

Ethics and Interdisciplinarity: Nietzsche as Cultural Theorist

While Nietzsche is frequently hailed, along with Marx and Freud, as a father of modern cultural theory, browsing through the most recent introductory texts and readers in cultural studies and theory one notices a disheartening absence of engagement with Nietzsche's thought.¹ This is surprising, given that Nietzsche's work resonates with many of the concerns that continue to dominate contemporary discussions in cultural studies, including questions of the meaning of the field's commitment to an ethically engaged scholarship, and questions concerning the relation between more empirical, social-scientific approaches to cultural questions and text-based and interpretative approaches. In arguing for Nietzsche's continued significance for cultural theory, I wish to emphasize two aspects of Nietzsche's work that warrant closer consideration: the interdisciplinary character of Nietzsche's thought, and Nietzsche's ethical preoccupation with the problem of suffering. Reflecting on the relation between these two dimensions of Nietzsche's thought opens possibilities for a greater appreciation of the value of Nietzsche's method for cultural studies, and for a reconsideration of his contribution to ethically engaged scholarship.

The centrality of suffering in Nietzsche's thought is not an aspect of his work which receives much attention, and it is certainly not the dimension of Nietzsche's thought that, thus far, has had any impact on Nietzsche's limited deployment in cultural theory. There are at least two possible reasons for this. First, the reception of Nietzsche in much recent cultural and social theory has come primarily through the influence of Foucault. Foucault's great impact on cultural

¹ Even a cursory glance at the indexes of most recent introductory texts in cultural studies and cultural theory indicates how few references there are to Nietzsche's thought in comparison to the work of Marx, Freud, Derrida and Foucault.

studies stems from his complication of the Marxist tradition. In place of an historical materialist account of society, that viewed politics through the lens of class conflict and class emancipation, Foucault offered a subtler understanding of power and its effects on social practices and on processes of subject formation. While compatible with the cultural materialist tradition within cultural studies, Foucault's approach to power and resistance opened the way for cultural and social theory to think about issues like race, gender and sexuality in ways that went beyond a purely Marxist approach to social oppression. Because of the credit which Foucault gives to Nietzsche in texts such as "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977) for inspiring this alternative approach to power, it is Nietzsche's concern with power and related notions, rather than his interest in the question of suffering, which is acknowledged as a significant contribution by cultural theory.

A second reason for the relative unimportance that is accorded to Nietzsche's interest in suffering is that the scholars who have been most influential in shaping Nietzsche's wider reception have tended to cull from his writings those parts of his work that are of most relevance to their discipline. As such, philosophers have tended to focus on Nietzsche's engagement with the philosophical tradition, particularly with his approach to questions of epistemology and his place in the tradition of philosophical skepticism. Literary scholars, on the other hand, have focused on stylistic aspects of his work, on his views on language and his significance for postmodern approaches to questions of interpretation. It is also noteworthy that while Nietzsche had some significance for the emerging social sciences (particularly for the German sociologists Georg Simmel and Max Weber), today he is almost completely absent from sociological and anthropological thought. For none of these disciplines has Nietzsche's engagement with the

problem of suffering figured as a key concern, and hence, while cultural theory draws widely on philosophical, literary, and social-scientific scholarship, this aspect of Nietzsche's thought has not been part of these interdisciplinary conversations.

I would argue, however, that a careful reading of Nietzsche's work indicates that the problem of suffering is central to his thought, and that his uniquely interdisciplinary approach to this question has interesting implications for scholarly reflection on culture and society. The problem of suffering, that is, the question as to the causes and solution of all those ills, tribulations and disappointments that characterize human existence, has a rich intellectual heritage in the Western tradition. It is a question that confronted the Greek tragic poets, the Greek philosophers, Christian theologians of all periods, and also the romantic literary tradition. As a young scholar, Nietzsche looked to literature, philosophy, and the classical tradition as a way of giving meaning to his personal sense of the pervasiveness of suffering, which he experienced not only in relation to his ongoing health problems but also through his exposure to the destructiveness of the Franco-Prussian War. His concern that scholarship address questions of personal significance is suggested when he writes that, "I have at all times written with my whole body and my whole life. I do not know what purely intellectual problems are." (*KSA* 1.500). In light of Nietzsche's highly personal attitude to suffering, and the influence of Schopenhauer and the literary tradition on his thought, it could be argued that his earliest approaches to the problem of suffering were romantic, even existentialist, in tenor. But as Nietzsche became more interested in historical and cultural questions, his approach to suffering became more complex. His interests in evolutionary biology, psychology, ethnological studies and the social sciences all made him aware of the ways in which different intellectual approaches

