Ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 121–439; *Twilight of the Idols*, Duncan Large (Trans.), Oxford 1998; *On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense*, in: Daniel Breazeale (Ed., Trans.), *Philosophy and Truth*, Amherst 1979, pp. 79–100; *Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann (Ed.), R. J. Hollingdale (Trans.), New York 1968.

**2** “[...] es genügt, neue Namen und Schätzungen und Wahrscheinlichkeiten zu schaffen, um auf die Länge hin neue „Dinge“ zu schaffen”.

**3** See Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge 1990. See also Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, New York 2002; and Brian Leiter, *Perspectivism in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals*, in: Richard Schacht (Ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals*, Berkeley 1994.

**4** See Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, New York 1965; Robert Nola, *Nietzsche’s Theory of Truth and Belief*, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (1987), pp. 552–557; Robert Nola, *Nietzsche’s Naturalism: Science and Belief*, in: Babette Babich / Robert Cohen (Eds.), *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science*, Dordrecht 1999; George Stack, *Nietzsche’s Anthropic Circle: Man, Science, and Myth*, Rochester 2005; Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism*, Evanston 2007.

to which Nietzsche thinks objects are identical to bundles of forces. One version of this reading, call it *unificationism*, holds that objects are intrinsically organized bundles of forces.<sup>5</sup> Objects such as trees and tables are particular collections of forces with internally unified structures. An opposing version of the revisionary reading, call it *constructivism*, claims that objects are bundles of forces that human beings interpret to be objects.<sup>6</sup> Trees and tables are bundles of forces we take to be trees and tables.

I argue that Nietzsche embraces constructivism. I first introduce what it means to be a constructivist about objects. Afterward, I argue that the non-constructivist readings are not supported by Nietzsche's texts.<sup>7</sup> I then present Nietzsche's constructivism, reconstruct his argument for the position, and defend it from a major objection internal to his philosophical program. I close by offering a surprising reason for why Nietzsche might have been attracted to such a controversial view of objects: it seems to play an important role in overcoming nihilism.

## Object Constructivism and Object Objectivism

Constructivism about objects is a form of social constructivism.<sup>8</sup> Ordinarily, it appears that something is constructed if its existence depends on intentional activity,

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<sup>5</sup> See John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, Oxford 1996; Stephan Hales / Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*, Urbana / Chicago 2000; Tsarina Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics*, Edinburgh 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Harvard 1985; Lanier Anderson, *Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism*, in: *Synthese* 115 (1998), pp. 1–32, and Lanier Anderson, *Overcoming Charity: the Case of Maudemarie Clark's Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 25 (1996), pp. 307–341; Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, Berkeley 1999.

<sup>7</sup> This essay uses material from Nietzsche's notebooks. Of course, any reading that relies too heavily on such material is suspect as an interpretation of Nietzsche's considered view. Accordingly, some commentators disregard the *Nachlass* (see Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*). And yet, others rely on it substantially (see Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, New York 1983; Peter Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, Oxford 1996; Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* 1996; Hales / Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* 2000; Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, Harvard 2006; Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics*). It is clear that the unpublished writings contain many of Nietzsche's most interesting thoughts on metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and nihilism. Plus, unlike published writings, many notebook entries contain relatively straightforward philosophical arguments free of rhetoric, hyperbole, metaphor, and other literary devices. Moreover, unpublished work often develops published work in great detail. In particular, published passages that claim that objects are constructed are expounded on at great length in the notebooks. For these reasons, it seems worthwhile to use the *Nachlass* for this project.

<sup>8</sup> Object constructivism is typically associated with William James and Nelson Goodman. See William James, *Pragmatism*, Bruce Kuklick (Ed.), Indianapolis 1981, pp. 109–120; Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis 1978. Nietzsche was familiar with constructivism through the influence of Kant and the neo-Kantians.

and something is socially constructed if it is constructed by a group of intentional agents.<sup>9</sup> Many objects are obviously socially constructed, such as tables and chairs, but constructivists make the much stronger claim that seemingly natural objects, such as quarks and stars, are also constructed. In general, *object constructivism* is the thesis that all objects we can in principle encounter are socially constructed. To say objects are socially constructed is to say the identity conditions of objects are essentially dependent on our intentional activities, which is to say those activities are partly constitutive of the identity of objects.<sup>10</sup> The intentional activities significant to constructivists are certain kinds of descriptive representations, such as those found in the sciences, since these appear to explain how objects are constructed.<sup>11</sup> Object constructivism, therefore, is the thesis that the identity conditions of all objects we can in principle encounter are essentially dependent on certain kinds of descriptive representations. To illustrate, consider Scrabble jokers, the blank tiles that can be used to represent any letter of the alphabet in the game of Scrabble. For the constructivist, if a tile *a* is a Scrabble joker while *b* is not, it is because the concept *Scrabble joker* fixes the conditions of identity of being a Scrabble joker such that the concept correctly applies to *a* but not *b* – perhaps, for instance, because *b* is not a blank tile, but has the marking “Z<sub>10</sub>.”<sup>12</sup>

Constructivists do not believe objects have identity conditions solely in virtue of being actually represented. If identity conditions depended on actual representation, then if there had been no people there would have been no objects such as stars or dinosaurs. But it certainly seems that there would have been such objects. Constructivists hold that objects gain conditions of identity by virtue of the possibility of being represented in some way or another.<sup>13</sup> They only deny that objects have identity conditions regardless of the possibility of being represented. Thus, it makes sense to talk about objects we have not encountered. If there had been no people there would still have been the things that would be constructed by humans were they around.

*Object objectivism* is the thesis that not all objects are socially constructed. The identities of some objects exist independently of our intentional activities. For the objectivist, the identity conditions of objects exist at least constitutively, and perhaps, but not typically, conditionally independent of our actions. If an object’s identity conditions are conditionally dependent on our actions, then although we must

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<sup>9</sup> See Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, Oxford 2006, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> See Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*; Robert Schwartz, *I’m Going to Make You a Star*, in: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 6 (1986), pp. 427–438, and *Starting from Scratch: Making Worlds*, in: *Erkenntnis* 52 (2000), pp. 151–159.

<sup>11</sup> See Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, pp. 27–28.

<sup>12</sup> This example is treated at length in Schwartz, *I’m Going to Make you a Star*.

<sup>13</sup> For a formulation of this idea, see Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer / Allen Wood (Ed., Trans.), Cambridge 1998, A 496/B 524-A 497/B 525.

understand what that object is from some standpoint or other determined by our activities, the object's identity is not constituted by those activities.<sup>14</sup> Grasping what objects are stars, for instance, might require us to be in some cognitive relation to the firmament, but objectivists hold that such a relation does not constitute what objects are stars. Objectivists who maintain that the identity conditions of objects exist both constitutively and conditionally independent of our actions embrace the existence of noumenal objects. Noumenal objects are objects in principle inaccessible to human beings, such as Kantian things in themselves. Whether objectivists believe the identity conditions of objects exist only constitutively independent of our actions, or both constitutively and conditionally independent of our actions, objectivism holds that objects have some identifying features that in no way depend on our activities, while constructivism denies that objects have such features. This is the fundamental difference between the two theses.

