

ABSTRACT

Nietzsche as Educator: The Three Metamorphoses of a Free Spirit

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This work examines Friedrich Nietzsche's views on freedom and philosophic development by turning to Zarathustra's first speech, "On the Three Metamorphoses." This speech provides a key by which to understand and balance many of tensions in Nietzsche's thought. It reveals the various ways in which an individual's pursuit of freedom requires constant engagement with the surrounding political culture, and challenges notions that Nietzsche was a radical individualist and radical skeptic.

Nietzsche as Educator: The Three Metamorphoses of a Free Spirit

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CHAPTER ONE

The Three Metamorphoses

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “On the Three Metamorphoses”

In an early essay, Friedrich Nietzsche declared that his concern is “with a class of men whose teleological conceptions extend further than the well-being of a state, I mean with philosophers—and only with them in their relation to the world of culture.”¹

Nietzsche’s principal concern with spiritual development in culture never wavered throughout his life, so that in one of his last writings he says that for him what “matters most ... always remains culture.”² This work therefore focuses on the idea of “Nietzsche as Educator,”³ a Nietzsche who is “ultimately ... a *teacher*.”⁴ Though Nietzsche is not often considered an advocate of duty and morality, he believed that his role as an educator was connected with a whole “chain of duties that may be accomplished,” duties

¹ *Untimely Meditations* “Schopenhauer as Educator,” IV. As is customary, all Roman numeral and numerical references to Nietzsche’s works refer to section rather than page numbers.

² *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack,” 4.

³ *Ecce Homo*, “The Untimely Ones,” 3.

⁴ Letter to Peter Gast, June 19, 1882. Quoted from Walter Kaufmann’s Introduction to his translation of the *Gay Science*, 20.

that “are certainly not those of a hermit,” but instead “imply rather a vast community, held together not by external forms but by a fundamental idea, namely that of *culture*.”⁵

In explaining his theoretical views on the philosopher's education, Nietzsche frequently has recourse to his own process of development as a philosopher. This is particularly seen in his autobiographical work *Ecce Homo*, as well as “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in which Nietzsche says his “innermost history,” his “*becoming*, is inscribed.”⁶ Nietzsche in fact says that in “Schopenhauer as Educator,” “an unequaled problem of education, a new concept of self-discipline, self-defense to the point of hardness, a way to greatness and world-historical tasks was seeking its first expression.” Themes of education and self-development can be found in each of Nietzsche’s writings from his first to his last.

A major philosopher openly discussing his own education is an extraordinarily rare treat for any reader, making Nietzsche’s corpus one of the rare “treasures of world literature.”⁷ There are reasons specific to Nietzsche’s philosophy that require him to “descend to particulars” and provide an account of his own development and life. Since Nietzsche is primarily a philosopher of spiritual development who argues that one’s thinking should be manifested in one’s actions and way of life, it is impossible to

⁵ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” V. Nietzsche was nonetheless aware that his moral intent would be misunderstood by others. “But we can do what we like—the dolts and appearances speak against us, saying: ‘These are men *without* duty.’ We always have the dolts and appearances against us.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 226.

⁶ *Ecce Homo*, “The Untimely Ones,” 3.

⁷ Walter Kaufmann gives this high praise to *Ecce Homo* for its expression of “Nietzsche’s own interpretation of his development, his works, and his significance,” but this is plainly no less true of most of Nietzsche’s other works. See: Kaufmann’s introduction to *Ecce Homo*, 657-665.

adequately understand Nietzsche's thought simply by considering his theoretical doctrines. Instead, one must also consider the role these ideas and doctrines played in Nietzsche's own development and life. He says at one point in his spiritual autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, that one

will ask me why on earth I've been relating all these small things which are generally considered matters of complete indifference. I only harm myself, the more so if I am destined to represent great tasks. Answer: these small things—nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness—are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far.⁸

In Nietzsche's writings, therefore, readers are privileged to see how a man became a philosopher—how Nietzsche became who he was.

The Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit

In examining Nietzsche's views on spiritual development and culture, it is fruitful to begin with the three metamorphoses of the spirit described by Nietzsche's Zarathustra in his very first speech. Zarathustra describes this process as occurring over three metamorphoses in which the spirit first becomes a camel, then a lion, and, finally, a child. Because Nietzsche sees education as a process involving metamorphoses and stages of development, part of "the duty" of a teacher is to say in what respects he has remained "the same," and in what respects he has "become *different*."⁹ This is important so that students can see the continuity across Nietzsche's three metamorphoses as well as the important changes each metamorphosis represents. This will hopefully prevent students

⁸ *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," 10.

⁹ Letter to Peter Gast, June 19, 1882.

from mistaking what is preparatory and partial in spiritual education from what is essential and complete.

The first stage—the stage of the camel—is the stage in which the spirit is shaped by a variety of warring influences. In this stage the camel is a strong, reverent spirit that “kneels down” and lets itself be “well loaded” with all that is difficult before, feeling himself “burdened,” he “speeds into the desert.” The second stage—the stage of the lion—is the point where the spirit distances itself from all these influences and challenges and critiques them in order to assert his independence and become “master in his own desert.” The lion must fight against “Thou Shalt” in order to earn its right to “I will.” The third and final stage—the stage of the child—is the point in which, with “a sacred ‘Yes,’” the spirit returns to the world and becomes a teacher for others through its creation of values.

That the three metamorphoses are described in Zarathustra’s first speech suggests their centrality and importance, not only to that work, but, given Nietzsche’s high estimation of his *Zarathustra*, to his thought as a whole. It might seem problematic to place so much emphasis on Zarathustra’s first speech, since Zarathustra will develop and learn much in the course of the book. Nonetheless, the fact that it is the first speech could also be considered of supreme importance. This speech, in being first, is given an emphasis no speech other than the last can possibly have. And the ideas and imagery of the speech recur throughout the book, including its ending.¹⁰ Even more importantly, however, the ideas and movements described in the speech are reflected in Nietzsche’s

¹⁰ For some of many possible examples see: “On the Tree on the Mountainside,” “On the Way of the Creator,” “On the Thousand and One Goals,” “On the Famous Wise Men,” and “The Sign.”

own views on education and his own spiritual development as he understands and presents it. This is confirmed by Nietzsche's frequent repetition of the imagery and ideas of the three metamorphoses in his other works, particularly in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's spiritual autobiography, as well as the 1886 prefaces he wrote to explain his earlier works and their place in his own philosophical development. I therefore take the three metamorphoses to be solid ground on which to examine Nietzsche's views about philosophic education in relation to culture. Let me defend this approach a little more fully.

The later 1886 prefaces to *Human, All-Too-Human* and *Gay Science* describe the same three metamorphoses of the spirit described in Zarathustra's first speech. The preface to *Human, All-Too-Human* contains language of the "all but unbreakable bonds" that are a result of one's "duties," and the "reverence proper to youth," both of which are characteristic of the spirit's first metamorphosis into a camel.¹¹ This preface also speaks of the spirit's second metamorphosis, which involves its "decisive experience in a *great liberation*," in which one is "restlessly and aimlessly on his way as if in a desert, where "[s]olitude encircles and embraces him."¹² Also characteristic of the second metamorphosis is the "feeling of bird-like freedom, bird-like altitude, bird-like exuberance,"¹³ which occurs before the "step forward in convalescence" represented by the third metamorphosis, in which "the free spirit again draws near to life."¹⁴

¹¹ *Human, All-Too-Human*, "1886 Preface," 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

The 1886 preface to *Gay Science*, meanwhile, declares that this work was “nothing but a bit of merry-making after long privation and powerlessness” in which he was just coming out of a “stretch of desert” and an “interlude of old age at the wrong time.”¹⁵ It speaks of the same “radical retreat into solitude” and “determined self-limitation to what was bitter, harsh, and hurtful to know” which was “prescribed by the *nausea* that had gradually developed out of an incautious and papering spiritual diet, called romanticism.”¹⁶ Finally, it concludes that “from such abysses, from such severe sickness, also from the sickness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn* ... more childlike and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before.”¹⁷ In looking back at these metamorphoses of the spirit, Nietzsche calls them “a long ladder upon whose rungs we ourselves have sat and climbed—which we ourselves have at some time *been!*”¹⁸

Even before Nietzsche wrote the speech on the three metamorphoses in *Zarathustra*, many of its central ideas can be found in earlier works, such as “Schopenhauer as Educator,” where Nietzsche says his own “becoming ... is inscribed,”¹⁹ as well as in a striking 1884 fragment where Nietzsche sets a kind of educational syllabus that marks out his own “path to wisdom”:

¹⁵ *Gay Science*, “1886 Preface,” 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ *Human, All-Too-Human*, “1886 Preface,” 7.

¹⁹ *Ecce Homo*, “The Untimely Ones,” 3.

The first passageway. Venerate (and obey and *learn*) better than anyone. Gather into yourself all things venerable and have them struggle with one another. Carry everything heavy ... the time of community...

The second passageway. Shatter the venerating heart when you are *most tightly bound*. The free spirit. Independence. The time of the desert. Critique of everything venerated (idealization of the unvenerated), attempt at reverse valuations.

The third passageway. The big decision whether one is suited for a positive stance, for affirmation. No more god, no more man *above* me! The instinct of the creator who knows where he sets his hand. The big responsibility and the innocence. (In order to have joy in anything, you must approve of *everything*.) Give yourself the right to act.²⁰

While it is generally appropriate to say that for Nietzsche the task of education is ultimately “a thoroughly individual one,” it goes too far to say that one must “create not only the self that one wishes to become, but also the means, the instruction and the content, if you will, of how one wishes to achieve this stature.”²¹ Rather, Nietzsche shows how his own education initially relied on the culture around him, and his own writings provide a substantive outline for others of what he considered to be essential aspects and requirements of spiritual development. Nietzsche’s writings serve as a vivid and detailed account of how an individual educated himself to wholeness in order to attain his measure of spiritual freedom. Nietzsche’s speech on the three metamorphoses and his portraits of the free spirit and the philosopher of the future are not necessarily a set of universally binding rules for education, but neither do they simply leave the reader without any guidance, requiring him to figure out everything for himself. Nietzsche is not just describing the education of one individual, but instead certain essential features

²⁰ Quoted in Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24.

²¹ Scott Johnston, “Nietzsche, Education and Democracy” in *Nietzsche’s Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values*, ed. Michael Peters, James Marshall and Paul Smeyers (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 90.

of spiritual development itself. “What has happened to me,” the free spirit says to himself, “must happen to everyone in whom a task wants to become incarnate and ‘come into the world.’”²²

Periodization and Various Tensions in Nietzsche’s Texts

In interpreting Nietzsche’s thought, one is faced with the problem of periodization. Nietzsche’s writings can be divided into three distinct periods. Nietzsche himself sanctioned such a division among his writings.²³ The first period is often considered Nietzsche’s romantic period in which he was heavily under the influence of figures such as Wagner and Schopenhauer. The second period is frequently considered Nietzsche’s scientific or “positivistic” period. The third period is some blending of the first two periods in which Nietzsche’s mature philosophy is finally articulated. In each period Nietzsche exhibits noticeably distinct attitudes and concerns. It would seem, therefore, that readers are, to a certain extent, faced with three different Nietzsches. Given these circumstances, one might expect to find many apparent tensions or contradictions within his corpus.

And, indeed, Nietzsche’s thought is full of such tensions. Karl Jaspers therefore observes that while to

many people reading Nietzsche seems easy ... anyone who is led by such impressions to read extensively soon becomes disturbed, and his enthusiasm for the directness of Nietzsche’s appeal is replaced by an aversion to the great variety

²² *Human, All-Too-Human*, “1886 Preface,” 7.

²³ This is seen most clearly in *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books.”

of judgments ... One finds it insufferable that Nietzsche says first this, then that, and then something entirely different.²⁴

According to Jaspers, one might even consider “[s]elf-contradiction” to be “the fundamental ingredient in Nietzsche’s thought.”²⁵

At times, for instance, Nietzsche advocates solitude and an exclusive concern with one’s own self-development, and at others he expresses his commitment to culture and friendship. Which aspect of his thought is primary? How can they possibly coexist?²⁶

And what exactly is Nietzsche’s relationship to culture? Nietzsche says culture begins with dissatisfaction with oneself, but how can Nietzsche praise such dissatisfaction when he seems to condemn asceticism in order to promote gaiety, free creativity, and affirmation of one’s individuality? How can he advocate obedience, discipline, and even discipleship as he engages in a devastating critique of past influences

²⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965, xi.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁶ Fredrick Appel argues there is an irresolvable tension in Nietzsche’s thought between his “insistence upon the dependency of higher types on others (both friends/enemies and inferiors) for full human flourishing and his occasional evocation of a form of self-sufficiency incompatible with any form of sociability or dependency.” Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 160-161. Jeffrey Church also concludes that Nietzsche’s commitment to individualism and autonomy leads him to create “a unique, self-determined life, one wholly different from that of friends and compatriots,” and that Nietzsche “fails to understand that modern human beings desire a rational, ethical community to afford them a sense of belonging and solidarity and a place for sharing a notion of the good life.” Church, *Infinite Autonomy: The Divided Self in the Political Thought of G.W.F. Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche* (State Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

and values? Is Nietzsche primarily the nostalgic philosopher *par excellence*, one who began as a philologist and returns again and again to the classical ideals of the Greeks and Romans, or is he the philosopher of tomorrow, one who divides the world in two through his legislation of a new idea of greatness and new philosophers who will attain it? And why does Nietzsche speak of philosophy and philosophers at all? How can Nietzsche, the famous skeptic and critic of previous arguments about truth, nature, and morality present himself at the same time a philosopher who constantly praises the nobility of confronting the truth about nature and reality, who advocates certain ways of life and kinds of morality?

And why did this famous opponent of religion and metaphysics seem to create something very close to a religion himself through his idea of eternal recurrence? What exactly is the meaning of this strange idea of eternal recurrence? How can Nietzsche seek to affirm everything as it is while at the same time seeking to legislate new values by which to remake the world? How can Nietzsche's gratitude be reconciled with his deep dissatisfaction with much in the world, as well as with his tireless striving for excellence and self-overcoming?

And how does Nietzsche want future men to respond to his own insights and values? Does he hope to be a political "commander and legislator"²⁷ who will remake Europe from its foundations up to its heights, or is he one who wants no disciples and believers and is instead content to play a more modest role in the lives of a few who will come after him?

²⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

Such tensions are ubiquitous, and in some way or another they must be confronted. Because of such tensions, one could easily come to the conclusion that while Nietzsche arrives at many striking insights taken individually, his larger thought as a whole, supposing such a “larger thought” exists at all, is full of hopeless contradictions.²⁸ In arriving at this conclusion, one might feel justified in ignoring his thought altogether, or else in grasping onto the threads one finds fruitful, while more or less discarding the rest.²⁹ One might even decide to favor one period of Nietzsche’s writings over another.³⁰ These interpretive approaches might seem reasonable given Nietzsche’s characterization of himself as an anti-systematic thinker and writer, and by the fact that he certainly would

²⁸ For the most well-known argument against the idea that Nietzsche’s corpus exhibits a complete and unified whole, see: Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 134-135, where Derrida argues that “the hypothesis that ... there is no ‘totality to Nietzsche’s text,’ not even a fragmentary or aphoristic one ... cannot be denied.”

²⁹ For a prominent example of the latter tendency, see Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), xi. According to Warren, many of Nietzsche’s assumptions about political life are mistaken, but once these assumptions are isolated and surgically removed, “the political possibilities of his philosophy are much broader than [Nietzsche] himself imagined or desired.” Warren’s goal is therefore to liberate “the possibilities of Nietzsche’s post-modern transitions from the distortions of his politics, without ignoring his politics.”

³⁰ This is the approach employed by Ruth Abbey in her *Nietzsche’s Middle Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), which argues that Nietzsche’s thought was at its most sophisticated and profound during his middle period. Richard Avramenko moves forward from Abbey’s position in order to critique Nietzsche’s late writings for their supposed rejection of rationality and friendship. Avramenko, “Zarathustra and His Asinine Friends: Nietzsche and Taste as the Groundless Ground of Friendship,” in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, ed. John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

never have demanded a slavish adherence to every single one of his views by his readers.³¹

These ways of reading Nietzsche are frustrated, however, by other statements in which he suggests his works and ideas exhibit fundamental unity and coherence, and that his earlier works clarify later ones. In the 1887 preface to *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche says that if this book “is incomprehensible to anyone ... the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so.”³² Despite Nietzsche’s mistrust of systems, he says a philosopher’s thoughts arise “from a common root,” and therefore they have “no right to *isolated* acts,” to “isolated errors” or “isolated truths.”³³ Instead “our ideas, our values ... grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit—related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun.”³⁴ According to Nietzsche, therefore, if a philosopher has gone wrong somewhere, one should expect that—to some extent—he has gone wrong everywhere.