conceptualize suffering differently.² So the question for Nietzsche became not how do we explain suffering, but how do we make sense of the different ways in which individuals, intellectual traditions and cultural groups interpret their own suffering and give it meaning and value. It is this emphasis on the enormous historical and cultural variety in interpretations of suffering which really distinguishes Nietzsche's approach from, for example, that of Freud or Marx, both of whom were interested in suffering, but who also tended to overlook the cultural and interpretative dimensions of suffering in favor of models which explained suffering in relation to particular models of the human psyche or of socio-economic relations.

What must be emphasized, therefore, is that Nietzsche's ability to take this critical standpoint to the discourses of suffering that he saw in his own society and throughout history depended on his interdisciplinary perspective. He was able to escape certain overly romantic and speculative approaches to the problem of suffering because of the more sobering materialist perspective of the natural and biological sciences. On the other hand, his literary and philosophical training allowed him to maintain a skeptical view towards any of the universal claims made by the natural and social sciences to represent a privileged discourse for conceptualizing suffering. In other words, what is distinctive about Nietzsche's approach to interdisciplinary scholarship was the way in which he played off one discipline against another, using one as a basis for critiquing the methods and assumptions of the other, and vice versa. This critical interdisciplinary approach not only allowed Nietzsche to re-evaluating his own attitudes to suffering as a moral and conceptual problem, but he was also came to see the ways in which

² On the significance of these intellectual traditions for Nietzsche's developing thought, see Babette Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science* (Albany: SUNY, 1994) and James Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

cultural systems and institutions at large exhibited competing interpretations of suffering and offered different paths to its solution.

This independence of thought and constant experimentation with different methods and approaches can be seen over the trajectory of Nietzsche's career. Despite the enormous variety of Nietzsche's work, it can be roughly divided into three periods, each showing the prevalence of different intellectual influences. Nietzsche held only one academic position, early on in his career. In 1869, at the age of twenty-five, he was appointed Professor of Philology at the University of Basel, where he taught for only seven years. He formally resigned this position in 1879, largely due to the ill health that was to plague him throughout his life, though the decision may also have been motivated by the fact that his first major publication, *The Birth of Tragedy*, had been widely attacked by the philological profession. This first period, of which *The Birth of Tragedy* is the most significant work, is closely identified with Nietzsche's work in philology. It is noteworthy, however, that Nietzsche's work of this period is also strongly philosophical, and that the *Untimely Meditations*, the other major work of this period, is not a philological study at all, but a series of essays dealing with subjects such as historiography, the philosophical work of Schopenhauer, and the work of religious scholar David Strauss. The second period of Nietzsche's work, in the late 1870s and early 1880s, was characterized by an increasing interest in the natural sciences, including physics and naturalist psychology, and a more naturalist and materialist approach in his work. Nietzsche claimed in *Ecce Homo* that during this period he had "pursued nothing more than physiology, medicine and natural science" (*EH*: VI, 3).

This is certainly an exaggeration, but the contents of his library as they stood at the time of his death reveal a surprising absence of works of philosophy and an enormous number of

books, in both French and German, on the latest developments in the fields of chemistry, physics, astronomy and physiology.³ The final period of Nietzsche's work, following the publication of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's most literary work, stretches from 1883-1889, and shows an increasingly interest in the comparative study of cultures, comparative religion, and the sociological perspective of English and French sociologists such as Herbert Spencer and August Comte. This interest in ethnology and comparative cultures is most evident in *On The Genealogy of Morals*.