## Non-Constructivist Readings

What is Nietzsche's position on objects? To begin, consider common sense realism.<sup>15</sup> This view is offered by Maudemarie Clark and supported by Brian Leiter. It is a consequence of Clark's developmental interpretation of Nietzsche's view of truth. She argues that between *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) Nietzsche rejects his early commitment to the view that all our beliefs are false – a view that depends on the position that we cannot know anything about the objects that give rise to perceptual states, but only the perceptual states themselves – and comes to hold that we can have true beliefs about the objects of experience. The later Nietzsche accepts a theory of truth that assumes a particular view of objecthood: true beliefs correspond to mind-independent, ordinary objects of experience.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed., Princeton, 1997, pp. 15–16: “An object has objective existence, in some sense, if it exists and has its nature whatever we believe, think, or can discover: it is independent of the cognitive activities of the mind [...]. It is not *constituted* by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages.”

<sup>15</sup> Common sense realism and unificationism seem compatible with one another. Unificationism might be understood as giving an ontologically basic description of ordinary objects. But an argument against one of these readings will not necessarily undermine other. Those who defend common sense realism deny that Nietzsche is committed to a bundle of forces ontology. See Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Ch. 7; Maudemarie Clark / David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge 2012, Ch. 8; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 252. Thus, common sense realism could be true, but unificationism false. The reverse holds as well. Perhaps Nietzsche does not regard intrinsically organized bundles as ordinary objects.

<sup>16</sup> See Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 31, 40, 107, 121. The following page numbers refer to this book.

Common sense realism is an objectivist position. Clark writes that, on Nietzsche's account, "the world exists independently of our representations of it" (p. 40), which partly means objects exist "ontologically [...] distinct from knowers and their representations" (p. 45). For Nietzsche, Clark claims, an object has "existence in itself," but not "essence in itself" (p. 136). An object with "essence in itself" has "an essence or nature that is independent of what it can appear to be [viz., a thing in itself]," whereas an object with "existence in itself" is just an "independently existing thing" (pp. 136–7, brackets added). For Clark, Nietzsche's assertion that "there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'" (GM III: 12) means that making claims about independently existing objects depends on our perspectival actions. In my terminology, the common sense realist reading unfolds as follows. Nietzsche rejects the constructivist view that the identity conditions of objects are ontologically dependent on our representations of them. He also denies the Kantian objectivist position that the identity conditions of objects exist both conditionally and constitutively independent of our mode of cognition. Instead, Nietzsche accepts the objectivist view that the identity conditions of objects are conditionally dependent on our intentional actions.<sup>17</sup> I fully agree that Nietzsche denies Kantian objectivism, and I develop this argument below. However, I also contend that Nietzsche is not sympathetic to any form of objectivism. This will provide sufficient reason to think Nietzsche rejects common sense realism.

Although some passages in Nietzsche's corpus seem to assume that objects are ordinary entities, others suggest that he endorses the eliminativist view that there are no objects. For instance, Nietzsche declares that "there is no 'thing'" (HH I: 19; see also GS 110; TI, "Reason" 2, 5; Nachlass 1888, 14[79]). Robert Nola's reconstruction of Nietzsche's argument for eliminativism is as follows:<sup>18</sup>

- A1. All objects are substances, or are bits of substantive matter, with identity conditions.
- A2. Anything which is a nexus of force-power (NFP) has no identity conditions.
- A3. So a NFP cannot be a substance, or substantive matter.
- A4. The only thing which exists is the total set of NFPs.
- A5. So there are no substances or bits of substantive matter with identity conditions.
- A6. So there are no objects.

The relevant premises to examine are A1, A2, and A4. Nola justifies A4 by taking Nietzsche at his word when he asserts that the world is "'will to power' and nothing else" (BGE 36). I will grant this premise, set A1 aside, and challenge A2. According to Nola, Nietzsche embraces A2 because if the world is will to power, then it consists in

<sup>17</sup> See also Leiter, *Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 349–350.

<sup>18</sup> Nola, *Nietzsche's Naturalism*, p. 93. See also Nola, *Nietzsche's Theory of Truth and Belief*, pp. 552–567. Those who attribute eliminativism to Nietzsche often endorse some form of this argument.

“nexuses of force-power (NFP),” or bundles of forces, which implies that “nothing has any continuing identity.”<sup>19</sup> Nola cites Nietzsche to support his reading: “Continual transition forbids us to speak of ‘individuals’ etc.: the ‘number’ of beings is itself in flux” (Nachlass 1885, 36[23]). Nietzsche seems to scare-quote ‘individuals’ and ‘number’ because he rejects the existence of objects.

The passage Nola cites, however, does not support eliminativism. For starters, Nietzsche’s claim about numbers mentions that “beings” exist in a world of bundles of forces. To assess Nietzsche’s statement about individuals, consider more of the passage:

The principle of identity has as its background the “appearance” that things are the same. A world of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be “grasped” or “known”; only to the extent that the “grasping” and “knowing” intellect encounters a coarse, already created world [...] is there anything like “knowledge” (Nachlass 1885, 36[23]).<sup>20</sup>

A “world in a state of becoming,” or what Nola regards as a world of bundles of forces, cannot be “known” only if knowledge requires a world that is not “already created.” A “created” world is one where the way things are depends on our actions. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that “continual transition” only “forbids us to speak of ‘individuals’” that exist apart from our actions. Nietzsche also suggests that we can apply “the principle of identity” that “things are the same” if that principle refers to entities within an “already created world.” Hence, it appears that “individuals” can have identity conditions within a world of bundles of forces if such conditions depend on our actions. In the following section, I explain Nietzsche’s argument for this view. The passage, then, does not support A2, the claim that bundles of forces have no identity conditions – and, to my knowledge, no other passage does. As a result, Nietzsche is not committed to the eliminativist conclusion in A6.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Nola, Nietzsche’s Naturalism, p. 93. There is a problem in Nola’s presentation. A2, which reads, “Anything which is a nexus of force-power (NFP) has no identity conditions,” is not equivalent to the view that since everything is in a “state of flux,” then “nothing has any continuing identity.” A2 denies that objects have identity conditions *simpliciter*, while Nola’s explanation of his premise only denies that objects have identity conditions over time. The former is the stronger claim. I concentrate on showing how Nietzsche resists it.

<sup>20</sup> I have omitted what is inessential for my argument. One might contend that Nietzsche criticizes constructivism in those omissions. The “already-created world,” he says, is “cobbled together out of deceptions.” This suggests that knowledge of a constructed world necessarily involves falsification. But this is not a problem. Nietzsche thinks construction requires simplifying the world, and although simplifications are literally falsifications, they can also be accurate, or true. For discussion, see Justin Remhof, Overcoming the Conflict of Evolutionary and Naturalized Epistemology in Nietzsche, in: History of Philosophy Quarterly 32.2 (2015), pp. 181–194.

<sup>21</sup> The other passages that seem to support eliminativism bear mentioning. These are Nachlass 1888, 14[79], GS 110, and TI, “Reason” 2 and 5. In the 1888 notebook entry, Nietzsche says, “no things remain

Finally, consider unificationism. Unificationism, like constructivism, holds that objects are identical to bundles of forces. Unlike constructivism, though, unificationism is the position that objects are identical to intrinsically organized bundles of forces. Support for unificationism can be found in Nietzsche's notebooks. Nietzsche discusses

this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force – and not only man – construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e. measures, feels, forms, according to its own force – [...] My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (– its will to power:) [...] But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (“union”) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it (Nachlass 1888, 14[186]).