The tensions present in Nietzsche’s thought, furthermore, may very well be signs of nuance and complexity rather than confusion. As Jaspers notes, it is possible

that we have here to do with contradictions that are necessary and inescapable. Perhaps the contradictories, presented as alternatives ... actually are misleading

³¹ “I mistrust all systematizers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.” *Twilight of the Idols*, “Maxims and Arrows,” 26.

³² *Genealogy of Morals*, “Preface,” 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, “Preface,” 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

simplifications of being ... A contradiction arising in this way would be necessitated by the subject-matter; it would be a sign of truthfulness rather than of incompetent thinking.³⁵

These remarks call to mind others made in a work very respected by Nietzsche, Johan Peter Eckermann's *Conversations of Goethe*. In his introduction to that work, Eckermann observes that what

we call the True, even in relation to a single object, is not something small; rather is it, even if simple, at the same time comprehensive; which, like the various manifestations of a deep and widely reaching natural law, cannot easily be expressed. It cannot be disposed of by a sentence, or by sentence upon sentence, or by sentence opposed to sentence; but, through all these, one attains just an approximation, not the goal itself.³⁶

In this way, as Goethe himself puts it, "truth may be compared to a diamond, the rays of which dart not to one side, but to many."³⁷ Given this view of truth and the inescapability of tension and contradiction in any communication, writers must, as Eckermann puts it, rely on "the insight and comprehension of the cultivated reader."³⁸ Or, as Jaspers puts it, "it is the task of the interpreter" not only to locate tensions and contradictions, but also, as far as possible, "to gain direct experience of their necessity. Instead of being occasionally provoked by contradiction, one should pursue contradictoriness to its source."³⁹ This is precisely the task the present work has set for itself.

³⁵ Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 10.

³⁶ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, trans. John Oxenford (London: Da Capo Press, 1998), xxvii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii.

³⁹ Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 10.

Reconciling Nietzsche's Tensions

Although everyone seems to recognize that periodization has something to do with Nietzsche's philosophic development, very few scholars have sought to draw out the implications that Zarathustra's speech about the three metamorphoses has for understanding the relationship between the three periods in Nietzsche's writings, as well as for understanding Nietzsche's philosophic development as a whole.⁴⁰

The speech on the three metamorphoses provides a key to arriving at a coherent idea of Nietzsche's thought and development as a whole. It helps overcome the seemingly schizophrenic nature of Nietzsche's writings by providing a way of incorporating each of the three periods into a coherent whole, revealing the essential—though ultimately partial—role played by each stage and period. While each period of Nietzsche's writings is coherent in the sense that it can be understood on its own terms, it is nonetheless partial and incomplete. Each period—like each of the three metamorphoses—can only be understood in light of the others. This is true even of Nietzsche's third period writings, which Nietzsche says can only be understood after one has spared no trouble in trying to understand his earlier writings.

This approach is not intended to systematize Nietzsche's thought, which would of course be a mistake. Instead, it is a frame by which to understand the course that Nietzsche's unsystematic thought took. In fact, this frame helps us to see why this body

⁴⁰ One notable exception is Karl Löwith. See my remarks on Löwith's impressive work below. Another is Robert Gooding-Williams, who argues that the "plot of *Zarathustra*" dramatizes "Zarathustra's performance of the three metamorphoses." "Zarathustra's Three Metamorphoses," in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra*, ed. Clayton Koelb. (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1990), 232.

of thought could never be reduced to a single system. In attempting to arrive at an understanding of Nietzsche's larger thought without the interpretive key of the three metamorphoses, one is faced with three different Nietzsches with noticeably different attitudes, orientations, and opinions, without any obvious way of relating them to each other or mediating between them. The speech on the three metamorphoses reveals that Nietzsche's periods are not closed wholes that cannot speak to each other. Instead, each period and stage of development is partial and speaks to the others, and—for a patient reader willing to take the proper care—makes up a part of a larger whole, in which each part supplements and checks the others, and is supplemented and checked by them in turn. While each of Nietzsche's works seem to contain the whole of his philosophy in that each asks and addresses the same questions, it is impossible to understand the full complexity of his thought from any one work alone. Each work is in dialogue with the others, each qualifying and explaining the others. This helps explain how Nietzsche's thought, which might seem redundant in its focus, is nevertheless always novel, always surprising, always challenging.

Though the three metamorphoses of spiritual development are passed through chronologically in a certain sense, and can be thought of as a kind of "ladder,"⁴¹ no stage or period is ever left entirely behind, and traces of all three stages can be found in all of the individual writings across Nietzsche's three periods.⁴² The philosopher can even be

⁴¹ *Human, All-Too-Human*, "1886 Preface," 7.

⁴² While one might argue that Nietzsche clearly left his first stage—in which he was dominated by figures like Schopenhauer and Wagner—behind, Nietzsche says later in his life that despite whatever differences they had, his "intimate relationship with Richard Wagner" was "by far the most profound and cordial recreation of my life," and

said to eventually fulfill the promise of all three simultaneously.⁴³ The three metamorphoses are a poetic image of an extremely complex phenomenon, and should only be considered a rough foreground approximation and image of the philosopher's education or development. Each period of his development represents Nietzsche's attempt to put all the inclinations and desires of his spirit into a proper order so that he can become who he is most fully in order to carry out his own unique task. The activities, attitudes, and aims of each metamorphosis represent a part of the philosopher's very complex activity and attitude. It is not the case, however, that each of the three periods of Nietzsche's writings correspond perfectly to one of the three metamorphoses. Instead, the aims, attitudes, and activities of each of the three metamorphoses are present in all of Nietzsche's works and periods. What distinguishes Nietzsche's different periods and works is the different emphasis each places on each of the three metamorphoses. Nietzsche's first period writings place particular emphasis on what is represented in the spirit's metamorphosis into a camel, his second period writings on the metamorphosis into a lion, and his third period writings on the metamorphosis into a child. If one looks closer at each period, however, it can be seen that what the other metamorphoses represent are present as well, although emphasized less. The philosophic activity and life always involves a complex balance between apprenticeship and independence, between creativity and discovery.

that he considered "Wagner the great benefactor of my life." *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Clever," 5-6.

⁴³ As Karl Löwith observes, Nietzsche's "lonely voyage of discovery ... finally leads him back in a circle to his point of departure." *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 25.

Spiritual development never comes to an end, because its goal of freedom can only be approximated, never attained permanently and in full.⁴⁴ Even Nietzsche's highest and rarest individual, the philosopher, never rests perfectly in a state of freedom. As Nietzsche puts it, a "higher kind of human being ... has time, he takes his time, he does not even think of 'finishing': at thirty one is, in the sense of high culture, a beginner, a child."⁴⁵ The philosopher, then, is always learning, resisting, creating. He is therefore always involved in meaningful communication with others. He is a part of the noblest and most spiritual community, and can even be said to be one of its most responsible members.

If correct, this way of understanding Nietzsche's thought would reveal problems with any interpretation of Nietzsche that rests satisfied with bringing some supposed contradiction in his thought to light, as well as with interpretations that favor one thread or period in Nietzsche's thought over another, which, to Nietzsche, must represent a narrowing of his full spiritual development.

One of the few scholars to recognize the central importance of the three metamorphoses to Nietzsche's thought is Karl Löwith, who observes that

[t]wo critical metamorphoses justify the differentiation of Nietzsche's writings into three periods: first, the transformation from the reverential disciple into the self-liberating spirit, and second, from the spirit that has been liberated into the teaching master."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John Mandalios is therefore correct in observing that, for Nietzsche, "'freedom' was never a static concept or state." Mandalios, *Nietzsche and the Necessity of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), xiii.

⁴⁵ *Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans Lack," 5.

⁴⁶ Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 22.

Löwith goes even further in arguing that this “double turning of the path, on the *one* way to wisdom ... characterizes the philosophic system of Nietzsche as a whole.”⁴⁷

My own work therefore seeks to consider Nietzsche’s philosophic thought and development through the lens of the three metamorphoses, by drawing out the many ideas and implications packed into this short speech. Essentially, the following chapters are engaged in unpacking the contents of one of Zarathustra’s speeches. This way of reading and interpreting Nietzsche’s writings is fully consistent with how he wished to be read.

Nietzsche advised his readers that since he spoke

the most *abbreviated* language ever spoken by a philosopher ... one must follow the *opposite* procedure of that generally required by philosophical literature. Usually, one must *condense*, or upset one’s digestion; I have to be diluted, liquefied, mixed with water ... I am *brief*; my readers themselves must become long and comprehensive in order to bring up and together all that I have thought, and thought deep down ... one must be able to see a problem in its proper place—that is, in the context of the other problems that *belong with it*.⁴⁸

He carried out such an exercise in “rumination” and “*exegesis*” himself in his third essay in *Genealogy of Morals*, which he says is a long commentary of a single short aphorism.⁴⁹ This justification would be enough for me to defend carrying out the following exegesis of the speech on the three metamorphoses. A further defense, however, is found in the obvious importance this speech has for understanding Nietzsche’s development and philosophic thought as a whole.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸ Part of a discarded draft for section 3 of *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” 3. Quoted in Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 796.

⁴⁹ *Genealogy of Morals*, “Preface” 8.

What the speech on the three metamorphoses reveals is that Nietzsche was aware of at least the great majority of the tensions in his thought raised earlier. Even further, it reveals that he attempted to balance and reconcile these tensions with each other, and that, in looking back at his development, he believed he had been relatively successfully in doing so. Of course, one can ultimately disagree with Nietzsche's assessment of his own success, but there is little reason to take seriously any account of Nietzsche's philosophy that begins by assuming that Nietzsche was evidently unaware of various tensions in his thought or that he did nothing to reconcile them.⁵⁰ Instead, it is essential to begin by seeking to understand Nietzsche's own understanding of how he attempted to take the chaos within himself and give birth to a dancing star.⁵¹

The Three Metamorphoses and Nietzsche's Political Philosophy

Reading Nietzsche through the frame of the three metamorphoses should be especially interesting for students of political philosophy, since only after considering the philosopher's spiritual development and education in detail can one determine whether Nietzsche's over-arching commitment to freedom and independence is consistent with meaningful human communication, relationships, and communities.

Nietzsche is frequently portrayed as a radical individualist, which is not at all surprising since he made this characterization of himself easy, as his writings abound

⁵⁰ Ken Gemes appropriately notes Nietzsche's statement about Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo* that "in him all opposites are blended into a new unity." Ken Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62.2, (2001), 358.

⁵¹ *Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," 5.

with statements in which he champions individualism and solitude and criticizes aspects of human relationships and communities.

Radical individualism is the view that man is fundamentally isolated from all other individuals, and because of this, meaningful human communication, relationships, and communities are impossible. Instead, the only recourse left to the individual is to focus exclusively on oneself—whether this is done through the pursuit of self-knowledge, self-mastery, and virtue; through the pursuit of pleasure understood either nobly or basely; or through nihilistic resignation.

Radical individualism is a phenomenon with largely political consequences, but it has its roots in the epistemological position of radical skepticism. According to the radical skeptic, an individual's ideas about existence do not necessarily—or even likely—correspond to the world as it actually is, because his ideas of the world are the result of his perceptions, and his perceptions are filtered and distorted by his mind. Man is enclosed and trapped within his own mind as a prisoner is within his cell. An individual's ideas about existence are inevitably partial, incomplete and illusory, because the mind cannot help but interpret and distort whatever it perceives. Trapped within his own mind, man's position within existence is as a radically individuated self inescapably severed from all others around him. Because of his permanently limited and particular place within the whole, he can never sufficiently transcend his own perspective in order to arrive at any objective idea of “the Truth” about reality. And since most individuals will likely perceive the nature of reality or ‘the truth’ in different ways, everything becomes subjective and relative.

The subjectivity inherent in all human perceptions and ideas not only means that individuals will not be able to agree on the nature of reality and the truth—but further, that one’s understanding of the truth is alien and inappropriate for other individuals, since all other individuals inhabit fundamentally distinct places or perspectives within existence. To follow “the truth” as apprehended by another is to betray one’s own unique position and identity. The pursuit of any kind of knowledge or wisdom, as inescapably limited, illusory, and arbitrary as it must be, necessarily becomes deeply personal, as all communication and relationships between human beings can only be struggles for power in a war of differing and competing perspectives. If one engages in these power struggles, only a very limited number of outcomes are possible: one may succeed in dominating another to the point that he accepts one’s own position on the truth; one may abandon one’s own responsibility for oneself and one’s unique, individual perspective and instead passively accept the ideas of another; or, as is almost always the case, one may partially succeed in dominating and influencing others, while one is dominated and influenced in turn. Whatever the result of these power struggles, however, human relationships and communities are not viewed here as spheres of mutual self-improvement, cultivation, and even friendship, but rather as spheres of mediocrity and lazy compromises where one’s unique perspective on existence is diluted and ultimately compromised.

Nietzsche’s individualism has therefore been linked to his skeptical epistemology, which stresses the limitations and distortions of the human mind and rejects any idea of

objective truth.⁵² Nietzsche's skepticism rules out any chance for meaningful insight, communication, and relationships. All knowledge becomes deeply personal and experiential, and thus not susceptible to communication or providing the basis of community. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the most typical tendency of the intellect is to simplify the complexity of existence. The spirit "has the will from multiplicity to simplicity" and its "power to appropriate the foreign stands revealed in its inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, and to overlook or repulse whatever is totally contradictory," essentially "retouching and falsifying the whole to suit itself."⁵³ The mind so distorts one's perception of reality that at one point Nietzsche makes the shocking argument that being

‘conscious’ is not in any decisive sense the *opposite* of what is instinctive: most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instinct. Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too there stand valuations, or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life.”⁵⁴

According to some accounts, therefore, Nietzsche goes so far as to reject reason outright, and turns instead to arational taste as the ultimate standard and goal of one's self-development. Taste, however, is arbitrary and subjective and therefore is not a satisfactory ground for meaningful relationships and community.⁵⁵

⁵² See, for instance, Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁵³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵ Richard Avramenko, "Zarathustra and His Asinine Friends: Nietzsche and Taste as the Groundless Ground of Friendship," in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, ed. John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

Nietzsche's view of existence is therefore said to rule out any chance for meaningful insight and communication, which can be seen in Nietzsche's declaration late in his life that at "an absurdly early age, at seven, I already knew that no human word would ever reach me: has anyone ever seen me saddened on that account?"⁵⁶

Communication from one individual to another is extraordinarily difficult because

[w]ords are acoustical signs for concepts; concepts, however, are more or less definite image signs for often recurring and associated sensations, for groups of sensations. To understand one another, it is not enough that one use the same words; one also has to use the same words for the same species of inner experiences; in the end one has to have one's experience in *common*.⁵⁷

Those men who have had the highest and rarest experiences will therefore find it most difficult to make themselves understood by others. And indeed, they will not anxiously seek to communicate their insights even if it were possible to do so, since every profound man, "in his evasion of communication, *wants* and sees to it that a mask of him roams in his place through the hearts and heads of his friends. And supposing he did not want it, he would still realize some day that in spite of that a mask of him is there—and that this is well."⁵⁸

According to the radical individualist view of Nietzsche, therefore, objective knowledge, communication, and healthy relationships and communities are impossible. All "knowledge" becomes deeply personal and experiential and thus not susceptible to communication or to providing the basis for community. As Nietzsche's Zarathustra says, "'This is *my* way; where is yours?'—thus I answered those who asked me 'the

⁵⁶ *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," 1.

⁵⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 268.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 40.

way.’ For *the* way –that does not exist.”⁵⁹ Unable to arrive at objective truth or to communicate it to others, man turns inward and concerns himself with his own self-development rather than with politics, community, or friendship. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra thus counsels the more spiritual individual to “Flee, my friend, into your solitude.”⁶⁰ Abandoning communication and concern for others, one turns to an exclusive concern with oneself. Thus, Nietzsche’s praise of self-preservation, or, as he unflinchingly calls it elsewhere, selfishness: “Not to remain stuck to a person—not even the most loved—every person is a prison, also a nook. ... *One must know how to conserve oneself*: the hardest test of independence.”⁶¹

According to this view, Nietzsche not only cuts himself off from his contemporary culture, but also from the past and from the philosophical tradition as a whole. He therefore called for a break with previous norms and values and for the advent of a new kind of philosopher. He was primarily hostile to previous thinkers and sees the “past as the source of the neuroses and psychoses besetting the present.”⁶² What Nietzsche hoped to accomplish was “the creation of ... a new and transfigured world, where men would no longer be prisoners of the old, increasingly defined by meaninglessness in human activity and pursuits.”⁶³ While Nietzsche recognized that one

⁵⁹ *Zarathustra* III, “On the Spirit of Gravity,” 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* I, “On the Flies in the Market Place.”