The impact of Nietzsche's critical interdisciplinary approach, born of his ongoing experimentation with different intellectual traditions, on his views on suffering can be indicated by considering two of Nietzsche's works, one from his early period, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and one from the last period, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. At the time that Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, the two most influential scholarly traditions for Nietzsche were philology and philosophy. Though Nietzsche chose to pursue a career in philology, he had as a student already become frustrated with the pedantic and overspecialized character of philological scholarship. In a letter to a friend, he criticized the philologists of his time for "their joy at capturing worms and their indifference to the true problems, the urgent problems of life."⁴ These urgent problems, Nietzsche thought, were more adequately dealt with in certain traditions of philosophy, notably by Schopenhauer, and by the pre-Socratic and Hellenistic philosophers. Nietzsche's early interest in ancient philosophy, and particularly in pre-Socratic and Hellenistic thought, stemmed from his appreciation of the fact that for the Ancient philosophical schools of Skepticism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, the problem of suffering stood at the heart of philosophical reflection. For these

³ For the full contents of Nietzsche's library, see Max Oehler, *Nietzsches Bibliothek. Vierzehnte Jahrgabe der Gesellschaft der Freunde des Nietzsche-Archivs* (Weimar: 1942): Vols 12-14.

⁴ Letter to Rohde, 20 November, 1868.

philosophers, philosophy was a therapeutic endeavor, whose goal was the attainment of a state of *apatheia*, that is, tranquility, or literally translated, freedom from suffering. Nietzsche wrote of Epicurus, for example, a philosopher commonly associated with hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure, that “such happiness could be invented only by a man who was suffering continuously” (GS: 45). Nietzsche’s philological career was therefore shaped by the sense that a philosophical reform of philology was necessary if it were to become relevant as a discipline able to engage with the intractable problems of human existence. In his inaugural address on his appointment at Basel in May 1863 Nietzsche went so far as to proclaim that “what was once philology has now been made into philosophy.”

However, if certain traditions in philosophy seemed to offer a means for philology to broaden its perspective to the urgent problems of life, Nietzsche used philology to place philosophy in a cultural and social context in which its own cultural significance could be reassessed. The result was that in the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche treats both philosophy and tragic theater as responses to a broad social and cultural need to deal with suffering. Nietzsche begins by distinguishing between an Apollonian aesthetic, that valorizes tranquility, formal harmony, and clarity, and a Dionysian aesthetic that celebrates instinctual feeling and orgiastic excess. For Nietzsche, however, the figure of Dionysus should not be associated with the cheery god of wine and revelry, but with a mythology relating to the God’s destruction and dismemberment. As he insists in the *Birth of Tragedy*, the tradition holds that “Greek tragedy in its earliest form had for its sole theme the sufferings of Dionysus” (BT: 10). For Nietzsche, Greek tragedy, in its attempt to balance Dionysian and Apollonian aesthetics, constituted a unifying public ritual that helped the society to both acknowledge and endure the terrifying

fickleness of fate and the uncertainties of human existence. What Nietzsche especially admired about Greek tragedy was that although suffering was elevated to a state of art, it was not avoided, but openly portrayed in all its terror. In this way, Nietzsche suggests, tragedy functioned as a seduction to a continuation of life. This view of tragedy, which considers art in relation to culture and society as a whole, seems to resonate in many interesting ways with twentieth century critiques of the culture industry, beginning with those of the Frankfurt school, which are interested in the reassuring and anaesthetizing functions of mass cultural consumption.

In comparison with Greek tragedy, Nietzsche viewed the emergence of Socratic philosophy and its displacement of Greek tragedy as marking a decline in the capacity of Greek society to face suffering honestly and unequivocally. For Nietzsche, most of philosophy since Socrates has been more interested in the evasion of suffering than in any honest engagement with it. For instance, contrasting Socrates with earlier pre-Socratic philosophers, Nietzsche wrote that “with Empedocles and Democritus the Greeks were on the best road to the correct assessment of human existence, its unreason, its suffering... they never arrived thanks to Socrates...” (KSA 8: 97-120). The Socratic or Platonic vision of an eternal realm of truth, which constituted a more real reality than the human reality of uncertainty and suffering, was viewed by Nietzsche as an evasion of the reality of existence, with all its uncertainty and inherent senselessness. With its promise of truth and intellectual certainty, philosophy and also later science, with its particular faith in the possibility of discovering eternal laws of nature that could guide moral conduct, serves a cultural need for certainty and reassurance. In the following famous passage from the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the significance of Socrates in Western culture:

Hence the image of the dying Socrates, as the human being whom knowledge and reason have liberated from the fear of death, is the emblem that, above the entrance gates of science (*Wissenschaft*), reminds all of its mission – namely, to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified; and if reasons do not suffice, myth has to come to their aid in the end – myth which I have just called the necessary consequence, indeed the purpose of science (*Wissenschaft*). (BT: 15)

What comes through in Nietzsche's discussion of tragedy and philosophy in the *Birth of Tragedy* is a determination to grapple with how ancient Greek society confronted suffering, but also an unwillingness to endorse either the methods of philosophy or philology as providing entirely satisfactory approaches to this problem. For this reason, after leaving the academy, Nietzsche's intellectual interests ventured far and wide. By the time he wrote *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he had experimented with a wider range of scholarly approaches, including ideas drawn from physics, evolutionary biology and naturalistic psychology. These approaches can all be seen in the *Genealogy*, but Nietzsche also retained a skepticism about philosophy and science, and the ways in which they function culturally as consolations, providing the illusion of a world which is comprehensible, subject to knowable laws and hence less threatening. In the second preface to *The Gay Science*, written shortly before the publication of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche reflects on his twenty years of scholarship and the temptations that the promise of different scholarly approaches had placed before him:

After such self-questioning, self-temptation, one acquires a subtler appreciation for all philosophizing to date; one can infer better than before the involuntary detours, the side

lanes, resting places and sunny places of thought to which suffering thinkers are led and misled on account of their suffering. (GS, Second Preface, 2)

Though in this passage from the *Gay Science* Nietzsche talks about the suffering of the individual scholar, and how this shapes the search for consoling ideas, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, this concern with the individual is expanded to a consideration of cultural practices and beliefs and social institutions as a whole. In addition to the continuing influence of philosophy, philology and the natural sciences, Nietzsche's examination of social practices and institutions, and forms of cultural production, also draws on the comparativist religious, cultural and historical scholarship of the time. In many respects, the *Genealogy* is comparable to those publications at the end of the nineteenth century that were designated as sociology or comparative ethnology. But where this book differs from similar works of the time is in Nietzsche's resistance to privileging any one explanatory framework. For instance, Nietzsche suggests that at a certain point in the development of societies, material and naturalistic needs will be displaced by or overlaid with intellectual and spiritual concerns, each of these necessitating a different analytical perspective. For example, according to Nietzsche, the urbanization of nomadic peoples and the domestication of crops and animals can be viewed from a materialist perspective as responses to a natural state of insecurity. However, socialization and enculturation, that is release from the uncertainties of living in a state of nature, brings new forms of suffering in its wake. Early urbanized populations, Nietzsche holds, wrenched from their nomadic, animalistic existence, now suffer "like an animal shut up in a cage, uncertain why or wherefore, thirsting for reasons" (GM III: 20). Relative material security only brings cultural and intellectual insecurity, and new forms of psychological suffering. Henceforth, Nietzsche suggests,

"Man's problem is *not* suffering itself," "but that there was no answer to the crying question, "*why* do I suffer?" (GM III:28).

Social institutions themselves reveal this layering of different interpretations. Institutions such as legal systems and systems of punishment will have different functions and meanings for different societies, and for the same society at different moments in its history. For primitive societies, Nietzsche contends, the purpose of punishment was to gain emotional relief and satisfaction from the disruption to a still fragile social order. The exacting of vengeance or the extraction of debt offers to those, particularly those with little power, some sense of control and mastery. In its ancient forms, punishment was therefore not dissimilar to tragic theatre, it too was a seduction to life, with the difference that reassurance and satisfaction lay not merely in the witnessing of suffering, but now also in the act of making suffer. For Nietzsche, moral notions of debt, conscience, justice and duty are thus intimately tied up with suffering. "To what extent can suffering balance debts or guilt? To the extent that to make suffer was in the highest degree pleasurable, to the extent that the injured party exchanged for the loss he had sustained, an extraordinary counterbalancing pleasure: that of making suffer" (GM II: 6.1). As the avoidance of material or physical suffering is overlaid by the need for a rational explanation of the environment and for spiritual reassurance, the function of punishment is reinterpreted as the expression of rational law and moral order. Hence, to explain modern legal and moral principles of justice, law, conscience, and responsibility, one cannot merely look to modern legal theory, for one needs to understand how the meaning of such notions has been shaped by society's changing interpretation of what threatens cultural stability and coherence, and what constitutes relief from a disruption of one's beliefs about how things ought to be.