A “center of force” has “its own viewpoint” and can form a “union” with other centers that are intrinsically similar. Bundles of forces, then, seem to have internally unified conditions of identity.

Stephen Hales and Rex Welshon, and more recently Tsarina Doyle, argue for unificationism in part by contesting the rival constructivist reading.<sup>22</sup> They point out that Nietzsche writes, “Where a certain unity obtains in the grouping of things, one has always posited *spirit* as the cause of this coordination: for which notion there is no ground whatever [...] there is no ground whatever for ascribing to spirit the properties of organization and systematization (Nachlass 1888, 14[144]). It appears that our intentional activity, or “spirit,” cannot organize bundles of forces into objects. So, Nietzsche must reject constructivism.

The quotation, however, omits something crucial. It is taken from *The Will to Power* 526, but that passage is only the first half of a single notebook entry, Nachlass 1888, 14[144], which continues with *The Will to Power* 523. Here is the context of Nietzsche's remarks in *The Will to Power* 526:

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but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta.” However, a quick glance at the context of the passage shows that Nietzsche does not reject the existence of objects, but only material atoms, which have been thought to comprise fundamental reality. This helps explain Nietzsche's remark in *The Gay Science* that “things” are an error (GS 110). Objects are an “error” because we mistake them to be fundamentally material. The basic nature of the world is not “matter” (GS 109), Nietzsche says, but “chaos” (GS 109), “flux” (GS 111), or “becoming” (GS 112). This position is likely adopted from Boscovich (see note 26), about whom Nietzsche speaks highly when preparing *The Gay Science* for publication (see Nietzsche's letter to Peter Gast, March 20th, 1882). Last, in TI, “Reason” 2 and 5, Nietzsche does not deny objects altogether, but only objects conceived as substances, that is, objects conceived as having ultimately unchanging natures. The subject-predicate structure of grammar leads us to think that what exists are objects (subjects) with natures that persist through different phases (predicates).

<sup>22</sup> See Hales / Welshon, Nietzsche's Perspectivism, p. 71; Doyle, Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics, p. 177.



Where a certain unity obtains in the grouping of things, one has always posited *spirit* as the cause of this coordination: for which notion there is no ground whatever [...] We shall be on our guard against explaining purposiveness in terms of spirit: there is no ground whatever for ascribing to spirit the properties of organization and systematization. The nervous system has a much more extensive domain; the world of consciousness is added to it. Consciousness plays no role in the total process of adaptation and systematization.

*The Will to Power* 523, the second half of the notebook entry, contextualizes those remarks:

Nothing is more erroneous than to make of psychical and physical phenomena the two faces, the two revelations of one and the same substance. Nothing is explained thereby: the concept ‘substance’ is perfectly useless as an explanation [...] We lack any sensitive organs for this inner world [i.e. consciousness], so we sense a thousandfold complexity as a unity; so we introduce causation where any reason for motion and change remains invisible to us – the sequence of thoughts and feelings is only their becoming-visible in consciousness. That this sequence has anything to do with a causal chain is completely unbelievable: consciousness has never furnished us with an example of cause and effect [my brackets].

Although the beginning of *The Will to Power* 526 appears to attack constructivism, it is obvious that the notebook passage is not aimed at discussing the conditions under which a bundle of force becomes an object. Nietzsche is concerned with the insignificant role the Kantian categories of substance and causation play for unifying multiplicities in consciousness. It strains the text to read the passage as a rejection of constructivism.

In the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche actually presents an argument against unificationism and for constructivism. He writes, “That things possess *qualities in themselves*, irrespective of interpretation and subjectivity, is a perfectly idle hypothesis: it would presuppose that *interpretation* and *subjectivity* are *not* essential.”<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche models an object with “qualities in itself” on a Kantian thing in itself, or an object with intrinsic properties. In this case, *F* is an intrinsic property of any object *a* if and only if *a*’s having (or not having) *F* is ontologically independent of the existence, and of the non-existence, of any contingent *b* such that *a* is wholly distinct from *b*.<sup>24</sup> Unificationism holds that objects have intrinsic properties. In the passage, however, Nietzsche indicates that the properties of an object that determine its identity are essentially dependent on our interpretations. Specifically, *F*’s being (or not being) a property of *a* is ontologically dependent on the existence, and of the non-existence, of our interpretive

<sup>23</sup> “Daß die Dinge eine Beschaffenheit an sich haben, ganz abgesehen von der Interpretation und Subjektivität, ist eine ganz müßige Hypothese: es würde voraussetzen, daß das Interpretieren und Subjektiv-sein nicht wesentlich sei” (Nachlass 1887, 9[40], KSA 12.353).

<sup>24</sup> See also Nachlass 1885/86, 2[85], 1887, 10[202], 1885/86, 2[149]; George Molnar, *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics*, ed. by Steven Mumford, Oxford 2003, pp. 39–40.

actions. If so, then the properties an object has (if any) essentially independent of our interpretive actions fail to constitute its conditions of identity. Consequentially, intrinsic properties (if any) fail to constitute an object's conditions of identity. This explains why Nietzsche says that positing intrinsic features is an "*idle hypothesis*." The passage is good evidence that Nietzsche prefers constructivism to unificationism.

The second problem with unificationism turns on the fact that, for Nietzsche, bundles of forces are constituted by their contextual relations with all other bundles. Call this view Contextual Constitution. Those who take seriously Nietzsche's fundamental ontology must hold that he embraces this position. He remarks, for example, "[a bundle's] essence lies in [its] relation to all other [bundles]" (Nachlass 1888, 14[79], cf. 1888, 14[153], 1888, 14[154]).<sup>25</sup> Every bundle depends on, and is depended on by, every other bundle. Yet, every bundle depends on, and is depended on by, some bundles more than others. "An atom of force," Nietzsche says, is more "concerned" with relations to other forces in its own "neighborhood" than its distant relations (Nachlass 1885, 36[20]). What unificationist readers fail to acknowledge is the importance of *our* being in local relations with bundles. For Nietzsche, properties are the result of interacting bundles of forces.<sup>26</sup> And he proclaims that "A thing = its qualities; but these equal everything which *matters* to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that *may be of some account* to us."<sup>27</sup> Something's being an object is defined in terms of having properties and we play an essential role in determining which properties things have. Contextual Constitution, therefore, entails that subjects are responsible for the existence of objects. This is strong reason to favor the constructivist reading.

Although unificationism seems to enjoy textual support, it does not capture Nietzsche's considered position. Despite its problems, though, it would not be incorrect to say that, on Nietzsche's account, when we set out to construct objects we confront various structures that must ultimately be due to bundles of forces having formed relatively stable internally unified arrangements independently of our actions. It is likely that objects are constructed from bundles of forces that exhibit some degree of internal unification. Indeed, intrinsic organization can, and often does, limit the conditions under which we interpret some collection of forces to be an object.

<sup>25</sup> I substitute "bundle" for "quanta" [Quanta].