⁶¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 41.

⁶² Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

cannot simply deny or forget the past, he nonetheless thought it was possible to “‘plant a new way of life’ which will ‘whither’ the first.”⁶⁴

The Nietzschean philosopher therefore finds his goods and values only within himself—he “finds his good nowhere in the social world to date” and is “wanting in both relationships and activities.”⁶⁵ He cuts himself “off from shared activity in which one has initially to learn obediently as an apprentice learns” and from “the communities which find their point and purpose in such activities.”⁶⁶ Instead, Nietzsche’s philosophers must become completely self-determined, isolated individuals unshaped by the political culture around them. On this account, while Nietzsche frequently portrays himself as a critic of modern liberal individualism, his philosophy ultimately represents another stage in its unfolding rather than a real alternative to it.⁶⁷

Ironically, however, Nietzsche’s pursuit of radical individualism culminates in radical historicism—or the ultimate dependence of an individual on his particular and limited position within history.⁶⁸ On this account, though Nietzsche appears to be an opponent of Hegelianism, in actuality he accepts the central historicist premises regarding the omnipotence of history in shaping the thought of individuals.⁶⁹ Thus, there is a

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 257.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁸ “Friedrich Nietzsche” in *History of Political Philosophy*, Third Edition, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 830-834.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

tension in Nietzsche's thought between his goal of freedom and his recognition of the fact of man's fundamental dependence. Given the fact of man's ultimate dependence, Nietzsche's goal of freedom is doomed to failure.

While some scholars worry that Nietzsche's philosopher is attempting to be too individualistic and self-determined, therefore, others express the opposite concern: the Nietzschean philosopher will ultimately become completely determined and limited by his place within the historical process. One might wonder how it Nietzsche could be simultaneously guilty of two seemingly opposite faults. One way might be that, in actuality, the faults are not opposed to each other at all, but instead grow out of each other. On this account, Nietzsche's dream of radical independence leads him to destroy all eternal values or norms and to deny the efficacy of human reason. The destruction of these eternal, universal norms does not make one more free, however, but only chains one all the more to the particular, limited values of one's place and time.

Some agree that Nietzsche is in fact a radical individualist in his more popular early and late works, but have nevertheless attempted a partial defense of his thought by pointing to his middle period, which is said to be the period of his writings in which he is more open to friendship, community, and a more modest place within the philosophic tradition.⁷⁰ According to this account, during his middle period Nietzsche is a more careful, compassionate, and psychologically astute thinker than in his earlier and later periods. In the middle period Nietzsche was also more open to "the dialogical aspects of self-hood" exhibited in a greater concern and regard for friendship, love, and women in

⁷⁰ Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

general.⁷¹ There is also a “metatheoretical level” to the dialogical self that Nietzsche exhibits in his middle period through his presentation of himself as working within the Western philosophical tradition rather than against it as a critic and innovator.⁷² Thus, during his middle period Nietzsche recognizes that culture plays a significant role in shaping the philosopher and that the philosopher in turn has duties to his fellow man in shaping and preserving culture, but before and after this period he seems to have lost this insight or abandoned it and instead sought to present himself as a completely original thinker and an alternative to the Western philosophic tradition.

It is essential to begin by recognizing that the above account of Nietzsche’s philosophy is not baseless, and, indeed, that a great deal of evidence can be marshaled in its favor, as I have tried to show by weaving Nietzsche’s own words into the account above. As with Scripture, Nietzsche’s works can be picked over for quotations to support a great many arguments. This is certainly true of the quite plausible argument that Nietzsche was a radical individualist. Indeed, it would be absurd to deny that a very prominent thread of individualism runs throughout his works.

Viewing Nietzsche’s thought through the frame of the three metamorphoses better enables one to be sensitive to its nuances and complexities on issues of individualism, culture, skepticism, and value creation. The speech on the three metamorphoses shows how an individual’s spiritual development occurs through his engagement with culture, and that the critical, destructive aspects of Nietzsche’s style and activity are consistent with and necessary for his positive, constructive task. In helping to show the meaning

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁷² *Ibid.*, xv.

and purpose of a revaluation of values, meanwhile, the image of the three metamorphoses reveals necessary limitations on the philosopher's will and creative activity, as well as the proper, limited extent of the philosopher's influence over others. In all of these ways, the three metamorphoses help reveal significant limitations on Nietzsche's individualism and skepticism.

The following chapters therefore complicate the conventional account of Nietzsche's political philosophy by investigating the necessary limitations Nietzsche placed on the philosopher's pursuit of freedom and independence, as well as the meaningful role human relationships, community, and culture play in the development of the philosopher. I argue that Nietzsche's skeptical and individualist tendencies are balanced by others, such as his abiding concern with philosophic inquiry and self-examination, friendship, culture, and education.

For Nietzsche, unqualified freedom—the freedom of the soaring bird—is a temptation characteristic of merely one stage in the philosopher's education or development, a temptation it is either impossible or unwise to fully give in to. What Nietzsche seeks is not unlimited and arbitrary self-creation, but rather a degree of independence from one's culture and one's today. Freedom and independence are always relative ideas for Nietzsche, mediated by one's external influences and exercised in a complex relationship with them. Freedom in the sense of complete isolation from others is never attained in full, and, indeed, it would not be desirable even if it were possible.

Nietzsche's concern with independence is limited in several ways. Nietzsche denies that the vast majority of men are independent. For most men what Nietzsche counsels is not greater independence and individualism but rather greater obedience and

self-discipline. Nietzsche does argue, however, that the philosopher is the most independent man and that only he has a right and duty to such independence.

One might therefore assume that Nietzsche's philosophy promotes the radical individualism at least of the philosopher if not of all men. Nietzsche recognizes, however, that even the philosopher is shaped by the thoughts of other men and the communities he is born into and participates in. The philosopher is influenced by others and influences others in turn. Nietzsche recognizes that even the philosopher is not a self-determined and self-made man, therefore, and that even and especially the philosopher has duties to his fellow man. Any attempts to label him a radical individualist are therefore potentially misleading.

To make this argument it is necessary to examine Nietzsche's complex views of freedom and the philosopher's spiritual development. For Nietzsche, the philosopher's defining characteristic is freedom, which raises the question of how freedom is compatible with meaningful human interaction and community. The philosopher's freedom, meanwhile, is ultimately exhibited through his defining activity, the creation or revaluation of values, which in turn raises the question of what revaluation entails and exactly how radical an activity it is. An examination of the first two metamorphoses of the philosopher will help reveal the extent to which the philosopher is shaped by his culture, and an examination of his third metamorphosis—constituted by his revaluation of values—will help reveal the extent to which the philosopher shapes culture for the benefit of future philosophers.

Before turning to the three metamorphoses in order to trace Nietzsche's "path to wisdom," however, it will be helpful to provide a brief account of its destination or end.

Having even a vague idea of the destination can help serve as a guide as one traces the path. It is therefore helpful to begin by asking what exactly freedom is for Nietzsche.

CHAPTER TWO

Culture and Freedom

What is Culture?

Nietzsche's idea of culture is somewhat fluid. In one sense, culture seems to be connected with a particular nation and its political regime. This understanding of culture is seen in Nietzsche's diatribes against German culture, his discussion of French and English culture, and in his estimation of the negative consequences modern democratic politics has on culture.¹ If one is speaking of culture in the most typical and customary sense of the word, it is easy to divide cultures at the borders of particular nations. Whatever creative acts the Germans, French, or Italians happen to be doing constitutes contemporary German, French, or Italian culture at that particular time.

In another sense, however, it does not seem that culture is inescapably connected with and limited by a particular nation and its politics, which can be seen in Nietzsche's call for a cosmopolitan European culture.² Closer to Nietzsche's idea of culture in its truest and best sense is what one speaks of when he speaks of an "Eastern" or "Western" culture, a culture that transcends national boundaries and is animated by more universal philosophical and religious principles that address individuals as human beings rather than as citizens, or representatives of a relatively specific and limited time and place.

¹ For characteristic examples, see: *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Peoples and Fatherlands."

² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 256.

Nietzsche therefore typically associates modern Western culture with Platonism and Christianity.

Nietzsche recognizes that there have been many cultures throughout human history and many others will develop in the future. He is not a cultural relativist, however, because he believes it is possible to distinguish between true and false cultures. True and false culture can be distinguished on the grounds that each is animated by perceptibly different ends and those who participate in each do so for very different reasons. The end of false culture is distraction, comfort, wealth, or influence, and is engaged in providing man with a disguise of “artificial limbs, wax noses, and spectacles” so that he can stand his own sight.³ It is, in actuality, “no real culture at all, but only a kind of knowledge about culture, it stops at cultured thoughts and cultured feelings but leads to no cultured decisions.”⁴ Modern culture therefore leads to that “most distinctive property of modern man ... the remarkable opposition of an inside to which no outside and an outside to which no inside corresponds.”⁵ True culture, meanwhile, is characterized by the “unity of artistic style in all expressions of life of a people” and entails “*the annihilation of the opposition of form and content, of inwardness and convention.*”⁶

³ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” I.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Untimely Mediations*, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Most often, however, an individual culture will be mixed, and aspects of true and false culture will exist in it simultaneously. In order to overcome the temptations, snares of dependence, and “thwarting influences” of society and its false, “parasitical” culture, Nietzsche says one thing is needed: “freedom in fact, and again freedom; the same marvelous and dangerous element in which the Greek philosophers grew up.”⁷ Freedom is not only necessary for philosophic development, however. In a way, it can be understood as the goal of philosophic development itself. In closely examining the three metamorphoses of the spirit and what each entails, one can observe Nietzsche’s idea of freedom as it slowly comes into being. Nietzsche’s highest individuals are therefore characterized by their freedom perhaps more than anything else. It could be argued that Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future are better characterized by other features, such as their skepticism, their critical nature, or their power to embrace the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. But for Nietzsche, all these features are inherent in his larger idea of freedom, as will become evident in the following chapters. Nietzsche’s concern with freedom in his conception of the higher man runs throughout his works. In his early essay on philosophic development, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” Nietzsche primarily praises Schopenhauer above all else for his independence rather than for any philosophic methods he employed or doctrines he held. Nietzsche’s middle and late works, meanwhile, develop his concept of the “free spirit” and independent philosopher.⁸

⁷ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VII-VIII.

⁸ Given the central place freedom and independence have in Nietzsche’s thought, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been given to these concepts in the scholarship, at least compared with the amount of attention given to his skepticism, epistemology, and the doctrine of eternal return. A few noteworthy exceptions are Jeffrey Church, *Infinite Autonomy: The Divided Self in the Political Thought of G.W.F.*

In its highest and noblest sense, culture is a spiritual community in which its members aid each other in the pursuit of freedom. In this community, certain courageous and noble individuals, linked together across continents and millennia, are able to speak to each other through their works and the accounts of their lives. Beset by the distractions, temptations, and dangers, culture allows an individual to “surround himself with the pictures of good and brave fighters” who were able to overcome these same dangers on their own path to freedom, leaving behind a testament of their lives capable of inspiring and challenging those to come.⁹

“Freedom From” and “Freedom For”

Zarathustra makes an important distinction between what can be called positive and negative freedom. Zarathustra asks those who would claim the right to freedom for themselves,

You call yourself free? Your dominant thought I want to hear, and not that you have escaped from a yoke. Are you one of those who had the *right* to escape from a yoke? There are some who threw away their last value when they threw away their servitude. Free *from* what? As if that mattered to Zarathustra! But your eyes should tell me brightly: free *for* what? Can you give yourself your own evil and your own good and hang your own will over yourself as a law? Can you be your own judge and avenger of your law?”¹⁰

Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche (State Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); John Mandalios, *Nietzsche and the Necessity of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); and Ken Gemes and Christopher Janaway, “Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy and the Sovereign Individual” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 80 (2006): 321-357.

⁹ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” III.

¹⁰ *Zarathustra* I, “On the Way of the Creator.”

While Nietzsche speaks of freedom (*Freiheit*) in two distinct senses—as a “freedom for” and a “freedom from”—clearly positive freedom, “freedom for,” is primary for him.

While Nietzsche uses the word independence (*Unabhängigkeit*) in several different senses, typically it is used to signify negative freedom. Independence characterizes the proper relationship of a free man to others. The free man is not dependent on others, he does not “remain stuck to a person” or “a fatherland,” for instance.¹¹ In this sense, independence becomes the space or opportunity necessary to exercise positive freedom.

Positive freedom, meanwhile, is a kind of autonomy. It involves giving oneself one’s own law and carrying this law out. It is the power by which a man governs himself. Nietzsche therefore says, “For what is freedom? That one has the will to assume responsibility for oneself.”¹² Though it is easy to read Nietzsche’s high praise of creative power as an advocacy of licentiousness and radically free willing, Nietzsche is careful to explain that the kind of freedom he does “*not* mean” involves “abandonment to one’s instincts,” which is a “calamity” since the “instincts contradict, disturb, destroy each other.”¹³ Nietzsche entirely rejects this idea of freedom, saying “our modern conception of ‘freedom’ is one more proof of the degeneration of instincts” that is symptomatic of decadence.¹⁴

¹¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 41.

¹² *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

While some liberal theorists have extolled ideas of positive freedom, liberalism has typically understood freedom in the negative sense.¹⁵ Accordingly, freedom is understood as a fact for all men and the only legitimate basis of society. All men can be said to possess freedom because it is understood as a kind of neutral capacity that allows men to choose between positive goods. Keith Ansell-Pearson thus argues that liberalism has “two primary themes: a dislike of arbitrary authority, and the free expression of individual personality.”¹⁶ On this account, freedom is primarily thought of as a kind of “noninterference.”¹⁷

According to Nietzsche, however, freedom is not a starting point for man or society. It is rather a *goal* only partially achievable by the most extraordinary men.¹⁸ Freedom is a goal rather than a fact for Nietzsche because he understands it as a positive power rather than a neutral capacity needing only to be filled with some content through choice. Rather than abandonment to the instincts and radical license, freedom involves

¹⁵ For a historical account of both positive and negative conceptions of freedom within liberal thought, see: Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty." For an argument that negative conceptions of freedom were predominant in even the ancient world, see: Efraim Podoksik, "Once Concept of Liberty: Writing the History of a Political Concept" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010): 219-240.

¹⁶ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Church argues that, for Nietzsche, true individuality or autonomy is “not just a legal unit, but also a goal to be achieved by both community and individuals.” Church, *Infinite Autonomy: The Divided Self in the Political Thought of G.W.F. Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche* (State Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 3.

disciplining oneself to “wholeness,” by creating oneself.¹⁹ Nietzsche goes so far as to argue that freedom even assumes particular activities and dispositions, as will be shown in the remaining chapters. Indeed, for Nietzsche, freedom seems to be another word for intellectual and spiritual *power*, which is not surprising since he considers power to be the fundamental principle of nature.

Only the man of the highest intellectual and spiritual power can be sovereign over himself and thus not abuse his independence or negative freedom. Indeed, for Nietzsche, freedom *is* ultimately the highest intellectual and spiritual power. This is something the Greek philosophers understood perfectly according to Nietzsche, who attributes the motto to them that “everybody who was not a philosopher” was to that extent “a slave.”²⁰ For Nietzsche as well as the Greeks, “he who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living.”²¹ For Nietzsche, therefore, “the ripest form of *Wesen* [being]” is only attained “when the individual achieves the ripest perfection, namely freedom. Only with such a full perfection is the ‘classic type of the sovereign man attained.’”²² For Nietzsche, “freedom is a virtue, the precondition for the attainment of the highest virtue, and virtue’s reward.”²³

¹⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 49.

²⁰ *Gay Science*, 18.

²¹ *Zarathustra II*, “On Self-Overcoming.”

²² John Mandalios, *Nietzsche and the Necessity of Freedom*, 9.

²³ Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 266.

The Limits of Freedom

While Nietzsche is sometimes portrayed as a thinker who recognizes no limits on the philosopher's will,²⁴ it is remarkable how many necessary limitations Nietzsche observes in the exercise of true freedom. Nietzsche's idea of freedom or independence is limited in its applicability to a particular kind of man, the philosopher. Even for the philosopher, however, freedom is not without limitations.