Nietzsche's famous accounts of *ressentiment* and asceticism offer further examples of the ways in which social forces can be viewed as attempts to respond, either at the level of physiology and emotion, or at the level of intellect, to the experience of suffering. The cultural phenomenon of *ressentiment* for instance, despite its frequent association in contemporary thought with social struggles for power or with class conflict, is understood by Nietzsche primarily as an emotional strategy for dealing with unrelenting and unresolvable suffering. This is stated explicitly by Nietzsche when he writes that,

... every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent: still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering – in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, *anaesthesia* – the narcotic he cannot help desiring to deaden pain of any kind. This alone, I surmise, constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness and the like: a desire to *deaden pain by means of affects*. (GM III: 15)

Here Nietzsche describes *ressentiment* as a physiological and affective response to suffering. In his analysis of asceticism, Nietzsche turns less to material and naturalistic explanations, and more to an explanation that emphasizes the cultural force and power of ideas and beliefs. Nietzsche argues in the third book of the *Genealogy* that it is asceticism that has historically proved most effective in supplying a community with a cohesive explanation of suffering. The solution that the ascetic priest provides to the question of human suffering builds on established ideas about guilt and

punishment, but argues that the person herself is the cause of her anguish, that she must understand her suffering as punishment:

Man suffering from himself in some way or other... uncertain why or wherefore, thirsting for reasons – reasons relieve -... receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the *first* hint as to the “cause” of his suffering: he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a punishment. (GM III: 20)

For Nietzsche it is *this* rationalistic interpretation of suffering, which draws on previous social practices of punishment and guilt, but now internalizes them, which has come to dominate European culture for two millennia. And the decline of religion as a cultural force does not reduce the power of ascetic or rational explanation of suffering, for the task of providing such explanation is simply transferred in modern society to the world of scholarship, and particular in Nietzsche’s view to the emerging social sciences, with their optimism concerning the power of social explanation as a means to resolving all manner of social ills.

What we therefore see in Nietzsche’s approach to social and cultural institutions such as the theatre, the penal system, and social phenomena like class resentment, religious asceticism, or various forms of morality, is an attempt to investigate not only the ways in which suffering, be it material or spiritual natural, drives cultural change, but also the ways in which societies or groups interpret their own suffering, seeking ways to make sense or alleviate suffering through social practices, beliefs and institutions. “Neither for the Christian,” Nietzsche wrote, “who has interpreted a whole mysterious machinery of salvation into suffering, nor for the naive man of more

ancient times, who understood all suffering in relation to the spectator of it, or the causer of it, was there any such thing as *senseless* suffering” (GM II: 7).

This approach to understanding society and culture, which draws on different traditions and methods to analyze the myriad ways in which societies adopt practices, establish institutions and perpetuate belief systems as a means of responding to physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of suffering, has I think, a certain resonance for contemporary cultural theory. Cultural studies as a field, and scholars who work on cultural and social theory, have often distinguished their work from traditional disciplines by insisting on the ethical and political orientation of their work. What this entails, theoretically and practically, remains a much disputed question, though it is often framed in terms of a conflict between Marxist and textualist orientations, the latter often characterized by Foucauldian and deconstructive ideas. The orientation of Nietzsche’s thought to the old humanistic problem of suffering offers an interesting way of thinking through these discussions. It can be argued that cultural theorists, like most scholars across the academy, are willing to evoke suffering for rhetorical purposes, but avoid the term as an analytic concept because of its association with vague and indistinct romantic, literary or theological sentiments. Nietzsche’s critical approach, however, allows one to consider different kinds of suffering as real factors that shape cultural beliefs and institutions, while also insisting that all understanding of suffering is shaped by cultural, and that includes, scholarly, interpretation. While notions such as oppression, marginalization, exploitation or injustice carry a more respectable academic pedigree, it does not take a Nietzschean genealogist to recognise the ways in which each of these terms expresses some kind of attitude towards, and interpretation of suffering. From Nietzsche’s perspective each of these differing vocabularies,