<sup>26</sup> See Nachlass 1885/86, 2[85], 1888, 14[184], 1888, 14[93], 1888, 14[79]). Nietzsche's view of properties reflects the influence of Roger Boscovich. Boscovich opposes the Newtonian idea that fundamental reality is composed of hard, extended atoms by arguing that non-extended physical force-points ("*puncta*") are the ultimate constituents of matter. Boscovich tries to show that the relative positions and velocities of force-points, together with a complex law of force, can account for all properties of matter.

<sup>27</sup> "Ein Ding = seine Eigenschaften: diese aber gleich allem, was uns an diesem Dinge angeht: eine Einheit, unter die wir die für uns in Betracht kommenden Relationen zusammenfassen." (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[77], KSA 12.97 f.)

Nietzsche simply denies that the internal unification of a bundle of forces *constitutes* objecthood – that requires construction.

## Nietzsche and Object Constructivism

I have already presented evidence that suggests Nietzsche is a constructivist of some kind. It is “we who created the ‘thing’” (Nachlass 1887, 9[144]), he exclaims, and “it is enough to create new names and valuations [...] in order to create new ‘things’” (GS 58). Nietzsche appears to scare-quote ‘thing’ because he holds the unusual position that something’s being an object depends on our activities.<sup>28</sup>

For Nietzsche, “A ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept, an image.”<sup>29</sup> The idea of synthetic unity by a concept is distinctly Kantian. Kant holds that sense data is presented to us in an undifferentiated manner. Unifying that data to represent objects requires structure provided by an *a priori* conceptual framework. Thus, as Henry Allison phrases it, “an object is by its very nature something represented.”<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche is clearly sympathetic to Kant’s view that objects are structured through the application of concepts that organize the world. Unlike Kant, however, Nietzsche thinks all concepts are formed exclusively in relation to our contingent needs, interests, and values.<sup>31</sup> Objects are constructed when we construct and employ concepts that organize what Nietzsche calls “effects,” or properties that derive from interacting bundles of forces. Thus, we construct objects by developing concepts that unify collections of properties in relation to our concerns. The identity conditions of objects are determined by the set of properties over which our concepts generalize. We also play a role in constructing properties, since properties can be entities predicated by concepts.<sup>32</sup> For Nietzsche, then, the collection of properties some concept *C* organizes determines the application conditions of the property predicated by *C*, and the identity conditions of *C*’s target are determined by which collection of properties constitute the correct application conditions of the property predicated by *C*. Application conditions are conditions that apply to our concepts, which predicate

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**28** When explaining Nietzsche’s constructivism below, I will not follow Nietzsche in flagging ‘object’ to mark its unusual, constructivist meaning. It will emerge that for him the constructivist conception of an object should *be* the everyday one.

**29** “[E]in „Ding“ ist eine Summe seiner Wirkungen, synthetisch gebunden durch einen Begriff, Bild ...” (Nachlass 1888, 14[98], KSA 13.275).

**30** Henry Allison, *An Introduction to the Problem, and: Transcendental Realism and Transcendental Idealism*, from *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, Chapters 1 & 2, in: Patricia Kitcher (Ed.), *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: Critical Essays*, Lanham / Boulder / New York / Toronto / Oxford 1998, p. 211.

**31** See, e.g., Nachlass 1887, 9[98].

**32** See Nachlass 1885/86, 2[152].

properties, and identity conditions govern the objects (if any) those concepts refer to. Application conditions fix the conditions of identity for anything that meets them.<sup>33</sup>

Consider planets to help illustrate Nietzsche's position. What holds for planets should extend to his examples, such as mammals (TL) or mountains (GS 57). Let  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma \dots$  be all the astronomical objects in the universe. Astronomical objects are physical entities, associations, or structures that the astronomical sciences take to exist celestially, such as planets, moons, stars, or entire galaxies. Let  $A_p$  be the set comprised of all the planets, and  $A_1$  to  $A_n$  be all simple combinatorial sets of astronomical objects (e.g.  $A_6$  might contain  $\alpha, \gamma$ ;  $A_{14}$  only  $\beta$ ). Only one combinatorial set of astronomical objects (e.g.  $A_{18}$ ) is identical to  $A_p$ . Each member of a set instantiates a property that is unique to members of that set, and that property has those members as its extension.

Suppose we want to know whether  $\alpha$  is a planet. Only knowing which astronomical objects ( $\alpha, \beta, \gamma \dots$ ) are members of which sets ( $A_1$  to  $A_n$ ) will not answer the question. To answer the question we must know which set includes only instances of the property of being a planet. According to the International Astronomical Union (IAU),  $\alpha$  is an instance of the property of being a planet just in case  $\alpha$  (i) orbits our sun, (ii) has exhibits hydrostatic equilibrium, or has a nearly round shape, and (iii) does not have any bodies of comparable size other than its own satellites under its gravitational influence. The IAU established (iii) after discovering an object larger than Pluto that they did not want to induct into  $A_p$ , primarily because doing so required adopting a definition of *planet* based merely on size, which was, for various reasons, thought to be inadequate. Accepting the third condition, however, required reclassifying Pluto from planet to dwarf planet. Pluto shares a good portion of its gravitational orbit with large Kuiper belt objects, and so it does not satisfy (iii). Hence, Pluto is not a planet.

Nietzsche would interpret Pluto's reclassification to be the result of a change in theoretical commitments about what constitutes the relevant interpretation of the conditions under which something counts as a planet. The relevant interpretation is crucial because, recall, "A thing = its qualities; but these equal everything which *matters* to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that *may be of some account* to us" (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[77]). The set of conditions that constitute what objects are planets are the conditions relevant to us about what objects are planets. Those conditions form the application conditions of the property of being a planet. In doing so, they provide a framework for saying whether or not the term 'planet' applies to particular portions of the world.

On Nietzsche's account,  $\alpha$  is an instance of the property of being a planet just in case astronomers decide that our concept *planet* refers to something that satisfies (i)-(iii), only something that satisfies (i)-(iii) is the referent of *planet*, and  $\alpha$  satisfies (i)-(iii). Fixing the boundary conditions of *planet* determines what is a member of  $A_p$ , or, for example, that  $A_{14}$  but not  $A_2$  will be identical to  $A_p$ . It is not the case that  $\alpha$  is or is

<sup>33</sup> See Amie Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, Oxford 2007, pp. 55–62.

not a member of the set of all planets absent some criteria for what does and does not satisfy the membership conditions of that set. Nietzsche states that “‘*This is considered to be*’ is the real ‘*This is*’” (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[150]). Without a set of conditions to form the application conditions for the property of being a planet, there is no set of objects that are instances of that property. The identity conditions of planets are constitutively dependent on our actions because our representations determine the correct application conditions of the property of being a planet.

For Nietzsche, there is no ontologically significant difference between planets and other objects of experience. Presumably, then, a similar argument can be employed for explaining how any object that we can encounter is constructed. Nietzsche’s argument for object constructivism can be reconstructed as follows:

- B1. Properties of all objects that are in principle graspable are essentially dependent on our interpretive activities.
- B2. Properties of objects determine the identity conditions of objects.
- B3. So, the identity conditions of all objects that are in principle graspable are essentially dependent on our interpretive activities.