Because freedom is a positive power, strictly speaking, it is unconditionally good and cannot be abused. Independence (understood as the opportunity to exercise freedom and power) can be abused, however. When an individual abuses his independence, he reveals that he is no longer suited for independence because he is no longer free. According to the popular idea of power, for instance, power is corrupting. This notion is flattering to most men, because it implies that those without power are inherently and naturally uncorrupt, or good. In actuality, however, an individual's lack of opportunity to exercise power says nothing whatsoever about whether he is inherently good or powerful or free. When power is considered the source of evil, it is clear that what is meant by power is merely the opportunity to exercise power. The colloquialism that power corrupts is, strictly speaking, false. When power appears to corrupt, what has happened is that an individual without power was nonetheless provided with an opportunity for exercising it. An individual without freedom was given independence. Freedom is,

²⁴ For a few examples, see especially Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), and Werner Dannhauser, "Friedrich Nietzsche" in *History of Political Philosophy*, Third Edition, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

primarily, power over oneself. Wherever independence is abused, freedom is absent. Power is what allows one to resist and overcome corruption and decadence.²⁵

Without positive freedom, negative freedom is not good for an individual. This does not prevent “the claim for independence, for free development, for *laissez aller* [letting go]” from being “pressed most hotly by the very people for whom no reins would be too strict.”²⁶ Like other relative goods, independence is one of those things which “serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation,” but is almost a “poison for a very different and inferior type.”²⁷ Nietzsche therefore speaks of those who inappropriately grasp for independence despite being unsuited for it due to their lack of “inner constraint.”²⁸ For the vast majority of men, independence is neither possible nor even desirable because seeking it is a grave burden that is both difficult and terrifying. Because of this, “[i]ndependence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong.”²⁹ Only the free man is suited for independence and it is appropriate for him to resist others and create space for the exercise of his freedom because he is self-directing and self-governing; he is sovereign over himself.

²⁵ This typical error made in tracing causation is highlighted by Nietzsche elsewhere. In *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors,” 2, for instance: “The newspaper reader says: this party destroys itself by making such a mistake. My *higher* politics says: a party which makes such mistakes has reached its end; it has lost its sureness of instinct. Every mistake in every sense is the effect of the degeneration of instinct, of the disintegration of the will.”

²⁶ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 41.

²⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Nietzsche therefore does not counsel greater independence for all; and indeed, he actually argues that the vast majority of men require stronger attachments and duties rather than greater freedom and license. He goes so far as to say that “the moral imperative of nature” seems to him to be: ““You shall obey—someone and for a long time: *else* you will perish and lose the last respect for yourself.””³⁰ Importantly, this is an imperative for *all* men, not just “the masses,” though the most powerful and independent men ultimately do not need to look outside of themselves for something to obey because they are able to obey themselves. Most men desire to obey something—no matter what—categorically and without reservation, however, and few men are so ordered as to be able to command and obey themselves. Without something external to obey unconditionally, most men feel adrift and will eventually wither away into mediocrity and nothingness.

To press for independence too early or too suddenly is therefore a great and common mistake, which is why, as will be seen in the following chapter, spiritual development for Nietzsche does not begin with solitude, critique of others, and radically free willing, but rather with immersion in culture, apprenticeship, and discipline. Independence must only be sought in view of the higher goal of positive freedom.

Even those who are usually considered the most intellectually gifted and creative, the scholars and artists, fall short for Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, both scholars and artists are of a lower rank than the philosopher because they lack the philosopher’s independence. This is because artists, unlike the philosopher, do not create their own values and instead work within the value systems of others. Artists “do not stand nearly

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

independently enough in the world and *against* the world” and have therefore always “been valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion; quite apart from the fact that they have unfortunately often been all-too-pliable courtiers of their own followers and patrons.”³¹ Connected to this, though perhaps even more fundamental, artists reach their highest states in their works rather than their lives. Unlike Nietzsche’s philosopher, they do not live artistically. Nietzsche says the scholar, meanwhile, “is certainly one of the most precious instruments there are; but he belongs in the hand of one more powerful. He is only an instrument; let us say, he is a *mirror*—he is no ‘end in himself.’”³² He is only involved in analyzing the thoughts of others rather than creating his own. The philosopher is not only concerned with facts, but with determining what man’s stance towards these facts should be, how man must relate himself to his place in existence.

Not even the philosopher will ever fully attain freedom, however. Since everything is in flux and nothing rests permanently in any state of being, the philosopher will always be involved in resisting certain tendencies and temptations, and struggling to retain certain insights and habits of being. Because of this, the philosopher will never stop developing and his education must never come to an end. Putting a halt to one’s self-development is equivalent to *laissez aller* (letting oneself go) and the decadent dissolution of the will. His right to independence will also remain relative and limited. The philosopher must therefore always be involved in meaningful relationships with

³¹ *Genealogy of Morals*, III.5.

³² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207. This description of the objective scholar calls to mind Socrates’ characterization of the poets as mirrors in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. Nietzsche here says that it is instead the objective scholar or scientist who is a mirror, because he lacks the artistic, creative will and vision of the philosopher.

others, since these relationships are a necessary part of his education. Enclosing oneself in a permanent solitude and seeking to cut oneself off from the outside influence of others is escapist and not indicative of true freedom. Thus, one cannot attain freedom by oneself, and in recognizing this we see one important limitation in Nietzsche's idea of freedom.³³

Only after explicitly highlighting the distinction Nietzsche draws between positive freedom and negative freedom (or independence) is it possible to understand Nietzsche's fervent advocacy of solitude. Nietzsche frequently praises the advantages solitude brings to spiritual development. He frequently counsels his higher men to seek and jealously guard their solitude, and he clearly considers solitude to be one of the most important features of philosophic education. As he puts it in a typical statement, "we are born, sworn, jealous friends of *solitude*, of our own most profound, most midnightly, most middaily solitude: that is the type of man we are, we free spirits!"³⁴ Such statements can easily lead to the assumption that Nietzsche considered solitude a positive good and the permanent end state of his philosophers and that Nietzsche must therefore be a radical individualist for whom meaningful human relationships and communities are not possible or even desirable.

For Nietzsche, however, solitude is an example of negative freedom or independence, and only if it is not abused or persisted in too long does it become a means to the higher end of positive freedom. Nietzsche's advocacy of solitude is therefore

³³ For an examination of Nietzsche's account of friendship and the ways in which friendship can aid individual development, see: Robert C. Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010): 47-69.

³⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 44.

limited and subservient to other concerns. Periods of solitude are in fact necessary to independence and philosophic development because they give one distance from much that is tempting and corrupting in modern society. Solitude allows the potential philosopher to resist and partially escape from that which will divert or distract him from his true needs and task, by dispiriting him or offering him the “lures of dependence that lie hidden in honors, or money, or offices, or enthusiasms of the senses.”³⁵ Solitude is an aid to leisure, something sorely underappreciated and lacking in modern life.

That solitude is a means rather than an end, however, is seen in Nietzsche’s listing of solitude as one of the “three dangerous dietary demands” of “religious neurosis,” along with fasting and sexual abstinence,³⁶ in his keen awareness of “what is most poisonous” in solitude,³⁷ and in his identification of solitude as a temptation and a danger that a man of knowledge must not “remain stuck to.”³⁸ Nietzsche calls this last temptation “the danger of the flier.”³⁹ Solitude is therefore overcome in the third and final stage of the philosopher’s development, in which the philosopher “again draws near to life” and “feeling for others acquire depth” and everything around him seems changed, as if they had acquired “bloom and magic.”⁴⁰ For Nietzsche, therefore, solitude is somehow both a necessary feature of philosophic development as well as a danger to it. Philosophic

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Human, All Too Human*, “1886 Preface,” 5.

development requires, in part and at different times, solitude as well as friendships, educators, and communities. Because freedom or independence is never fully attained by man and can only be continually approximated throughout life, one continually fluctuates between periods of solitude and greater human interaction, and one's need for these postures vie for ascendancy with each other and must be put into harmony with each other—something that Nietzsche argues is incredibly difficult but nonetheless possible.

This harmony can be conceptualized in different ways. One might understand the need for solitude and for greater human involvement respectively as characteristic of certain stages in a person's life that one passes through chronologically. In this way, during the first stage of a philosopher's development, he would be more involved in human relationships. Later in his life, however, he would pass out of this stage, assert his independence, and enter into a long period of solitude. Eventually, however, the philosopher will grow weary of his solitude and pass into his final stage of development in which he returns to man. While there is something to this account of the philosopher's development, it is ultimately too neat and simplistic, particularly for a thinker like Nietzsche who stresses the flux and chaos within the souls of individuals. Thus, Nietzsche's poetic representation of his philosopher of the future, Zarathustra, does not consist in him going up his mountain only once and returning to man only once in a chronological sequence. Instead, throughout the book, Zarathustra is continually involved in going up and back down his mountain, fluctuating between periods of solitude and greater human involvement.⁴¹

⁴¹ Insofar as *Zarathustra* can be said to have a plot in any traditional sense, it is largely made up of Zarathustra's journeys back up and down his mountain. We are told in the beginning of the work that Zarathustra left his home and went up in the mountains

It is thus possible to think of the philosopher's development in a different sense. One might therefore understand the balance between solitude and human involvement as a continual fluctuation and movement between two extremes. On this account, the philosopher alternates between extended periods of complete solitude and great human involvement throughout his life. While this account is closer to Nietzsche's idea of philosophic development, it is also incomplete, because it is ultimately too simplistic.

Nietzsche's imagery of Zarathustra going up and down his mountain is simplified and exaggerated in order to ease the reader's comprehension of a very complex idea: the struggle going on in the soul of a potential philosopher between his need both for solitude and human relationships, and how he must order these needs in such a way that they can co-exist with each other and serve a higher end, namely the philosopher's attainment of freedom. Through a poetic image, Nietzsche can liken this struggle to spending ten years up in the mountains before descending back down to roam the earth giving speeches and singing songs to whomever he meets. In life, however, while certain extended periods of a philosopher's life may be characterized by greater solitude or greater human involvement, most often the philosopher's warring needs for solitude and for human involvement each find expression and struggle with each other within the very same day or even within the same moment, such that at the very same time a philosopher is involved in learning from others he is also involved in resisting them.

when he was thirty. The prologue consists of Zarathustra returning to man and the world. At the end of Part I he returns to his solitude, and then returns to more active involvement in the world at the beginning of Part II. At the end of Part II he returns to his mountain and cave once more, and the beginning of Part III sees him embarking on a ship for the Blessed Isles. In Part IV, he descends his mountain in order to seek out the higher men, before ascending once more.

Only when one has arrived at this insight is it possible to make sense of the following paradoxical statement, where solitude and human involvement are so tied-up together that Nietzsche can actually say that part of “the good solitude” is to be surrounded by the right kinds of people:

Rather, go away. Flee into concealment. And have your masks and subtlety, that you may be mistaken for what you are not, or feared a little. And don't forget the garden, the garden with golden trelliswork. And have people around you who are as a garden—or as music on the waters in the evening, when the day is turning into memories. Choose the *good* solitude, the free, playful, light solitude that gives you, too, the right to remain good in some sense.⁴²

Interestingly, therefore, even Nietzsche's idea of solitude is not incompatible with meaningful human relationships. Instead, solitude consists in avoiding the wrong kinds of people and the wrong kinds of relationships, those that will distract the philosopher from his duty and task. The idea of solitude expressed here is much closer to a bright and sunny leisure than a pale and cold alienation. That “all contact is bad contact except with one's equals” implies, of course, that contact with one's equals or superiors is not necessarily harmful to philosophic development, and, as will become evident, is in actuality absolute necessary to it.⁴³ For those individuals Nietzsche is primarily concerned with, such equals are most likely to be found in culture.

Indeed, freedom is always exercised relationally and within a given context. Nietzsche explicitly denies that radical independence of the subject is possible, just as he also resists the radical dependence argued for in certain forms of historicism. Here, as elsewhere, Nietzsche's talent for nuance is on display in his efforts to arrive at a fuller

⁴² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

and subtler understanding of how individuals assert and pursue freedom. This is the driving consideration behind Nietzsche's criticisms of free will, criticisms that should surprise a reader given Nietzsche's emphasis and praise of freedom elsewhere. Nietzsche is suspicious of those who cling to the idea of freedom of will because they "will not give up their 'responsibility,' their belief in *themselves*, the personal right to *their* merits at any price (the vain races belong to this class)."⁴⁴ He says this is akin to the attempt to "absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society" in the determination of our being, and to attempt to "pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness."⁴⁵ One is not free to arbitrarily construct oneself however one chooses, "to change one's *essentia* arbitrarily, like a garment—a demand which every serious philosophy has rejected with the proper scorn."⁴⁶ Even the philosopher is dependent on previous generations and his culture, because for

every high world one must be born; or to speak more clearly, one must be *cultivated* for it: a right to philosophy—taking that word in its great sense—one has only by virtue of one's origins; one's ancestors, one's 'blood' decide here, too. Many generations must have labored to prepare the origin of the philosopher.⁴⁷

Culture is essential to the development of the philosopher; and any philosopher who recognizes this inescapable fact will immediately feel his duty to the maintenance or creation of a culture that is able to contribute to the education and development of future philosophers.

⁴⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 213.

Nietzsche is also critical of those, who, on the contrary, eagerly deny freedom of will because they “do not wish to be answerable for anything, and owing to an inward self-contempt, seek to *lay the blame for themselves somewhere else*.”⁴⁸ Nietzsche’s criticism of notions of free will can therefore be understood, at least in part, as a critique of radical individualism as well as radical historicism.⁴⁹ According to Nietzsche, every human being is a mixture of freedom and necessity, of task and destiny.⁵⁰ Freedom involves ordering the chaos within oneself. This is accomplished by controlling and ordering the various drives, inclinations, and characteristics one did not originally choose and cannot and should not simply eradicate, by employing each in the service of a higher task.

Another related limitation Nietzsche places on freedom is the extent to which freedom involves and even necessitates obedience of one kind or another. While one might think of Nietzsche as a severe and relentless critic of morality who favors creative self-expression beyond considerations of good and evil, it is more appropriate to consider Nietzsche a critic of certain features of popular morality rather than a critic of morality

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ The same resistance towards radical notions of independence and dependence is seen in Nietzsche’s claim that while learning “changes us ... at the bottom of us, really ‘deep down,’ there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 231.

⁵⁰ For an example of Nietzsche’s understanding of how freedom and necessity related to each other in his own self-development, see particularly *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am So Clever,” 9.

itself.⁵¹ According to Nietzsche, throughout human history there have always been “a great many people who obeyed, compared with the small number of those commanding.”⁵² Therefore, since obedience has been exercised and cultivated for so long,

it may fairly be assumed that the need for it is now innate in the average man, as a kind of formal conscience that commands: ‘thou shalt unconditionally do something, unconditionally not do something else,’ in short, ‘thou shalt.’ This need seeks to satisfy itself and to fill its form with some content.⁵³

On its surface this passage could be understood as a critique of morality itself, but on closer examination it is clear that Nietzsche is criticizing only the particular features of popular morality that encourage man’s natural desire to give up his responsibility for himself, a desire that makes him unsuited for freedom. Nietzsche is critical of the fact that in popular morality the desire for obedience is inherited “at the expense of the art of commanding,” that it is arbitrary because most people, in seeking to fill their formal need for obedience with any content whatsoever, accept what is shouted into their ears first and loudest, and that it is based on unconditional commands, even though truth is very rarely if ever unconditional. Nietzsche is not opposed to obedience itself, since he considers it necessary for any kind of self-discipline and development. It is only the desire to have something to *unconditionally* obey that reveals a man to be unsuited for independence. Man’s desire for the unconditional stems from his natural inclination towards laziness

⁵¹ One influential argument along these lines is made by Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁵² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 199.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and his desire for comfort above other nobler, more difficult ends.⁵⁴ The primary tendency of the intellect is to simplify the complexity of existence, to move from multiplicity to simplicity,” overlooking “whatever is totally contradictory,” essentially “retouching and falsifying the whole to suit itself.”⁵⁵ This is necessary to some extent for an individual to function in the world, but he must be aware of the tendency and try to limit it as best he can. Man feels more secure wrapped in the external authority of a political party, church leader, philosophical camp, or public opinion itself. The mind seeks short-cuts in the forms of authorities to tell it immediately how to think and how to react to every aspect of life. To think for oneself about every facet of existence would be extremely burdensome and tiring, and thus, a key is sought.