with their particular set of ethical and political commitments, opens different possibilities for approaching suffering in the world, but each also risks becoming rigidified, an obstacle to the analysis of the changing forms in which individuals and groups understand their experience. The history of cultural studies reveals this only too clearly in the ways in which different groups have insisted on the failure of prior theoretical models to capture accurately the nature of their specific condition. Feminist and race theory's critiques of Marxism, and queer theory's critique of feminism can all be understood in Nietzschean terms, as the perceived failure of one constituency's interpretation of suffering to fully capture another group's particular interpretation of their own suffering.

A further implication of Nietzsche's approach to cultural analysis lies in his critical interdisciplinarity. However misguided and naive his own application of psychology, ethnology or biology may have been, he established a precedent for an openness to interdisciplinary investigations into a range of cultural and social phenomena. His approach suggests a place for empirical investigation into the physiological, psychological and material aspects of suffering, while also insisting that the interpretative skills of anthropologists, historians and literary scholars are needed to critically examine the ways in which an understanding of suffering is shaped by tradition, the authority of science, conventional morality, as well as religious and political discourse. Indeed, alongside the importance of never becoming overly attached to a person or a country, Nietzsche wrote of the virtue of not becoming "stuck to a science – even if it should lure us with the most precious finds that seem to have been saved up precisely for us" (BGE: 41).

Two examples drawn from current social and cultural theory may suggest ways in which this approach resonates with current practice. Medical anthropologists have shown increasing interest over the last decade or so in understanding the relation and tensions between western biological models of medicine, and cultural understandings of illness that embrace localized religious, moral and traditional beliefs. Without an understanding of cultural interpretations of illness and the ways in which interpretations of illness are interwoven into a broader social, religious and moral fabric, the application of western models of treatment are likely to miss dimensions of the disease that extend beyond the physical body of the patient. Another example concerns the rise of various forms of ethnocentrism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism. While these phenomena certainly have strategic political dimensions, and can partly be explained by global political and economic developments, an understanding of their attraction and power seems to require a deeper appreciation of the ways in which religion and nationalism may assume a redemptive function in people's lives, offering explanations and solutions to the experience of communal suffering.⁵

What is reflected in these examples is the necessity of a critical interdisciplinary approach of the kind deployed by Nietzsche, a willingness to interrogate the assumptions of all disciplinary perspectives, and their tendency, as Nietzsche puts it, to seek out the sunny places, the resting places of thought. This is a demanding charge to place upon scholars, but it is one which reflects the best intentions of social and cultural theory. In a quintessentially Nietzschean quotation from *the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche has this to say about the scholars of his time:

⁵ Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983) provides strong evidence for such a redemptive function of nationalist ideology.

The proficiency of our finest scholars, their heedless industry, their heads smoking day and night, their very craftsmanship – how often the real meaning of all this lies in the desire to keep something hidden from oneself! Scholarship as a means of self-narcosis: *do you have experience of that?* Whoever associates with scholars knows that one occasionally wounds them to the marrow with some harmless wound... one can drive them besides themselves merely because one has been too coarse to realize with whom one was really dealing – with *sufferers* who refuse to admit to themselves what they are, with drugged and heedless men who fear only one thing: *regaining consciousness*. (GM III:23)

It is not my intention to endorse this particular view of scholars and scholarship. Rather, I conclude with this quotation because it captures, albeit in a highly polemical manner, the same commitment among proponents of cultural studies and theory to interrogate the comforting and paralyzing assumptions that underpin not only social life outside the academy, but which also characterize dogmatic or unreflective positions within it. With this task in mind, one might argue that just as the death of Socrates stands as the emblem above the gates of science, proclaiming its mission and goal, so perhaps Nietzsche, or at least some suitable quotation from his work, might fulfil a similar role for those engaged in the work of cultural theory.

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