The fact that objects exemplify some collection of properties depends on our organizational activities. Identity conditions depend on us because collections of properties determine such conditions. Of course, this argument is not obviously sound. It could be argued that Nietzsche denies B1. He appears to think some properties of objects exist independently of our actions, such as the property of being the object to which we apply the property of being a planet. Before addressing this objection, first consider Nietzsche’s view of what constrains construction.

On Nietzsche’s account, there are constraints on the constructive process. These constraints guide acceptable inquiry. Embracing them allows his account to avoid the position that constructing objects depends on the whims of particular subjects and the view that all constructions are epistemically equal. Most importantly, construction must be constrained by information from the senses.<sup>34</sup> Sensory information is not subjective and it should not be ignored when arranging the world some way rather than another. What we take to exist is what affects us: “we construe ‘what is’ as what exerts an effect on *us*, what *proves itself by exerting its effect*.”<sup>35</sup> Sense data, however, does not itself constrain organization in any unique manner. We arrange what affects

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<sup>34</sup> See BGE 134; TI “Reason” 3. For Nietzsche the sensory information we cognize is always already organized to some extent by our concepts and valuations. He indicates that conceptual and valuational discriminations are present “in every experience, in every sense impression” (GS 57, cf. Nachlass 1887, 9[144], 1885, 34[167], 1885, 34[247], 1885/86, 2[95], 1885, 38[10], 1885, 40[15]; TL; BGE 192).

<sup>35</sup> “Das „Seiende“ wird also von uns gefaßt als das auf uns Wirkende, das durch sein Wirken Sich-Beweisende.” (Nachlass 1886/87, 5[19], KSA 12.192).

us in relation to our purposes: “the concept ‘really, truly there’ is one we drew out of the ‘mattering-to-us’.”<sup>36</sup> The various ways in which sensory information relates to our interests influences object construction.

Other constraints guide construction as well. These include the current body of accepted beliefs, certain epistemic values, such as consistency, scope, and a certain kind of utility, and the mathematical and logical constraints of self-identity and equivalence. These constraints, taken together with sensory information, ensure objectivity. Nietzsche denies that objectivity requires representing a world constitutively independent of our representations of it.<sup>37</sup> The “knowledge-seeker” is “in no way an observer, outside, indifferent, secure, objective” (GS 351). We can assess representations only in relation to others, whether perceptual or descriptive. As a consequence, “the *more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our ‘concept’ of this matter, our ‘objectivity’ be.”<sup>38</sup> Objectivity in construction depends upon a wealth of information generated by a multiplicity of representations.

## Nietzsche and Object Objectivism

There is a pressing objection to reading as a Nietzsche constructivist about objects. He appears to believe some objects are unconstructed. With respect to planets, for example, one could reply that, while Nietzsche might think we play an essential role in deciding that the property of being a planet applies to astronomical object  $\alpha$  but not  $\beta$ , astronomical objects themselves are perfectly mind-independent. Perhaps Nietzsche is an objectivist after all.

In response, Nietzsche would likely claim that what holds for the property of being a planet also holds for the property of being an astronomical object. We construct astronomical objects by organizing features of the world that matter to us about some celestial entities, associations, or structures having the property of being an astronomical object. For instance, consider star clusters. Star clusters are scattered objects. They are composed of dozens to millions of stars. Determining if some aggregate of stars is a cluster requires determining what stars, of what kind, distributed over what spatial and temporal intervals, constitutes a cluster. Nietzsche would claim that we contribute to determining these boundaries just as we do planets. A similar argument

<sup>36</sup> “[D]en Begriff „wirklich, wahrhaft vorhanden“ haben wir erst gezogen aus dem „uns-angehn““ (Nachlass 1886/87, 5[19], KSA 12.191 f.).

<sup>37</sup> See GM III: 12; A 20; BGE 80, 207; EH, “Books” 5; GS P: 3.

<sup>38</sup> “[J]e mehr Augen, verschiedene Augen wir uns für dieselbe Sache einzusetzen wissen, um so vollständiger wird unser „Begriff“ dieser Sache, unsre „Objektivität“ sein.” (GM III: 12, translation modified).

can be made about stars themselves. We decide what identifies certain heavenly material as a star. For Nietzsche, there is no ontologically significant difference between objects we can experience – all are constructed.

Critics reply that constructivist views such as Nietzsche's are untenable because there has to be *something* upon which construction occurs which is itself not constructed:

If our concepts are cutting lines into some basic worldly dough and thus imbuing it with a structure it would not otherwise possess, doesn't there have to be some worldly dough for them to get to work on, and mustn't the basic properties of that dough be determined independently of all this [constructive] activity?<sup>39</sup>

At the basic level of reality, we must structure something that has features constitutively independent of our descriptive activities. So, something must have such features. Another critic writes: "Whether a feature or predicate of our making is *null or not* is not [...] dependent on the saying."<sup>40</sup> Some predicates, particularly those fashioned to represent the basic level of reality, have content essentially apart from our activities. So, something must have such content. This suggests the following argument:

- C1. There must be some unconstructed objects for there to be constructed objects.
- C2. If so, then object constructivism is false.
- C3. So, object constructivism is false.

C2 is unassailable on the current understanding of object constructivism. C1 is warranted because the material that enables agents to construct objects must have conditions of identity constitutively independent of our descriptions. Whatever has these identity conditions is unconstructed. It follows that constructivism is false.

Nietzsche's best reply would be to deny C1. The objectivist position that something has the features it does constitutively divorced from our descriptions does not help answer questions about what objects exist. And this is the very issue in contention. The claim *that* a predicate is not null, or has *some* content apart from us, says nothing about *what* predicate is not null, or *what* content it has apart from us. Moreover, it is *self-defeating* to describe such content in any detail, since the description would require some organization of the world, which, according to Nietzsche, affects what objects exist.<sup>41</sup> Objectivists cannot describe what has the features it does apart from us without abandoning their position. No content is "given" without being "taken" to have some boundaries.

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<sup>39</sup> Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Israel Scheffler, *Worlds of Truth. A Philosophy of Knowledge*, Malden 2009, p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> See also Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 6.

Despite this response, which is available to Nietzsche, one could maintain that he still thinks some objects are unconstructed, namely, the fundamental forces upon which macroscopic objects are constructed. Of course, even if Nietzsche were an objectivist about microscopic reality, he could be a constructivist about macroscopic objects. This is enough to challenge all prominent secondary readings of Nietzsche's view of objects. However, there may be reason to suppose that Nietzsche is not committed to objectivism. He appears to treat forces as mereologically simple (i.e. partless) units of basic reality.<sup>42</sup> Since objects appear composite (i.e. have parts), forces may not be objects. This argument rests on Nietzsche's understanding of force. For Nietzsche, the fundamental feature of force is *directedness*: a force is actively oriented from some perspective towards some target. His view that forces "will" [Wille] means they are actively oriented (Nachlass 1888, 14[79]). A force's activity is to influence whatever it encounters, which is then its target (Nachlass 1888, 14[186]). Nietzsche often discusses a force's influence as "growth" (BGE 230, see also 259), specifically "the growth of power" [Macht] (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[108]). Growth occurs from a particular "mode of action," or perspective (Nachlass 1888, 14[184], see also 1888, 14[186]). Nietzsche's position that a force "wills" "power," then, means that a force is actively oriented towards expanding the influence of its perspective.