Though Nietzsche is extremely critical of the desire for unconditional obedience, he is far from critical of obedience itself. Freedom is even limited in the sense that it necessarily involves “*obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction: given that, something always develops ... for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality...”⁵⁶ More accurately, freedom involves the constant interplay between the art of command and the art of

⁵⁴ In the opening section of “Schopenhauer as Educator” Nietzsche goes so far as to identify this inclination towards laziness as one of man’s most fundamental characteristics. See the opening paragraph to section 1: “When the traveler, who had seen many countries and nations and continents, was asked what common attribute he had found everywhere existing among men, he answered, ‘They have a tendency to sloth.’ ... He was right; men are more slothful than timid, and their greatest fear is of the burdens that an uncompromising honesty and nakedness of speech and action would lay on them.”

⁵⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 230.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

obedience, an interplay which has always been a central feature of noble, aristocratic codes of behavior.⁵⁷ This interplay is seen very clearly in Zarathustra's three metamorphoses of the spirit, in which, at different stages of its development, the spirit obeys, resists, and eventually commands. Freedom necessarily involves morality and obedience in some way or another, though certain moralities demand obedience in a way that neuters the individual's ability to command and therefore subverts morality's proper end, freedom. Nietzsche's critique of morality therefore has in mind a different, higher moral code all the time.⁵⁸ Nietzsche therefore says that the modern idea of morality prevalent

in Europe today is herd animal morality—in other words, as we understand it, merely *one* type of human morality besides which, before which, and after which many other types, above all *higher* moralities, are, or ought to be, possible. But this morality resists such a 'possibility,' such an 'ought' with all its power: it says

⁵⁷ See: *Ibid.*, 257, where Nietzsche says that in an aristocratic society, "the ruling caste 'just as constantly practices obedience and command.'" Also see, Aristotle's *Politics* 3.4 1279b7, where it is argued that "men are praised for knowing both how to rule and how to obey, and he is said to be a citizen of approved virtue who is able to do both." A ruler "must learn by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a general of cavalry, or the duties of a general of infantry by being under the orders of a general of infantry, and by having had the command of a regiment and of a company. It has been well said that 'he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.' The two are not the same, but the good citizen ought to be capable of both; he should know how to govern like a freeman, and how to obey like a freeman—these are the virtues of a citizen."

⁵⁸ Nietzsche is always eager to stress the dangerous and questionable aspects of philosophic activity because he distrusts any philosophy that seeks to cloak itself with a pious pose. Pious posing can only lead to contemptible self-satisfaction, and is thus an enemy to all self-development. Nietzsche therefore spends very little time stressing the extent to which he is an advocate of a certain kind of morality and life.

Nietzsche's attitude on these matters calls to mind a remark by Oscar Wilde's Lord Darlington in the play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*: "Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad."

stubbornly and inexorably, ‘I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality.’⁵⁹

For Nietzsche, there are in fact “truly human virtues,” though these are not the virtues the herd man in Europe glorifies in his own timid attributes.⁶⁰

Though Nietzsche is extremely critical of popular morality, therefore, he argues that different kinds of morality are better able to promote freedom. This is seen, for instance, in Nietzsche’s high estimation of the artist’s morality, which is too complex and demanding to be put into something like unconditional, categorical imperatives. As he puts it,

Every artist knows how far from any feeling of letting himself go his ‘most natural’ state is—the free ordering, placing, disposing, giving form in the moment of ‘inspiration’—and how strictly and subtly he obeys thousandfold laws precisely then, laws that precisely on account of their hardness and determination defy all formulation through concepts.⁶¹

In its intricacy and complexity, the artist’s morality shows the “art of nuances which constitutes the best gain of life.”⁶² It represents the very opposite of the desire for the categorical and unconditional, which is a mark of immaturity and “characteristic of youth.”⁶³

⁵⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 206.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

What is Freedom?

Nietzsche is clearly not opposed to any form of morality or obedience, therefore. But does he nonetheless elevate the human will over reason and celebrate the radically free creation of values? If so, it would be difficult to make sense of his diatribes against Platonism, Christianity, romanticism, modern morality, socialism, anarchism, and many other schools of thought. While man has the license to interpret nature and carry himself in any manner he pleases, it seems only certain methods of interpretation and certain values are indicative of true freedom for Nietzsche.⁶⁴ For Nietzsche, freedom is primarily grounded in rationality, but man's rational powers find their highest expression in a creative act—a revaluation of values. This creative act is not arbitrary, however, because it is based on the philosopher's *honest* confrontation with nature.⁶⁵ Any creative act not based on one's honest interpretation of nature is a flight before reality that demonstrates weakness rather than strength and freedom.⁶⁶

According to Nietzsche, freedom is the power of an individual to honestly interpret and confront reality or nature as it appears to him, rather than as he would like it to appear or as it is presented through the intermediary screens of the thought of others. Freedom does not mean that the philosopher examines or interprets reality in a spirit of disinterested contemplation, however, but instead, that after his interpretation of nature,

⁶⁴ The larger argument for this position is found in chapters four and five.

⁶⁵ "Honesty, supposing that this is our virtue from which we cannot get away, we free spirits..." *Beyond Good and Evil*, 227.

⁶⁶ "In the end, it is *courage* in the face of reality that distinguishes a man like Thucydides from Plato: Plato is a coward before reality, consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has control of *himself*, consequently he also maintains control of things" *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," 2.

he must determine a “Wither and For what” for himself in accordance with the knowledge he has acquired.⁶⁷ The philosopher is concerned both with facts about reality and how man should respond to these facts. The latter is what Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of value creation or revaluation.

Freedom is a power—the power to act in accordance with one’s perception of the true nature of reality and one’s own particular place within it. To be immediate in existence in this sense is to live philosophically or artistically in such a way that one becomes one of the “real artists of life.”⁶⁸ One of Nietzsche’s most interesting definitions of philosophy is “real *profundity* of spiritual perception.”⁶⁹ According to this idea of philosophy, the end of one’s intellectual and spiritual development is to live artistically and philosophically. The contemplative life understood in a certain, modern sense—life lived out in a dimly lit, musty study—is not the goal. Such a way of life encourages a disjunction between one’s life and one’s studies, the kind of incongruity between inner and outer characteristic of false culture.⁷⁰ One’s life is compartmentalized and lacks an over-arching order; one is a philosopher in one’s study; outside of it, one is a good Christian, a good democrat, a breadwinner, a mediocre philistine, etc. The

⁶⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷⁰ The “most distinctive property of modern man” is “the remarkable opposition of an inside to which no outside and an outside to which no inside corresponds.” Modern culture “is no real culture at all, but only a kind of knowledge about culture, it stops at cultured thoughts and cultured feelings but leads to no cultured decisions.” True culture, meanwhile, is “unity of artistic style in all expressions of life of a people.” It entails “*the annihilation of the opposition of form and content, of inwardness and convention.*” Nietzsche, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 4.

philosophizing of such men has no relation to their actual experiences in their own time and place, and is thus unconcerned with today or tomorrow. For such men the philosophic activity is inevitably the study of the history of philosophy, but the “learned history of the past was never a true philosopher’s business, in India or Greece.”⁷¹ While such men may be able scholars and historians, they incapable of being true philosophers according to Nietzsche.

Rather than the philosophic life, understood as the study of the history of philosophy in which life is put in the service of knowledge, Nietzsche advocates a life lived philosophically or artistically, in which knowledge is put in the service of one’s life, and one learns “simply and honestly to be in my thoughts and life.”⁷² The philosopher does more than gather and collect knowledge; he represents new values; he *lives* his new values; his ideas and his life are in harmony. As Nietzsche says, the philosopher has “more to do than merely to gain knowledge—namely, to *be* something new, to *signify* something new, to *represent* new values.”⁷³ Nietzsche considered the pre-Platonic philosophers exemplary in this regard.⁷⁴ While the artists’ “subtle power usually comes to

⁷¹ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VIII.

⁷² *Ibid.*, II.

⁷³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 253.

⁷⁴ “The Greeks themselves, possessed of an inherently insatiable thirst for knowledge, controlled it by their ideal need for and consideration of all the values of life. Whatever they learned, they wanted to live through, immediately ... For what they invented was *the archetypes of philosophic thought*. All posterity has not made an essential contribution to them since ... Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates. These men are monolithic. Their thinking and their character stand in a relationship characterized by strictest necessity” *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 1. Nietzsche says that he gets profit from a philosopher “just so far as he can be an example to me ... [b]ut this example must exist in

an end where art ends and life begins ... we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.”⁷⁵ When one lives philosophically or artistically in this latter sense, with

the strength of his spiritual eye and insight grows distance and, as it were, the space around man: his world becomes more profound; ever new stars, ever new riddles and images become visible for him. Perhaps everything on which the spirit’s eye has exercised its acuteness and thoughtfulness was nothing but an occasion for this exercise, a playful matter, something for children and those who are childish ...⁷⁶

One’s own life and experiences—rather than books chronicling the experiences of others—become the subject matter of one’s reflections and philosophical investigations. Any study of past thought is put in the service of his life in the present and future. A philosopher is not primarily one who spends all of his time reading Plato and Aristotle—though he will undoubtedly do this as well—but rather one who studies his today with a view to tomorrow. Someone who has “disciplined himself to wholeness,” “*created*

his outward life, not merely in his books; it must follow the way of the Grecian philosophers, whose doctrine was in their dress and bearing and general manner of life rather than in their speech or writing.” “Schopenhauer as Educator,” III.

⁷⁵ *Gay Science*, 299. Nietzsche’s criticism of artists along these lines offers a great deal of support to Leslie Paul Thiele’s objection to the central thesis of Alexander Nehamas in his work, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). While Nehamas “posits Nietzsche as having paid tribute with his life to the artistic task of creating his own literary character,” Thiele sought instead “to expound Nietzsche’s literary characters as the tributes he paid to the artistic task of creating his own life.” Thiele is correct in observing that “Nehamas failed to account for the primacy of the lived over the written experience,” and that for Nietzsche “literature was not life but life’s relic.” Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 6n & 133n. According to Nietzsche, art for its own sake is senseless, “a worm chewing on its own tail.” The true artistic instinct does not aim at art itself, but rather “at the sense of art, life.” *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 24.

⁷⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 57.

himself” and “surrounded himself with limited horizons” so that he does not “retire from life but put himself into the midst of it,” has become free.⁷⁷ And he who has “*become free* stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷. *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 49.

⁷⁸. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE

Nietzsche as Camel

“There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.

“What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well-loaded. What is most difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one’s haughtiness? Letting one’s folly shine to mock one’s wisdom?

“Or is it this: parting from our cause when it triumphs? Climbing high mountains to tempt the tempter?

“Or is it this: feeding on the acorns and grass of knowledge and, for the sake of the truth, suffering hunger in one’s soul?

“Or is it this: being sick and sending home the comforters and making friends with the deaf, who never hear what you want?

“Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads?

“Or is it this: loving those who despise us and offering a hand to the ghost that would frighten us?

“All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert.”

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “On the Three Metamorphoses”

The Initial State of the Soul

In Zarathustra’s very first speech he describes spiritual development as consisting of three stages—or, as he puts it, three metamorphoses—in which the soul becomes a camel, then a lion, and then finally a child. Because Zarathustra says this process occurs over the course of three metamorphoses rather than two, the soul does not then begin as a camel. In order to enter into the sphere of culture and begin its education, the spirit must

first *become* a camel.¹ There is an initial state of the soul that is not described by Zarathustra in this speech, therefore, though it is possible to imagine what it might consist of for Nietzsche.

Every individual is born with a spiritual inheritance. That inheritance comprises the ideas of good and bad, noble and base instilled by one's political regime, culture, and family. As Zarathustra puts it, "We are presented with grave words and values almost from the cradle: 'good' and 'evil' this gift is called."² For better *and* worse, every individual is thoroughly shaped from birth by these many relationships and communities that influence the way every aspect of his existence is viewed.

In this initial state of the soul, one is not yet aware there are other possible ideas of good and bad, noble and base—other possible values. One is therefore unaware of the element of arbitrariness and narrowness in one's own values. This lack of awareness is largely the result of a lack of thoughtful experience. Such individuals lack an awareness of alternative answers to fundamental questions because they are not yet aware that there is a question present. Indeed, they even seem to have a lazy inclination not to question at all. As Nietzsche puts it,

the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterward ... Among some pious people I found a hatred of reason and was well disposed to them for that; for this at least *betrayed*

¹ This necessity is apparently overlooked by Löwith, who argues that since "the first of the 'three' metamorphoses is not characterized in further detail regarding its point of departure," Nietzsche's development occurred over the course of "a double metamorphosis" rather than three metamorphoses. Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 26.

² *Zarathustra* III, "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2.

their bad intellectual conscience. But to stand in the midst of ... this whole marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity in existence *without questioning*, without trembling with the craving and the rapture of such questioning, without at least hating the person who questions, perhaps even finding him faintly amusing—that is what I feel to be *contemptible*.”³

More than anything else, it seems that, for Nietzsche, this passive, unreflective, even unconscious acceptance of one’s spiritual inheritance is what constitutes the initial state of the soul.⁴

Overview of the Spirit’s First Metamorphosis

Before examining the first metamorphosis of the spirit in detail, it will be helpful to provide a brief overview of it.

Nietzsche says the first sign—rather than the cause—of the beginning of one’s education and initiation into culture is dissatisfaction with oneself, and, by extension, with contemporary society. This dissatisfaction might be thought of as the height of impiety, but, as I shall explain, it is actually motivated by a profound reverence. The cause of one’s dissatisfaction, meanwhile, is an unseen increase in strength, usually the result of thoughtful experience.

Dissatisfaction with oneself necessarily extends to a dissatisfaction with one’s today, with the contemporary influences that have shaped one so thoroughly up to now. Dissatisfaction with one’s “today” leads to a willingness to suffer hunger in one’s soul rather than rush to the ready fruits of conformity. One’s untimeliness and willingness to

³ *Gay Science*, 2.

⁴ Nietzsche’s description in the opening section of “Schopenhauer as Educator” of the man who conforms to his neighbor out of timidity and laziness also seems very apt in determining what Nietzsche considered the initial state of the soul.

suffer hunger leads to feelings of alienation from the group one has begun to leave behind. Through its alienation, the soul gains an openness to the truth wherever it may find it, a willingness to accept truths however ugly, cold, or dangerous. Such openness is plainly threatening to the group one has left behind, and will usually provoke its hostility and hatred. The proper stance towards the despising group is not hostility or resentment, however, but rather patience, and, indeed, even *love*.

The camel's increase in strength also allows it to seek to discipline its mind through cultural study and apprenticeship. Cultural figures, friendships, and membership in a more narrow and select scientific or scholarly field all help to mitigate one's feelings of alienation and loneliness, as well as help keep one open to the thoughts and experiences of others. Such cultural study also begins to mitigate the dizziness and disorientation that accompanies a complete openness to the truth by focusing on certain models one finds exemplary, or fields one considers particularly essential.

Features of the Camel: Dissatisfaction

Both Nietzsche and his literary creation Zarathustra are in agreement that one enters "into the circle of culture, which is the child of every man's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction" only when one has learned to feel "shame or vexation at one's self, a hatred of one's own narrowness."⁵ One must learn to humble oneself, "to wound one's haughtiness."⁶ In his dissatisfaction and shame, the camel is not content to lacerate himself and wallow in self-contempt, however; instead, he looks "to a higher self which

⁵ "Schopenhauer as Educator," VI.

⁶ Uncited quotations refer back to Zarathustra's speech on the first metamorphosis of the soul, quoted in full at the beginning of this chapter.

is yet hidden,” and strives “upward to it with all its strength,” saying, ““I see something above me, higher and more human than I: let all help me to reach it, as I will help all who know and suffer as I do.” Zarathustra describes this moment as the “hour of the great contempt,” when one first learns to feel profoundly dissatisfied with oneself, with one’s virtue and knowledge. Hoping to lead others to this hour of contempt, he proclaims before the crowd, ““What matters my reason? Does it crave knowledge as the lion his food? It is poverty and filth and wretched contentment.””⁷

The camel’s dissatisfaction with himself, his reason, and his education is one of the things that distinguishes him from modern men who, Zarathustra says, are “proud” of their education because it “distinguishes them from goatherds.”⁸ The last man is the “most despicable” man precisely because he is “no longer able to despise himself.”⁹ Self-overcoming requires contempt for one’s education, one’s virtue, and reason—in short, with all that one has been up until now. Evidently, Nietzsche’s gaiety and his supreme confidence in himself and his task were qualities apparently hard-earned and long in coming.