From this analysis, one might be tempted to conclude that forces are composite. Forces seem to have two parts: a *perspective* and an *activity*. On Nietzsche's view, however, a force's activity is ontologically inseparable, though conceptually separable, from its perspective, just as a subject is ontologically inseparable, though conceptually separable, from its actions.<sup>43</sup> Forces are indeed mereologically simple. Unfortunately, this does not help the constructivist respond to the charge that forces are unconstructed. Forces necessarily exist in *bundles*, or "quanta," which appear to be composed of at least two forces. Bundles of forces are proper candidates for unconstructed objects.

Does Nietzsche think bundles of forces are constructed? Answering this question requires introducing Newton's understanding of force. Of course, Nietzsche does not accept all features of classical mechanics. He denies that rigid, extended pieces of matter comprise the ultimate units of reality. Instead, he adopts Boscovich's position that materially ungrounded forces are basic.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, classical mechanics provides a helpful background for assessing Nietzsche's position on force.

Newton articulates force in mathematical terms. He understands force as mass times acceleration:

$$F = ma = m d^2x/dt^2$$

<sup>42</sup> See Nachlass 1888, 14[184]; 1888, 14[79].

<sup>43</sup> For this view of force see Nachlass 1888, 14[79]. For this view of the subject see GM I: 13.

<sup>44</sup> See BGE 12, 17; Nachlass 1885, 40[36].



The force acting on a body is equal to its mass times the second derivative of its position with respect to time. Ronald Giere, whose work I draw on here, has pointed out that the chief importance of Newton's principles is their application to empirical targets.<sup>45</sup> This project requires looking at various formulations of force functions. With respect to linear restoring force, for example, the force on a particle is proportional to the negative displacement of the particle from its rest position. The second law for this is (where  $k$  is the constant of proportionality):

$$F = ma = m d^2x/dt^2 = -kx$$

This enables the representation of harmonic motion. For current purposes, it is not essential to go over the details of different force functions, but simply note that one must account for two things when applying them to target phenomena. One must interpret mathematical symbols to instantiate some concept, such as *position*, *momentum*, or *mass*. One must also identify mathematical symbols with some feature of a specific object, such as the mass of the earth. Giere calls the former the requirement *interpretation* and the latter *identification*.<sup>46</sup> He examines  $F = -kx$  to illustrate his point. Here  $x$  could be interpreted as the displacement of a particle from its rest position, and in applying the formula to a particular mass on a spring,  $x$  could be identified as the displacement of a particular mass from its equilibrium position. Giere notes that the requirements of interpretation and identification are not unique to mathematical representation in Newtonian physics, but occur whenever we attempt to use language to represent the world.<sup>47</sup>

Nietzsche appreciates that these requirements – whatever they are called – must be met to represent empirical phenomena.<sup>48</sup> On Nietzsche's account, meeting such requirements implies that mathematical and logical discourse are “a means and measure for us to *create* reality” (Nachlass 1887, 9[97], cf. HH I: 11, 19; GS 111, 121; BGE 4, 21). The argument goes as follows.<sup>49</sup> For the symbols of mathematics and logic to mean anything, or be applicable, there must be domains of objects to which they refer. These domains, or universes of discourse, are constructed by virtue of a conceptual apparatus. The meaningfulness and applicability of symbols, then, requires constructing objects, whether concrete or abstract. Nietzsche refers to mathematical and logical objects as “fabricated beings” (HH I: 19). Conceptual frameworks provide

<sup>45</sup> See Ronald Giere, *Explaining Science*, Chicago 1988, p. 66; cf. Ronald Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, Chicago 2006, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Giere, *Explaining Science*, pp. 74–76; Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Giere, *Explaining Science*, pp. 75–76; Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> See TL; HH I: 11, 19; GS 111, 121; 354; BGE 192, 268; Nachlass 1884, 25[168], 1885/86, 2[87], 1887, 10[202].

<sup>49</sup> This is indebted to Hales / Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*, pp. 42–44. See Nachlass 1887, 9[97]; HH I: 11, 19; GS 111.

an interpretation and identification of relevant symbols. We construct domains that tell us which kinds of things symbols represent (e.g. within domain  $D = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$ , say  $F: \{2, 4, 6, \dots\}$  and  $H: \{<x, y>/ x, y \in D \text{ and } x > y\}$ ) and which particular things symbols represent (e.g. in  $D$  say  $a: 1$  and  $b: 2$ ). Interpreting and identifying symbols allows us to apply them (e.g., we can determine the truth-values of  $Haa$  (false) and  $Fb \ \& \ Hba$  (true) in  $D$ ). For Nietzsche, when we apply conceptual frameworks to interpret and identify mathematical and logical syntax we effectively “create reality.”

In an instructive passage from the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche suggests that the type of construction required to apply mathematical and logical formulas to target phenomena is also required to apply formulas of force to target phenomena. He first comments that “The mathematical physicists have no use for lump atoms in their science; consequently they construct for themselves a world of force-points which can be reckoned with.”<sup>50</sup> Mathematical physicists “construct for themselves a world of force-points,” or an ontology of bundles of forces, to avoid problems in material atomistic systems, such as Newtonian physics. Other passages suggest that physicists aim to construct a scientific *model* that attempts to understand all worldly phenomena as different manifestations of interacting bundles of forces.

Consider *Beyond Good and Evil* 36.<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche famously conjectures, “Suppose nothing else were ‘given’ as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other ‘reality’ besides the reality of our drives.” This “primitive form of the world” consisting in only “drives” suggests a project: “[I]f it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this ‘given’ would not be *sufficient* to render the so-called mechanistic (and thus material) world comprehensible as well?” (translation modified). And this experiment is not optional: “not only is it permitted to make the experiment; conscience of *method* demands it.” Nietzsche then expands on the connection between effective drives and efficient causality:

The question is in the end whether we really recognize the will as *efficient*, whether we believe in the causality of the will: if we do [...] then we have to make the experiment of positing the causality of the will hypothetically as the only one [...] In short one has to risk the hypothesis whether will does not affect will wherever “effects” are recognized – and whether all mechanical occurrences are not, insofar as a force is active in them, will force, effects of the will.

<sup>50</sup> “Die mathematischen Physiker können die Klümpchen-Atome nicht für ihre Wissenschaft brauchen: folglich konstruieren sie sich eine Kraft-Punkte-Welt, mit der man rechnen kann.” (Nachlass 1885, 40[36], KSA 11.646).

<sup>51</sup> The aim of this passage is certainly not uncontroversial. For arguments that it does not put forward Nietzsche’s view about the fundamental nature of reality see Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Ch. 7; Clark / Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil*, Ch. 8. For responses see Anderson, *Overcoming Charity*; and Hales / Welshon, *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*, pp. 102–107. For the view that Nietzsche wants us to take his fundamental ontology seriously see Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche’s Will to Power*, in: *International Studies in Philosophy* 32.3 (2000), pp. 83–94.

He concludes with a statement about will to power as the only efficient causal force:

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic form of the will – namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power [...] then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as – will to power. The world viewed from inside, defined and determined according to its “intelligible character” – it would be “will to power” and nothing else.

The initial hypothesis – that “we could not get down, or up, to any other “reality” besides the reality of our drive” – is a claim about psychology. Psychology posits the reality of “willed” drives. Drives “will” because they are psychological forces capable of motivating behavior. The passage proposes that if a willed drive event can be understood as an instance of an efficient causal event conceived as will to power, then, after generalizing into other domains, from the organic to the inorganic, all efficient causal events might be justifiably modeled as will to power.

Rex Welshon has pointed out that a willed drive event might be taken as an instance of a causal event conceived as will to power because they enjoy isomorphic structures.<sup>52</sup> A willed drive event, or, more generally, an intentional psychological event, consists in a subject, an intentional object, and an affective attitude relating subject to object.<sup>53</sup> For instance, if *S* enjoys modern dance, then *S* is the subject, modern dance is the intentional object, and enjoying is the affective attitude. The structure of such an event can be modeled as <subject → affect → intentional object>. It is an affective directed transfer of energy from subject to intentional object. A non-psychic event modeled as will to power has the form <event  $\alpha$  → energy  $\gamma$  → event  $\beta$ >, where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are particular bundles of forces, and  $\epsilon$  is a directed energy transfer between relata  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  due to the influence of  $\alpha$  onto  $\beta$ .<sup>54</sup> A will to power event consists in force transferring from one bundle to another. The triadic structure of a causal event conceived as will to power is isomorphic to the structure of an intentional psychological event. The isomorphism between these events provides reason to think the latter is an instance of the former. If his instantiation extends to events beyond the domain of psychology, Nietzsche suggests, eventually we should be permitted to conclude that all efficient causal events are most basically due to the operation of interacting bundles of forces. He requests that we experiment with this generalization. The will to power model should help explain all empirical phenomena.

In the *Nachlass* passage cited above, Nietzsche also indicates that the will to power model is determinate only in relation to our contributions: “The mathematical physicists [...] construct for themselves a world of force-points which can be reck-

<sup>52</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, Montreal / Kingston 2004, pp. 172–176.

<sup>53</sup> I will bracket the fact that in willed drive events subjects often recognize intentional objects.

<sup>54</sup> See Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 174.

oned with [...] [T]hey have arranged, thought, devised the world to fit, until they could make use of it" (Nachlass 1885, 40[36]). By "constructing" a "world of force-points," physicists have "arranged" and "devised the world to fit." The world as will to power *itself* is apparently "arranged," "devised," or "constructed." This enables physicists to "reckon with" and "make use" of the world. Physicists must render the world determinate in order to understand it.

Rendering the will to power model determinate seems to be a consequence of the requirements of having to interpret and identify mathematical syntax when applying force formulas to various targets. In the passage at issue, for instance, Nietzsche is concerned with "mathematical physicists." Elsewhere he says, "our knowledge has become scientific to the degree that it can apply number and measure" (Nachlass 1888, 14[105]). He qualifies this in *The Gay Science*: "Let us introduce the subtlety and rigor of mathematics into all science to the extent to which that is at all possible; not in the belief that we will come to know things this way, but in order to *ascertain* our human relation to things" (GS 246). Insofar as possible, the sciences should be informed by mathematics. Yet, because applying mathematics to target phenomena requires some human contribution, we should not think that our sciences reveal the way the world is apart from all human influence.<sup>55</sup> Thus, if Nietzsche holds that solving the problems of interpretation and identification contributes to "creating reality," then he might think that physicists render the will to power model determinate by interpreting and identifying the symbols within that model ( $\langle \alpha \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow \beta \rangle$ ).

The worry with this interpretation is that Nietzsche never formulates his conception of force quantitatively. He does not provide a mathematical formula for the application of the will to power model to target phenomena. Newton's formulation is unavailable to him because it defines force in terms of material substance. And, although he accepts Boscovich's idea that forces are materially ungrounded, he does not endorse Boscovich's particular law of force. Boscovich treats forces as qualitatively identical, or homogenous, whereas Nietzsche considers forces to be perspectival. Nonetheless, Nietzsche's recognition that the requirements of interpretation and identification must be satisfied to represent the world meaningfully can help illuminate why he believes that scientists render the will to power model determinate without having to invoke a particular mathematical formula.

The application of the will to power model to various observational targets first requires interpreting  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  as pertaining to some kind of event. A conceptual apparatus must provide an interpretation of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  such that these symbols have meaningful content. They must be interpreted as some kinds of bundles of forces. This

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<sup>55</sup> One might read the passage differently. When Nietzsche says that we will not "come to know things this way" he could mean that we cannot have any knowledge of mathematically understood phenomena. However, the *reason* for this would be that he thinks mathematics and logic are means for us to construct reality. Mathematics and logic do not reveal the way the world is apart from us.

guides us from symbols to objects in a domain by providing information about which targets, with which sorts of identity conditions, symbols represent. Interpreting symbols help us identify which specific events out of a plurality we identify as  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . Our conceptual apparatus then helps us identify which bundle of forces within a domain our kind terms denote. Applying an interpretation of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  to a target requires identifying them with specific sets of forces. Only by interpreting and identifying  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  can we understand some event as an event of will to power. Nietzsche's suggestion that physicists render the will to power model determinate seems to mean that our judgments delimit the relevant kind and particular domains of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . This implies that the identity conditions of particular bundles of forces are essentially dependent on our actions. Nietzsche states, "There is no event in itself. What happens is a group of phenomena *selected* and unified by an interpreting being."<sup>56</sup> There are no events in themselves, or fully apart from our mode of cognition, because the identity conditions of events depend on our organizing activities.<sup>57</sup>

One may be tempted to say that, on Nietzsche's account, *forces* have the features they do divorced from our actions. But this would be incorrect. Forces have the property of directedness. They are actively oriented from a perspective towards some target outcome to increase influence. The kind of perspective from which forces are oriented, and the particular extent of their influence, are shaped by interpretation and identification. Nietzsche asserts, "an artificial distinction is made in respect of events between that which acts and that toward which the act is directed" (Nachlass 1887, 9[144]). The conditions delimited are "artificial" in the sense that they do not exist apart from our interventions. All kind concepts introduce conditions of identity. We establish the boundaries of the concepts that define directedness – *perspective* and *activity* – and those boundaries form the application conditions of the property of directedness. The identity conditions of forces, then, appear to depend essentially on our activities.

At this point, it is important to reiterate Nietzsche's anticipated response to the objectivist claim that there must be something upon which construction occurs which is itself not constructed. With respect to whatever is unconstructed, one can say, at most, "*something* has the features it does apart from our descriptions," or offer the demonstrative "*that* has the features it does independently of our representational

<sup>56</sup> "Es giebt kein Ereigniß an sich. Was geschieht, ist eine Gruppe von Erscheinungen ausgelesen und zusammengefaßt von einem interpretirenden Wesen." (Nachlass 1885/86, 1[115], KSA 12.38)

<sup>57</sup> One might claim that this account is problematic because we are unable to apprehend forces by the senses. This difficulty is not unique to Nietzsche, but also applies to Newtonian and Boscovichian forces. Yet, Nietzsche suggests that talk of unobservable objects, such as forces, is meaningful (see BGE 12). Nietzsche seems to think that solid evidence of the existence of forces will be born out by empirical research.

activities,” which says nothing about what objects there are.<sup>58</sup> For Nietzsche, “making use” and “reckoning with” the world requires constructing objects, whether macroscopic or microscopic (Nachlass 1885, 40[36]). Nietzsche can concede the objectivist criticism that constructing objects is only possible provided that *something* enables construction. It does not follow from this that what enables construction are *objects*. The objectivist’s worry is therefore compatible with embracing the constructivist thesis that all objects that we can encounter are constructed.