Reverence

Dissatisfaction and reverence would appear to be opposites, yet Nietzsche pairs them together in his image of the camel. The camel’s dissatisfaction with himself implies his dissatisfaction with the communities and relationships that have gone so far in making

⁷ *Zarathustra* I, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5

⁹ *Ibid.*

him who he is, and to question these things would seem to be the very height of irreverence. And, indeed, Nietzsche says that all those who have felt it to be their inescapable task to seriously examine and question their spiritual inheritance have at some time faced a great deal of guilt and self-doubt, during which time they wore “the pallid and fatal mark of the Chandala on their foreheads—*not* because they are considered that way by others, but because they themselves feel the terrible cleavage which separates them from everything that is customary or reputable.”¹⁰ Nietzsche therefore says that “almost all forms of existence which we consider distinguished today once lived in this half tomblike atmosphere” of the consciousness of public disapproval.¹¹

Despite this, Nietzsche, a philosopher not usually remarked for his reverence, calls the camel “the strong reverent spirit that would bear much.”¹² As it turns out, the dissatisfaction of the camel is motivated by a more profound reverence than the reverence of those who, lacking an intellectual conscience, never question their inheritance. For Nietzsche, as for Plato’s Socrates, doubt and reverence are not opposites but twins that belong together. The opposite of reverence is not doubt but spiritual lethargy.¹³ Those

¹⁰ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² A few scholars who have not missed the surprisingly reverent attitudes and concerns in Nietzsche’s thought include Bruce Ellis Benson and Paul Woodruff. Benson’s work focuses on the “deeply religious nature of Nietzsche’s thought and his attempts to overcome his early religiosity in order to move to a *new* religiosity.” *Pious Nietzsche* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 3. Paul Woodruff even goes so far as to call Nietzsche the “one great Western philosopher who praises reverence,” despite the fact that “he is also the most given to mockery.” Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

¹³ This is what I take to be the central theme of Plato’s *Apology* and *Euthyphro*. As Socrates says while on trial for his life, “I, men of Athens, salute you and love you,

who never question their spiritual inheritance reveal their lack of seriousness towards it. The camel shows his seriousness towards its inheritance by carrying “faithfully what one gives us to bear, on hard shoulders and over rough mountains ... Like a camel, he kneels down and lets himself be well loaded,” even though in loading too many “*alien* grave words and values on himself ... life seems a desert to him.”¹⁴

The false piety of those who do not question is a result of laziness and the prevalent desire for what is easy and comfortable. In not seriously questioning their spiritual inheritance they make their peace with arbitrariness and reveal their lack of concern with truth, goodness, and nobility. Indeed, they reveal a lack of concern with the state of their own soul—their lack of reverence towards themselves as individuals. The reverence of the camel, conversely, manifests itself as a profound desire for goodness, nobility, and truth, and, moreover, to actually *possess* these things oneself—to be noble and beautiful oneself.

In the *Ethics* Aristotle argued that one must be a gentleman, by which he meant one concerned with the noble and good, and especially with *being* noble and good, to be a student of moral philosophy.¹⁵ In his own way Nietzsche agrees. As Nietzsche puts it, the “*noble soul has reverence for itself*.”¹⁶ If one does not have the desire to possess

but I will obey the god rather than you; and as long as I breathe and am able to, I will certainly not stop philosophizing, and I will exhort you and explain this to whomever of you I happen to meet.” *Apology*, 29d.

¹⁴ *Zarathustra* III, “On the Spirit of Gravity,” 2.

¹⁵ Aristotle says that “to be a competent student of what is right and just, and of politics generally, one must first have received a proper upbringing in moral conduct.” *Ethics*, 1095b2-6.

¹⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 287.

goodness and nobility oneself, and is instead content to worship these things from afar, one reveals a lack of reverence *for* these things; for indeed, how can one believe in the existence and goodness of beauty, nobility, and truth without wanting these things for oneself? To *not* desire them and *not* order one's life to the pursuit of them is the same thing as to deny either their existence or their desirability. The desire for nobility reveals one's belief—one's hope and faith—that such noble "heroes" willing to tackle what is most difficult in life exist, or could possibly exist. This belief is what causes one to be concerned with great problems and tasks in the first place. It is a belief that Zarathustra, in stumbling upon a disturbed youth, begs him not to cast away, saying,

do not throw away your love and hope ... Alas, I knew noble men who lost their highest hope. Then they slandered all high hopes. Then they lived impudently in brief pleasures and barely cast their goals beyond the day ... Once they thought of becoming heroes: now they are voluptuaries.¹⁷

The camel's belief that truth, nobility, and beauty exist in the world causes him great anxiety. His belief leads him to wonder whether everything he has known and been until now has been false, ignoble, and arbitrary. Without the belief that truth and nobility exist, arbitrariness in one's beliefs or actions is simply not a problem, because without this belief, any values are as good as any other and can be passively accepted. Indeed, without this belief, it appears best simply to accept the dominant values of one's time and place, as this will make life easiest, most comfortable and pleasant. The camel is deeply dissatisfied with himself and all that has gone into shaping himself because he is animated by the faith that there are higher alternatives. Rejecting Descartes' *de omnibus dubitandum*, then, Nietzsche here reveals how much faith and hope is required to embark

¹⁷ *Zarathustra I*, "On the Tree on the Mountainside."

on a philosophic investigation of any kind. To embark on a philosophic education, one must be intimately concerned with great problems and willing to load one's conscience down with them.

Philosophic education does not begin, therefore, with light and free contemplation devoid of personal interest; philosophic contemplation is—at least initially—deadly serious and practical in that it has the greatest possible bearing on one's life. In this stage of his development, the philosopher is, for better *and* worse, extremely moral and concerned with ethical questions above all others. This is one reason Nietzsche and his Zarathustra occasionally appear to others, and even consider themselves to be, the most pious of atheists.¹⁸ For the camel, all theoretical questions are subservient to questions of life and living well, and, at a certain point, theoretical questions *must* give way to the necessities of life.¹⁹ In this early stage of his own life and development, therefore, Nietzsche makes a stark division between life and truth—and sides unabashedly with life.

Younger generations are frequently portrayed as lacking modesty and reverence. In actuality, however, it is the young—or, at least, the reflective and noble among the young—who tend to be the most reverent and pious towards their teachers, ancestors, and revered cultural figures, precisely because they rightly sense that they have much to learn and much to do to justify their learning. Thus, Nietzsche speaks of

¹⁸ See: *Ibid.* IV, “Retired.”

¹⁹ For an example of this tendency, see Nietzsche's preface to his early essay “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” where he writes, citing Goethe, “‘I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity’ ... ‘instruction that does not ‘quicken,’ knowledge that slackens the rein of activity ... must seriously be ‘hated,’ as a costly and superfluous luxury of the understanding: for we are still in want of the necessities of life, and the superfluous is an enemy to the necessary.”

that reverence proper to youth, that reserve and delicacy before all that is honoured and revered from old, that gratitude for the soil out of which they have grown, for the hand which led them, for the holy place where they learned to worship.²⁰

In his critique of modern educational procedures and institutions, Nietzsche therefore says that “thinking of *youth* at this point I cry land ho! land ho!” and argues that one “has to be young” in order to understand his protest, because only the instinct of youth “still has the instinct of nature which is first broken artificially and violently” by modern education and false culture.²¹ The young still have the strength for great and challenging tasks and are therefore less given to lazy contentment with themselves as they are. Everything to the young is new and unexplored, mysterious and inspiring. These pious, reverent youths have not heard the hollowness of so many false idols yet. And neither have they grown weary of continual doubt and self-examination, which so often forces one to take refuge behind dogmatism of one form or another. The young still have faith that there is another rarer reverence reserved for higher subjects that does not decrease but instead grows with greater study and familiarity.

Strength

The camel’s concern with nobility and his desire to set out on great tasks is admirable, but it would ultimately be in vain if he was without strength. Fortunately, the camel is characterized by his strength perhaps more than anything else. As Zarathustra says, the camel’s spirit is “strong,” “the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands,” and it seeks out what is most difficult, taking it upon itself so that it

²⁰ *Human, All-Too-Human*, “1886 Preface,” 3.

²¹ See: “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 10.

may “exult in [its] strength.” The essence of the noble is the difficult. Difficulties are necessary because they develop, test, and exhibit one’s strength. Fortunately, therefore, the camel not only sets great tasks for itself, it also has the strength to set out to accomplish them.

The camel’s strength is seen in several different ways. As has been shown, the camel’s strength is characterized in part by an increase in the power of the individual will to be something different, something more than one currently is, and to represent something new and different from what is praised by the group or crowd. As will be seen presently, the camel’s strength also allows him to resist the offered fruits of conformity and comfort, suffering hunger in his soul; it allows him to sustain himself amidst feelings of guilt and alienation; it allows him to forgive and even love those who would despise him; it allows him to be open to the truth wherever he may find it—no matter how ugly, cold, and unwelcome the truth may be; and it allows it to seek to constrain and discipline his spirit and mind through cultural and scientific study and apprenticeship.

Alienation

Because of the camel’s increase in strength, he no longer needs the group or community to tell him how and what to think in every instance. The camel is instead able “to feed on the acorns and grass of knowledge and, for the sake of the truth, [suffer] hunger in one’s soul.” The camel is able to remain hungry rather than rush to devour what is always eagerly handed to it by others—in effect, sending “home the comforters.” The strength to withstand spiritual hunger rather than rush to the easy fruits of conformity and dogmatism is characteristic of Nietzsche’s preferred form of skepticism, though it is not exhaustive of it, as will be seen in the following chapter.

The camel's dissatisfaction with himself necessarily extends to all that has gone into making him what he has been up until now—that is, to his spiritual inheritance. The camel thus begins to question and critique his spiritual inheritance for the first time, “parting from our cause when it triumphs” out of a hatred of its “narrowness.” This parting leads to feelings of alienation, as the camel's spirit climbs “high mountains” and “speeds into its desert.” Leaving behind the group, the camel is surrounded only by the “deaf” who cannot sympathize with or understand its new needs and sufferings.

At this point, one might ask why the movement from a communal to a more personal and individual idea of good and bad is necessary for the spirit's development.²² Why does Nietzsche believe it is necessary for a man to suffer from alienation and feelings of loneliness and secret guilt? This is a complex, even troubling question, and it is clear that Nietzsche's prescribed course of action carries great risks and dangers.

Part of Nietzsche's alienation is intimately connected with what he sees as the philosophical necessity of becoming untimely, and Nietzsche seems to consider philosophic study and education inherently alienating. This is why he says that all education is detested by the many “that makes for loneliness and has an aim above money-making and requires a long time: men look askance on such serious education as mere ‘refined egoism’ or ‘immoral Epicureanism.’”²³ Though it is easy to think of the proud lion as the isolated, alienated animal, it is actually the camel who first speeds into

²² This question will be addressed more fully in the following chapter, “Nietzsche as Lion,” which describes the spirit's movement from “Thou Shalt” to “I Will.”

²³ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VI.

the desert. Only finding himself already isolated does he then feel the need to become a lion.

In his alienation, the camel gains an openness to truth where he may find it, however unsettling these truths may be to others and even to oneself. The camel is thus willing to enter “into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth.” In his exploration of these waters, all potential sources of truth and wisdom, whether they be “cold frogs or hot toads” are seen, at least initially, as potentially valid.

The camel’s lack of fear before cold, ugly, unsettling truths—truths that will frequently run counter to the values of the group—will no doubt confuse and upset the group and cause it to despise the camel who has left it behind. But the camel’s patience and strength allow it not to be angry with those who despise it. It knows that those who despise him are only suffering from a misunderstanding that is the result of perhaps temporary weakness, and that no misunderstanding of others is to be seriously feared or hated when one has oneself under control. Zarathustra therefore rebukes his “ape” who despises those in the city because they do not praise him, and tells him that out “of love alone shall my despising and my warning bird fly up, not out of the swamp.”²⁴

Zarathustra’s love for his task and his pursuit of nobler alternatives has caused him to turn from the city, not his wounded vanity.

Instead of merely passing by and ignoring the group he has left behind, however, the camel actually sets himself the perhaps inordinately difficult task of “loving those who despise us.” This love is possible, perhaps, because the camel recognizes that he was once no different from those who now despise him. Just as he was able to move

²⁴ *Zarathustra* III, “On Passing By.”

beyond its initial state of the spirit by entering the sphere of culture and beginning his education, so too can others. Nietzsche therefore says he does “not want to believe ... although it is palpable,” that “*the great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience.*” Some “folly” keeps persuading him “that every human being has this feeling, simply because he is human. This is my type of injustice.”²⁵ In “Schopenhauer as Educator,” meanwhile, Nietzsche argues that most men fail to develop their spirit and attain their true individuality out of laziness and timidity rather than a lack of some innate potential.²⁶ But perhaps the most important indication of what this kind of love entails is found in Nietzsche’s statement that “from love alone the soul gains, not only the clear vision that leads to self-contempt, but also the desire to look to a higher self which is yet hidden, and strive upward to it with all its strength.”²⁷ This love does not extend only to oneself, moreover, since Nietzsche asks for all to help him reach his higher self, just as he will “help all who know and suffer as I do.”²⁸

Cultural Apprenticeship

The camel’s reverence and his intimate concern with goodness and nobility has caused him to set great and challenging tasks for itself. These tasks are impossible to accomplish, however, if in overestimation of his strength, he asserts his independence too early. One’s education and the pursuit of freedom does not begin with a rejection of all moral standards and constraints, or the assertion of one’s right to radical creativity and

²⁵ *Gay Science*, 2.

²⁶ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” I.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, VI.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the embrace of “*laissez aller*,” a letting oneself go to a supposedly more natural state.²⁹ Instead, the pursuit of freedom begins with—and is *always* constituted by—a great deal of constraint, obedience, and discipline. Dissatisfied with his time and place, the camel cannot yet look primarily to himself for alternatives, because at this point in his life he is almost wholly a product *of* his time and place. He must therefore look elsewhere for the truth. In attempting to attain the nobility of his true nature, the reverent camel looks to certain impressive cultural figures and educators as examples of men who resisted their time in their struggle for independence and freedom. The camel understands that one’s “true being lies not deeply hidden in thee, but an infinite height above thee, or at least above that which thou dost commonly take to be thyself” and that there is no better means “of ‘finding ourselves’ ... than to think on our educators.”³⁰

The camel therefore embarks on a rigorous, disciplined, and open-minded engagement with culture, particularly through the study of past thought as it is preserved in the philosophical and literary tradition, as well as through his apprenticeship in a field or science. The stage of the camel is a stage of asceticism in which his mind is disciplined and constrained to think through many new screens and perspectives.

At this stage, the potential philosopher, who is fortunately able to “bear much,” “kneels down like a camel wanting to be well-loaded.” The mind learns to see through many eyes and from many angles and to stand on many different stones in the pyramid of

²⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 188.

³⁰ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” I.

knowledge.³¹ Thus, Nietzsche surprisingly praises the advantages he sees brought about by the

long unfreedom of the spirit ... the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think within the directions laid down by a church or court, or under Aristotelian presuppositions, the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema.³²

Though this manner of proceeding is in certain respects “forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and anti-rational,” it was also the “means by which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility.”³³ According to Nietzsche, Emerson, for instance, asserted his independence too early and did not undergo the proper training. In a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche says he does not know how much he would give, “if only I could bring it about, *ex post facto*, that such a glorious, great nature, rich in soul and spirit, might have gone through some strict discipline, a really scientific education. As it is, in Emerson we have lost a philosopher.”³⁴

This thread in Nietzsche’s thought is ignored or underplayed by those who

³¹ “It may be necessary for the education of a genuine philosopher that he himself has also once stood on all these steps on which his servants, the scientific laborers of philosophy, remain standing—*have* to remain standing. Perhaps he himself must have been critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and solver of riddles and moralist and seer and ‘free spirit’ and almost everything in order to pass through the whole range of human values and value feelings, and to be *able* to see with many different eyes and consciences, from a height and into every distance, from the depths into every height, from a nook into every expanse. But all these are merely preconditions of his task.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

³² *Ibid.*, 188.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Portable Nietzsche*, 441.

suppose that, according to Nietzsche, “disciplinary education transforms the individual into a docile and obedient subject as it presents a small range of possibilities limited by reason,”³⁵ that the individual must “destroy the domination of the past by forgetting it,”³⁶ or that Nietzsche’s supposed “exaltation of the creative will” instills “an indiscriminate contempt for authority, limitation, and form” in which “whatever constrains the will represents an intolerable ‘Thou shalt not.’”³⁷ Instead, Nietzsche continually extols the necessary (albeit problematic) virtues of discipline and cultural apprenticeship.³⁸ Though Nietzsche’s philosopher eventually moves beyond his status as a pupil and becomes something more, his Zarathustra is careful to remember that “he who would

³⁵ Patrick Fitzsimons, “Revaluing the Self: Nietzsche’s Critique of Liberal Education,” in *Nietzsche’s Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values*, 152.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 269.