What about noumenal objects, or objects that are in principle inaccessible to human beings? These objects – if they exist – are the best candidates for unconstructed objects. Of course, the existence of noumenal objects does not directly challenge constructivism. Constructivism only concerns objects that are in principle accessible. Nonetheless, Nietzsche sometimes claims that noumenal objects do not exist. He remarks, for instance, “There are no things in themselves! [...] Something that is of no concern to anyone is not at all” (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[154], see also 1887, 8[2], 1887/88, 11[99], 10[202], cf. GM III: 12; TI “World” 6). The argument can be stated as follows:<sup>59</sup>

- D1. Noumenal objects are in principle inaccessible to us.
- D2. If so, then noumenal objects cannot be conceived, or cannot be conceived without contradiction.
- D3. If something cannot be conceived, or cannot be conceived without contradiction, then it does not exist.
- D4. So, noumenal objects do not exist.

D1 is the definition of a noumenal object. D2 gains warrant because it seems best to understand a noumenal object as a conceptual placeholder for whatever it is that exists independently of our particular mode of cognition. We can have no conception, or only a contradictory conception, of a concept about something we cannot in principle conceive.<sup>60</sup> D3 holds that if something cannot be conceived, or cannot be conceived without contradiction, then it does not exist. This assumes inconceivability is a good test for ontological impossibility. The assumption is certainly not true in all cases. But it does seem warranted in the case of noumenal objects. The inability to conceive of something that can only be understood as a concept, or the inability to

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<sup>58</sup> For a defense of this position see David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, Harvard 1980. Wiggins holds that “behind every true identity there is an identity sentence covered by a substance concept for some particular *kind* of thing” (p. v). Cf. Michael Devitt, *Making Worldmaking Hard: Rejecting Global Response Dependency*, in: *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2006), pp. 3–25, here p. 13: “You do not get a realism [viz., object objectivism] worth fighting for by claiming merely that *something* exists objectively and independently of the mental.”

<sup>59</sup> This reconstruction is indebted to Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, pp. 83–85, and Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>60</sup> See GM III: 12; BGE 16; GS 54.

conceive of something that can only be understood as a concept without contradiction, indicates that it does not exist. It follows that noumenal objects do not exist. This argument, combined with commitment to constructivism about the objects of experience, implies that for Nietzsche all objects are constructed.

## Object Constructivism and Nihilism

I want to finish by suggesting why Nietzsche might have been attracted to such a radical Kantian view of objects. My account is meant to begin to bridge the gap between the treatment of Nietzsche's metaphysics and ethics in secondary literature. It is common to focus on Nietzsche's metaphysics and neglect his ethical concerns, particularly his worries about nihilism. Moreover, focusing on his ethics often leaves little place for his metaphysics. One way to combine these two approaches is to grant that Nietzsche is primarily concerned with ethical issues, specifically nihilism, and to investigate his metaphysics in the context of his ethics. I adopt this methodology in what follows.

Nietzsche's mature work is primarily concerned with understanding nihilism. Nihilism is the view that life is meaningless. For Nietzsche, life is meaningless because the highest values people have used to comprehend it have become devalued.<sup>61</sup> These values have become devalued because they cannot be realized in the conditions of this world.<sup>62</sup> On Nietzsche's view, the "true world of being" is a critical nihilistic value.<sup>63</sup> The true world of being is a world conceived to be constitutively independent of the empirical world. It is obvious that throughout history the true world has been dominant in shaping people's lives and informing basic assumptions about the relationship between mind and world. In philosophical and scientific inquiry, for instance, people have traditionally understood themselves to be grasping objects constitutively independent of human interpretation, motivated by the value that the best theories should represent such objects. However, the truth of constructivism renders this value unrealizable. Embracing constructivism, then, contributes to overcoming nihilism. Constructivism helps people recognize that they have "absolutely no right" to certain values (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[99]). Thus, recognizing the truth of constructivism could add meaning to people's lives. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains:

It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually *make* something that is not yet there: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. This poem that we have invented is constantly internalized, drilled,

<sup>61</sup> See Nachlass 1887, 9[35], cf. 1886/87, 5[71]; A 1.

<sup>62</sup> See Nachlass 1887/88, 11[61], 1887, 9[60], 1888, 14[9]. See Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, pp. 25–28.

<sup>63</sup> See Nachlass 1887/88, 11[99]; cf. TI, "Reason" 6.

translated into flesh and reality, indeed, into the commonplace, by the so-called practical human beings [...] we have created the world *that concerns human beings!* But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we catch it for a moment we have forgotten it the next: we misjudge our best power and underestimate ourselves just a bit, we contemplative ones. We are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we could be (GS 301, cf. HH I: 16).

Reality is constructed. Yet, since we are largely unaware of it, “we are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we could be.”<sup>64</sup>

Commitment to constructivism could also ease the distress that follows the awareness that the true world has become devalued. Nietzsche writes:

Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, first, when we have sought a “meaning” in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long *waste* of strength, the agony of the “in vain,” insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and regain composure – being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had *deceived* oneself all too long [...] any goal at least constitutes some meaning (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[99]).

One influential “meaning” or “goal” of philosophical and scientific inquiry is uncovering mind-independent objects. This aim is a “*waste* of strength,” a project undertaken “in vain.” It rests on a deception.

However, inquiry is not a “*waste* of strength” or “in vain” if we recognize that objects are constructed. For Nietzsche, “we can comprehend only a world that we ourselves have made” (Nachlass 1884, 25[470], cf. GS 301). He remarks, “A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist” (Nachlass 1887, 9[60]). Constructivists affirm reality *as it is*, whereas objectivists, whether or not they are aware of it, hold that the way the world is ought not to be. Embracing constructivism, then, enables people to commit to the goal of understanding the world without deceiving themselves about the nature of the objects of inquiry. As a result, endorsing constructivism can enhance meaning in many cognitive pursuits. Perhaps Nietzsche was attracted to constructivism about objects, then, to combat his greatest philosophical concern.

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<sup>64</sup> It has been argued that nihilism is most basically an affective state, rather than a cognitive awareness of the nature of our values or the world. See Ken Gemes, Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster, in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 16.3 (2008), pp. 459–466. My account can be understood as providing a necessary but not sufficient description of what constitutes nihilism. But it is important not to lose sight of the importance of the cognitive dimension of nihilism. After all, Nietzsche claims that a particular cognitive recognition – the recognition that “all the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves” have “proved inapplicable” and “therefore devaluated the world” – provides the means by which to no longer devalue the world (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[99]).