³⁸ The work of Stefan Ramaekers is valuable on this point. Ramaekers notes that any “subjectivist understanding of ... education from a Nietzschean point of view is incorrect, because it does not fit with Nietzsche’s view on the importance of being embedded in ... the cultural and historical background.” Obedience and subordination to a system of morals are not impermissible restrictions on an individual’s creative freedom because such restrictions are the “necessary determination and limitation of the conditions under which something can be conceived at all as possibility and as creative freedom.” For Nietzsche the philosopher’s creation of values “does not ... emerge out of nothing.” Ramaekers’ understanding, like my own, “is consequently at variance with any understanding that argues for a radical individualism and takes the individual to be the point of reference of all values and truths.” The necessity of embeddedness does not culminate in a total lack of freedom, however, because the “self is not constituted *permanently* by ... being embedded. Alteration, development—in short, ‘self-education’—remains possible.” Stefan Ramaekers, “Subjectivism and Beyond: On the Embeddedness of the Nietzschean Individual,” in *Nietzsche’s Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values*, 157-162.

learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance: one cannot fly into flying.”³⁹

Engagement with culture is invaluable because it potentially gives one a critical distance from the immediate and all-encompassing influence of one’s time and place. Nietzsche is insistent that the dominant cultural values of one’s today are always the greatest threat to one’s independence and philosophical development. Because of this, Nietzsche insists that “the philosopher, being *of necessity* a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and *had* to find himself, in contradiction to his today: his enemy was ever the ideal of today.”⁴⁰ Contemporary values and ideas have a pervasive influence and thus represent the greatest threat to independent thought. Nietzsche is thus the arch-enemy of the newspaper who is always engaged in attacking only those “causes that are victorious.”⁴¹

Nietzsche considers his thoughts untimely because he attempts to understand that of which his age is most proud as “a defect, infirmity and shortcoming.”⁴² He writes because of a belief he shares with Goethe that “with our virtues we also cultivate our faults,” and we should “at least realize that we suffer from” these faults.⁴³ Nietzsche was only able to overcome his age within himself and become untimely because of his

³⁹ *Zarathustra*, “On the Spirit of Gravity” 2.

⁴⁰ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 212.

⁴¹ See: *ibid.*, “Preface,” and *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am So Wise,” 7.

⁴² See: Nietzsche’s preface to “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*

“profession as a classical philologist,” which allowed him to become “a nursling of more ancient times, especially the Greek.”⁴⁴ Past ideas and values are worth studying because they provide distance from modern ideas and values and can serve as alternatives and correctives to their shortcomings that an individual is blinded to because he stands so close to them. Critical distance from the dominating influence of contemporary values creates the open space necessary in order for him to begin thinking for himself.

Since the philosophic life consists especially of self-examination and self-overcoming, and modern values and opinions are closest to us, distance from these modern ideas must first be achieved. Otherwise one has no awareness of alternative answers to fundamental questions—or even an awareness of the question itself—and one can never be philosophical. At best, one can only be ideological, and at worst, unconscious. The philosopher therefore seeks to be untimely not out of some perverse enjoyment he finds in being a contrarian and feeling superior to his contemporaries, but rather because the “present is too much with us; it directs the vision even against the philosopher’s will: and it will inevitably be reckoned too highly in the final sum.”⁴⁵ Because of this he must “put a low figure on his own time as against others, and suppress the present in his picture of life, as well as in himself.”⁴⁶ Nietzsche therefore says that a “lack of consideration for what is here and now lies at the very core of the great philosophic nature.”⁴⁷ In becoming untimely and resisting his age, the philosopher is

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” III.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 8.

“only an enemy to that element which is not truly himself, the irreconcilable antagonism of the temporal and eternal in him.”⁴⁸ Contemporary society will always contain a great many temptations and dangers it will be necessary for the individual to navigate. In order to do this, some degree of untimeliness will always be necessary. The separating of wheat from chaff, of the eternal from the temporal, is therefore an essential part of the task of culture, which removes “all the weeds and rubbish and vermin that attack the delicate shoots.”⁴⁹

Because Nietzsche believes it is possible to achieve distance from modern ideas and values, it would be strange to label him a radical historicist, or even someone who prepared the theoretical ground for radical historicism.⁵⁰ The radical historicist argues, after all, that the historical process and one's position within it inescapably dominates and conditions one's thought, and one can never escape the influence of one's time and place. Nietzsche is in important respects the very opposite of a radical historicist so defined. Not only did Nietzsche argue for the theoretical possibility of escaping the dominating

⁴⁸ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” III.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰ Werner Dannhauser argues, for instance, that while Nietzsche appears to challenge Hegelianism and “return to a pre-Hegelian viewpoint,” in actuality his critique of historicism “does not deny the validity of the essential premises of historicism.” Specifically, Nietzsche accepts the “omnipotence of history,” the “overwhelming importance of history, the determination of man's life and thought by history, and the impossibility of transcending the historical process.” Werner Dannhauser, “Friedrich Nietzsche,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, Third Edition, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 830.

influence of one's time and place, his writings and life demonstrate that as an individual he was, in important respects, in fact able to do so.⁵¹

Probably the best way in which an individual can begin to escape the influence of his time is through the study of past thought. Far from a progressive thinker who believes that past values and modes of thought are tyrannical, that man should instead concern himself with the present and future, Nietzsche argues that constraining the mind by thinking within past and alien modes of thought is essential to overcoming the prejudices of one's today as well as to the formation of a disciplined and dexterous mind. This is an important qualification of the idea that Nietzsche is almost exclusively hostile and antagonistic to past thought. Tracy Strong, for instance, argues that Nietzsche "sees our past as the source of the neuroses and psychoses besetting the present ... For Nietzsche, the problem will then be to change the person or society in such a manner that the basis of the neurosis is eliminated."⁵² While this is in some respects true, it obscures the extent to which Nietzsche saw past thought as a significant corrective of modern values and present thought.

Studying the thought of others in both the present and past helps one learn to think better oneself. One learns different habits of thought and begins training one's mind to think in different ways, just as a child learns to draw through tracing, which

⁵¹ While Thomas Brobjer argues that any thinker will always be a child of his time to some extent, he acknowledges that "Nietzsche attempted from an early age to be untimely, and he made this into a supreme condition for being a good philosopher. I take this attempt seriously and believe that he carried it through more successfully than most other major philosophers." Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 2.

⁵² Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pgs. 9-14.

trains the muscles in the hand. The mind not only learns factual details and content as it studies the thought of others, but, much more importantly, it learns habits of thought, deductive and inductive techniques, and methods of proceeding in the investigation of a question. While Nietzsche spends a great deal of time showing that past thought frequently suffered from poor methodology and unjustified presuppositions, it is clear that even such problems and mistakes were instructive to him.⁵³

Of course, past a certain point, leaning on the thought of others becomes a crutch that can lead to the atrophy of one's own mind. Though the stage of the camel is primarily a stage of apprenticeship, for all too many it becomes a final destination. Because of this, Nietzsche laments the "countless examples of natures warped and twisted by their reckless and premature devotion to science."⁵⁴ Nietzsche says that scholars "do little nowadays but thumb books—philologists, at a moderate estimate, about 200 a day."⁵⁵ While it is tempting to think of such scholars as very learned and wise, Nietzsche says this constant engagement with books actually leads these scholars to "lose entirely their capacity to think for themselves. When they don't thumb, they don't think. They *respond* to a stimulus (a thought they have read) whenever they think—in the end, they do nothing but react."⁵⁶ Such scholars, even those who begin with a "generous and free disposition," are too often "'read to ruin' in their thirties—merely

⁵³ See especially *Beyond Good and Evil*, Book I.

⁵⁴ "Schopenhauer as Educator," II.

⁵⁵ *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

matches that one has to strike to make them emit sparks—‘thoughts.’”⁵⁷ Nietzsche thus considers his own reading a “recreation,” and says that during periods when he is hard at work “you will not find me surrounded by books.”⁵⁸

It would be a mistake, of course, to suppose Nietzsche is advocating simple philistinism or a rejection of all interaction with books. Nietzsche was obviously extremely well-read, composed a great many literary works of his own, and continually recognized the debt he owed to the works of certain cultural figures and influences. Nietzsche’s periods of work are therefore followed by “periods of recreation,” during which he says “come to me, pleasant, brilliant, clever books.” These turn out to be “a small number” of books that are “*proved to me*.”⁵⁹ Rather than simply advocating either the typical scholarly life or philistinism, Nietzsche shows how extraordinarily difficult it is to achieve a balance in matters of cultural study and spiritual apprenticeship. Ultimately for Nietzsche, cultural study and engagement with books is a necessary and even essential aspect of philosophic education. But such study and apprenticeship is also dangerous and capable of being abused such that it subverts the true end of that education, freedom.

In the stage of the camel, one’s reverence naturally shifts from one’s spiritual inheritance to certain cultural figures or a science one gravitates toward on a more individual, personal level. Focused cultural study helps mitigate the feelings of loneliness and alienation one feels in embarking on one’s spiritual development. Cultural

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

examples help an individual overcome his isolation and can serve as inspiration for his own thought and action. For the man suffering isolation, Nietzsche therefore recommends surrounding “himself with the pictures of good and brave fighters such as Schopenhauer.”⁶⁰ Cultural study also helps to mitigate the disorientation that accompanies openness to the truth wherever one may find it by focusing on certain figures and fields of study. Such limits and boundaries are essential in education because of the inevitable limitations in the “*plastic power*” of any individual.⁶¹ The plastic power of an individual is its ability “to grow out of itself, transforming and assimilating everything past and alien, to heal wounds, replace what is lost and reshape broken forms out of itself.”⁶² The more plastic power an individual has, “the more of the past will he appropriate or master.”⁶³ Because all men are limited in the amount of power they have, it is necessary to set boundaries in one’s engagement with culture so that what an individual “cannot master it knows how to forget; it no longer exists, the horizon is closed and whole.” For “this is a general law: every living thing can become healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon.”⁶⁴ And herein lies the danger of youths being “whipped through all millennia,”⁶⁵ which usually leads to an easy relativism, a hatred of philosophy, or else a kind of “see-sawing between Christianity and Paganism, between a

⁶⁰ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” III.

⁶¹ “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

furtive or hypocritical approach to Christian morality and an equally shy and spiritless dallying with the antique.”⁶⁶

Though focusing on particular cultural figures can help mitigate these dangers, it leads to others, particularly a stifling dogmatism that even a proudly independent nature such as Nietzsche’s did not fully escape. In his youth, Nietzsche says he thought he would be relieved “of the dreadful and wearisome duty of educating myself: some philosopher would come at the right moment to do it for me,—some true philosopher who could be obeyed without further question, as he would be trusted more than one’s self.”⁶⁷ But that one chooses discipleship to a particular cultural figure, teacher, or field rather than others will always be to some extent arbitrary, at least initially.⁶⁸ Nietzsche therefore speaks of having become a professor and a classical philologist as if he had no real choice in the matter, almost as if these were events that simply happened to him. As he puts it, thus

it happened, for example, that one day I was a university professor—no such idea had ever entered my mind, for I was barely twenty-four years old. Thus it happened two years earlier that one day I was suddenly a philologist.⁶⁹

Nietzsche eventually came to see that many of his own initial educational choices and

⁶⁶ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” II.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ See: “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 5: “Let us assume a man working on Democritus; I always have the question at the tip of my tongue: why not Heraclitus? Or Philo? Or Bacon? Or Descartes?—and so on at random. And then: just why a philosopher? Why not a poet, an orator? And: why especially a Greek, why not an Englishman, a Turk? Is not the past large enough to find something that will not make even you appear so ridiculously arbitrary?”

⁶⁹ *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Clever,” 9.

attachments, though necessary and beneficial for his initial development, were limiting and needed to be left behind. He realized that his attachment to certain cultural figures, particularly Schopenhauer and Wagner, was jeopardizing his own individual task. He therefore speaks of having “knowingly-willfully” closed his eyes “before Schopenhauer’s blind will to morality at a time when I was already sufficiently clear-sighted about morality,” and that he deceived himself “over Richard Wagner’s incurable romanticism, as though it were a beginning and not an end.”⁷⁰ And though Nietzsche would eventually resist the undue influence of Schopenhauer over his own thought, he admits that in an important early work, the *Birth of Tragedy*, he occasionally “spoiled Dionysian premonitions with Schopenhauerian formulations.”⁷¹

The camel is therefore always in extreme danger of entering into one of two opposite states. Remaining open to everything, the soul can fall victim to perpetual disorientation and a dizzying, empty relativism. Or else, in seeking to escape this fate, it can rush into a stagnant, self-satisfied dogmatism. These dangers will prevent a potential philosopher from fully developing and attaining freedom, either by causing him to become “a dilettante, a millipede, an insect with a thousand antennae,” or else a disciple or narrow specialist who has been permanently “detained somewhere.”⁷² The latter state is especially dangerous insofar as its dogmatic arbitrariness mimics the initial state of the soul, characterized by the passive, unconscious acceptance of arbitrary values. The latter is therefore a retreat from culture and a regression of the soul, while the former can

⁷⁰ *Human, All Too Human*, Preface, Section 1.

⁷¹ *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” 6.

⁷² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 205.

ultimately lead only to dissolution or madness. If one permanently remains entirely in the stage of the camel, these dangers will always be present and one will inevitably fall victim to one or the other. This is because, though the dangers appear as opposites, in actuality they stem from a single cause: that one has remained in a state of perpetual discipleship in which one continually looks *elsewhere* for the truth.

In looking back at his own development, Nietzsche suggests that he was able to escape the limitations and dangers inherent in the stage of the camel because, even as he was most immersed in it, a greater task was developing in him before he was even yet fully aware of it. It eventually became increasingly clear to him that this stage of his life was preparatory for greater, more challenging tasks that were soon to reveal themselves to him at the proper time. Nietzsche provides an almost mystical explanation for this aspect of spiritual education, saying that for every individual with a great task, the

secret force and necessity of this task will rule among and in the individual facets of his destiny like an unconscious pregnancy—long before he has caught sight of this task itself or knows its name. Our vocation commands and disposes of us even when we do not yet know it; it is the future that regulates our today.⁷³

In this way, while “the organizing ‘idea’ that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down,” “it trains all subservient capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, ‘goal,’ ‘aim,’ or ‘meaning.’”⁷⁴ It is essential that one remain in a state of ignorance about this task until the proper time, however, since

To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong turns, the delays ... seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. All this can express a great prudence, even the

⁷³ *Human, All-Too-Human*, “1886 Preface,” 7.

⁷⁴ *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am So Clever,” 9.

supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum* [know thyself] would be the recipe for ruin.⁷⁵

In looking back on his own development, Nietzsche says that he “never even suspected what was growing in me—and one day all my capacities, suddenly ripe, *leaped forth* in their ultimate perfection.”⁷⁶ This mysterious, greatly fortuitous occurrence made it possible for Nietzsche to instill the virtues and habits of the camel within himself and then, at the proper time, to move beyond the necessary shortcomings and limitations of this stage. It allowed Nietzsche to “remain master” of his virtues rather than be mastered by them.⁷⁷ Nietzsche therefore says that it was necessary for him to have been “many things and in many places in order to be able to become one thing—to be able to attain one thing. *I had to be a scholar, too, for some time.*”⁷⁸ Nietzsche’s awareness of the limited, preparatory nature of the first metamorphosis allowed him to pass out of it when the time was right, by resigning his teaching position at Basel and beginning his critique of previous thought, even and especially the thought of the cultural figures such as Schopenhauer and Wagner, who had been most important and influential to him thus far.

Here Nietzsche is suggesting a way in which an individual can overcome the limitations involved in his initial educational choices. These choices do not necessarily involve one-way, dead-end streets. Instead, an individual can later eventually move beyond the necessary, early limitations he places upon himself and see the extent to

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 284.

⁷⁸ *Ecce Homo*, “The Untimely Ones,” 3.

which they have been a training ground, a preparation for his true task and goal. As Nietzsche says, “[w]hoever reaches his ideal transcends it *eo ipso* [along the way].”⁷⁹ But here again a tremendous difficulty becomes visible. One cannot be aware too early that these initial choices are in certain respects preparatory and temporary, or else one will not fully invest oneself in them and develop the capacities that narrowing apprenticeship can instill.

Nietzsche is frequently thought of as extolling radical individualism, the unchecked creative will, and a simple rejection of past thought. In examining the spirit’s metamorphosis into a camel, however, certain permanent and necessary characteristics of the philosophic activity and life have become visible that complicate this popular image of Nietzsche’s thought. Though these features are dangerous and susceptible to abuse, without cultural study, apprenticeship, and discipline, the spirit cannot even embark on its path towards freedom, let alone arrive at the destination.

In the stage of the camel, therefore, the soul is reverent but dissatisfied, well-loaded but with an alien weight; it has great ends in view but is pulled in so many different, contradictory directions it hardly yet knows how to make a beginning. When the spirit has reached this impasse, it can stand still and graze, turn back and rejoin the herd—or speed further into its desert and become a lion.

⁷⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 73

CHAPTER FOUR

Nietzsche as Lion

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon.

Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? “Thou shalt” is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, “I will.” “Thou shalt” lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden “thou shalt.”

Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: “All value of all things shines on me. All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more ‘I will.’” Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough?

To create new values—that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred “No” even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values—that is the most terrifying assumption for a strong reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved “thou shalt” as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “On the Three Metamorphoses”

After describing the spirit’s metamorphosis from camel to lion, Zarathustra asks, “My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough?” Zarathustra anticipates that many will resist the metamorphosis into a lion because much in the lion’s nature is troubling, dangerous, and even “terrifying.” The lion’s activity is largely defined by solitude and a war on all that he had previously loved as most “sacred.” Moreover, his critical, destructive activity does not necessarily carry any constructive, redemptive counterpart.

The lion could very well wage war upon all previous values only to find that he does not have the power to create his own values by which to live. Zarathustra does not deny, therefore, that the spirit's metamorphosis into a lion could very well be a plunge into nihilism.

Why the Lion is Necessary: An Overview

While the camel is admirable and noble in many important respects, it is necessary for the spirit to become a lion because the camel is not yet free. The camel is still governed by external duties and values that he has not freely willed himself. In becoming a camel, his reverence has shifted from his spiritual inheritance towards particular cultural figures and fields he is attracted to on a more personal level. One's early choices in matters of education and spiritual inheritance are not free in the fullest sense, however, because they are always to a certain extent arbitrary. One is not yet fully aware of the alternatives one is presented with and is lacking a standard by which to adjudicate between them because one is also lacking in self-knowledge. Because the camel is still governed by external values and duties, moreover, it is almost inevitable for him to believe these duties are categorical and apply to all men in all circumstances.

No longer satisfied following "thou shalt," the lion attempts to "conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert" by becoming self-directing, someone able to say, "I will." In the process, he moves beyond categorical notions of duty and morality and instead lives according to a more individual and nuanced morality not as susceptible to rigid formulation.

In seeking to strengthen his will and capacity for self-direction, the lion criticizes previous cultural values. He frees himself from external influences in order to create the

space necessary to develop his own thought. In criticizing especially the thoughts and values that have been most influential and even “sacred” to him up until now, the lion reveals that he is primarily engaged in *self*-critique and self-overcoming. Even in the act of critique one is still being a reactive thinker, however. The spirit must therefore go even further in creating the open space necessary for independent thought by entering into periods of solitude, which, unlike critique, does not involve contact with others. At times, one must dispense with the aid of influential figures, teachers, and works in order to see what one is capable of on one’s own.

Nietzsche is not simply an advocate of closing oneself off entirely from others, however. Instead, the periods of solitude necessary for spiritual development are temporary and make up only one aspect of the philosopher’s complex relationship to others. Solitude is not considered a goal or end in itself. Instead it is understood as a means to healthier relationships and engagement with culture in which the individual does not lose sight of himself and his own needs and task. The thoughts and works of others should always be considered a means to developing one’s own thoughts and works as one begins to articulate one’s own interpretation of nature.

That the child rather than the lion achieves the goal of “I will” suggests that the time of the lion, perhaps even more than that of the camel, is a transitional period. It is a time of experiment, skepticism, hard analysis of oneself and others, and the adoption of reverse perspectives from those one had earlier cherished.

In Nietzsche’s own development, this transitional stage consisted of a movement away from his earlier romanticism and his infatuation with figures such as Wagner and Schopenhauer. Nietzsche therefore says that the “*second passageway*” on the path to

wisdom requires shattering “the venerating heart when you are *most tightly* bound,” a critique “of everything venerated” and the “idealization of the unvenerated.”¹ In his second period works Nietzsche therefore renounces his earlier romanticism and begins to venerate the rigorous scientific empiricism he had previously considered inimical to life. It is therefore appropriate to consider his second period skepticism and scientific positivism as a reaction to his earlier romanticism, which, in the words of Karl Löwith, had become a “disappointed romanticism.”²

Ultimately, Nietzsche will borrow elements from his earlier romanticism as well as his middle-period demand for scientific rigor to arrive at what he calls gay science.³ But while Nietzsche is on the road to affirming existence without the need for romantic illusion and sentimentalism, in his middle period such affirmation is still too difficult for him to attain because he has not yet clearly articulated his own values by which to live.

From “Thou Shalt” to “I Will”

For Nietzsche and his Zarathustra spiritual development largely consists of a movement from “Thou Shalt” to “I will.” But what does this movement consist of? Why does Nietzsche criticize the idea of “Thou Shalt”? Does his embrace of willing know any limits?

¹ Quoted in: Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 23-24.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

³ Nietzsche seems to have had this ideal in mind in an early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which speculates about the possibility of an artistic Socrates. Nietzsche eventually came to understand, however, that the individual who would fulfill the promise of this ideal was not Richard Wagner but rather himself.

Because the spirit of the potential philosopher is reverent by nature, it is susceptible to remaining stuck to values and duties laid down by others, remaining in a state of perpetual discipleship as it retreats behind dogmatism of one form or another. The camel is still passively dominated by external influences, and the fact that he has at least chosen these influences himself is only a minor consolation because one's initial educational choices are always made somewhat blindly, and are therefore not free. Even in its loneliest desert, the camel is still dominated by the ideas of others and his criticisms of the group he has left behind are in accordance with these ideas rather than its own. Rather than seeking to develop his own thought and interpret nature more directly, he is satisfied with viewing nature only through the intermediary screens of the thoughts of others.

The camel is governed by external values and duties rather than his own will. Because his own will is not responsible for the formulation of his values, it is natural for him to suppose that *no* human will is responsible for them. That an individual can create his own values and “posit his own ideal and ... derive from it his own law, joys, and rights—that may well have been considered hitherto as the most outrageous human aberration and as idolatry itself.”⁴ The “central law” of any morality that seeks to be categorical is therefore a hostility towards the “impulse to have an ideal of one's own.”⁵

The camel believes in an impersonal and objective source of his morality. The supposedly objective *source* of this morality, meanwhile, leads him to believe in its universal, categorical *applicability*. The camel therefore shares the belief of those who

⁴ *Gay Science*, 143.

⁵ *Ibid.*

have not yet embarked on their spiritual education and development: that all should be made to live according to the same law.

As is well known, Nietzsche is a fierce opponent of popular morality, particularly when it insists on its categorical applicability.⁶ One might assume the reason for this opposition is his “immoralism,” his supposed desire for free expression and individuality in opposition to all constraints on the will. In fact, however, Nietzsche opposes categorical morality because of the surprising insight that any categorical morality must be too undemanding for the noblest individuals.

Because categorical morality is presumed to apply to all men in all circumstances, it must be expressed at a high level of generality. Its focus on the universal requires it to ignore particulars and context. A categorical moral code cannot easily prescribe positive, constructive actions or ways of life, moreover, because nearly everyone recognizes that it is not possible or appropriate for all men to engage in the same activities, whether physical or spiritual. Nietzsche says that Kant’s morality was naïve in demanding “of the individual actions which one desired of all men.”⁷ This is naïve not only because it is presumptuous to assume “everyone knew without further ado what mode of action would benefit the whole of mankind, that is, what actions at all are desirable,” but, more

⁶ “Fundamentally, my term *immoralist* involves two negations. For one, I negate a type of man that has so far been considered supreme: the good, the benevolent, the beneficent. And then I negate a type of morality that has become prevalent and predominant as morality itself—the morality of decadence ... In the great economy of the whole, the terrible aspects of reality ... are to an incalculable degree more necessary than that form of petty happiness which people call ‘goodness.’” *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am a Destiny,” 4.

⁷ *Human, All-Too-Human*, 25.

importantly, because of the very real possibility that “it is absolutely not desirable that all men should act in the same way.”⁸

In seeking categorical applicability, a moral code will inevitably concern itself almost exclusively with the prohibition of certain actions that undermine the stability and order of society. Its focus is on the suppression of “bad expressions as far as possible, for the sake of the general welfare—an undertaking that is strikingly similar to the police.”⁹ That the primary concern of popular, categorical morality is with the stability of society rather than the flourishing of individuals is seen further in its estimation that, rather than one’s disposition or state of soul, “expressions alone matter. Therefore the catechism can say: Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not curse! Etc. Nonsensical, however, is an imperative: ‘Be good!’ as well as, ‘Be wise!’ or, ‘Be talented!’”¹⁰ For the individual who does not engage in particularly threatening, destructive activities (such as murder, rape, or unnecessary theft) as a matter of course, simply because he is preoccupied by nobler tasks and animated by nobler sentiments and desires, such a negative moral code is largely superfluous.

Because popular, categorical morality is more concerned with the stability of society than the flourishing of the individuals within it, it is content to eradicate the passions rather than spiritualize them. The passions of individuals are a danger both to

⁸ *Ibid.* Nietzsche also criticizes any categorical morality on the grounds that they are “unreasonable in form—because they address themselves to ‘all,’ because they generalize where one must not generalize.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 198.

⁹ “On Ethics,” 1868 fragment, quoted from Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

society and the individual himself, since, as Nietzsche recognizes, all “passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity.”¹¹ If popular morality were truly concerned with the individual rather than with the stability of society, instead of counseling the castration of passions, which is “merely another acute form of stupidity,” it would seek instead to wed the passions with the spirit, the “*spiritualization* of passion” in which the passions are put into an ordered whole leading to a great task.¹² To order and control one’s passions in this sense is extremely difficult, however, and it is not to be expected that most will be successful. Therefore, popular, categorical morality is sensible in advocating the castration of passion, since this method is “instinctively chosen by those who are too weak-willed, too degenerate, to be able to impose moderation on themselves ... Radical means are indispensable only for the degenerate.”¹³ Those who are able to impose moderation on themselves are equally sensible in seeking an alternative morality, however.

The mediocrity inherent in popular, categorical morality becomes even more apparent when one considers what it demands of individuals. According to Kant’s categorical imperative, for instance, one should “act only according to that maxim whereby one can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.”¹⁴ While this sounds demanding in the sense that it forbids many actions, the imperative to act in such a way that one’s maxim can be universalized without causing catastrophic harm to

¹¹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 402.

society is actually compatible with literally thousands of activities and ways of life, and can offer no satisfactory way of adjudicating between them. There is no hierarchical principle in the categorical imperative, because ultimately, like any categorical moral code, it can only serve as a low, minimal baseline for legitimate action.

Indeed, if anything, the imperative seems most compatible with precisely the most mediocre and common activities and ways of life, insofar as these will bear universalization easiest, since they are already almost universally engaged in. According to the categorical imperative, therefore, a man who spends ninety hours a week pulling a lever on an assembly line is at least the equal of a Beethoven, and in all likelihood his superior insofar as the contributions of a typical worker are much more obviously and quantifiably necessary to the preservation and maintenance of society than the activity of even a great artist, who is not strictly necessary to society at all. The assembly line automaton is actually the ideal man and citizen according to Nietzsche's critique of Kant's morality, since the aim of this morality is precisely to transform the individual "into a mere function of the whole," a productive spoke in the wheel of society.¹⁵ The means of Kant's morality—its categorical imperative—undermine its professed end, "the strength for the highest autonomy," since in its desire for categorical status it is forced to abandon its concern for the individual in order to focus exclusively on the preservation of society.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Gay Science*, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Because of this, virtue has actually come to be understood and praised as something positively harmful for the individual. Nietzsche says that a “man’s virtues are called good” by popular morality

depending on their probable consequences not for him but for us and society: the praise of virtues has always been far from ‘selfless,’ far from ‘unegoistic.’ Otherwise one would have had to notice that virtues (like industriousness, obedience, chastity, filial piety, and justice) are usually harmful for those who possess them, being instincts that dominate them too violently ... and resist the efforts of reason to keep them in balance with their other instincts ... One praises the industrious even though they harm their eyesight or the spontaneity and freshness of their spirit.”¹⁷

This idea of the ends of morality and virtue would only be beneficial to the individual if there were a perfect correspondence between the good of the individual and what is necessary for preservation and maintenance of society, which Nietzsche denies.¹⁸ To argue for such a strict correspondence would, at the very least, require a more sophisticated idea of what a good society is than is usually articulated by popular morality. Thus, while one could consider whether it would be more useful to society for the individual to have “been less ruthless against himself and ... preserved himself longer,” popular morality “considers the other advantage—that a sacrifice has been made ... greater and of more lasting significance.”¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21

¹⁸ “[Q]uestions and cares of the public weal, renewed every day, devour a daily tribute from the capital in every citizen’s head and heart: the sum total of all these sacrifices and costs in individual energy and work is so tremendous that the political emergence of a people almost necessarily draws after it a spiritual impoverishment.” *Human, All Too Human*, 481.

¹⁹ *Gay Science*, 20.

Generally speaking, however, the good of the individual is not simply equivalent to what is good for society as the categorical imperative falsely implies. The most creative, powerful and ambitious individuals who seek to develop and unleash their full potential are always perceived as the greatest threats to others and to society, and there is actually very good reason for this. As Nietzsche says, quoting Emerson, one should beware ““when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet ... Then all things are at risk.””²⁰ Even if such individuals caused no direct harm to others or to society, there is still little guarantee that their attempt to reach their full potentiality will contribute to the maintenance and preservation of society, since one “misunderstands great human beings if one views them from the miserable perspective of some public use. That one cannot put them to any use, that in itself may belong to greatness.”²¹

Ultimately, there is no perfect correspondence between the good of the individual and the good of society because the “teleological conceptions” of the freest and most spiritual men “extend further than the well-being of a state.”²² For Nietzsche, true virtue is not one’s own impoverishment or transformation into a function of the whole, but rather one’s excellence and completion, one’s highest autonomy. For Nietzsche, as for Plato and Aristotle, moral virtues were ultimately means to a particular way of life,

²⁰ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VIII. A few lines later, Nietzsche also approvingly quotes Diogenes’ dismissal of a philosopher who was praised in his presence: ““What great result has he to show, who has so long practiced philosophy and yet has hurt nobody?””

²¹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 50.

²² “Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous.” *Zarathustra* I, “On the New Idol.”

namely, the philosophic.²³ Nietzsche says this is how philosophers should consider the ascetic ideals of morality insofar as they have anything to do with them at all.²⁴

Nietzsche does not reject the traditional virtues outright. Instead, like the ancient philosophers, he wants to keep them in balance with each other in a way necessary for one's excellence and flourishing in a particular way of life.

Nietzsche's very uncategorical morality therefore expresses the insight that not all men can or should live according to the same law. In fact, according to Nietzsche, for there to be a Beethoven at all there must be many overworked philistines who sacrifice themselves with little concern for the spiritual detriment such sacrifice entails.²⁵ The relation between a Beethoven and the typical individual is similar to that between a flower and a shrub. This hierarchical, very undemocratic notion of the differences between individuals might be thought of as potentially cruel and oppressive. One might

²³ This understanding of the instrumental nature of moral virtues is seen most clearly in Nietzsche's description of the philosopher's use for ascetic ideals in *Genealogy of Morals* III, 5-9.

²⁴ While Robert Solomon rightly notes that in Nietzsche's thought "the virtues are best understood in an extremely individual context" he goes too far in arguing that, before Nietzsche, the philosophical tradition as a whole conceived of the virtues "as social functions." The idea of the virtues as social functions even seems to be distinctively modern. Though Nietzsche is concerned primarily with the excellence and flourishing of rare individuals, it is also not true that most "of Nietzsche's distinctive virtues ... are exemplified in solitude, and, sometimes, only in solitude." Nietzsche's concern with solitude is limited by his greater concern with the attainment of freedom, which only occurs through the individual's active participation in the spiritual community of culture. In this respect as well Nietzsche does not seem to be very different from Plato. Robert C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great "Immoralist" Has to Teach Us* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 165.

²⁵ "Every enhancement of the type 'man' has so far been the work of an aristocratic society ... a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank ... and that needs slavery in some sense or other." *Beyond Good and Evil*, 257.

well ask whether Nietzsche is seriously arguing that the vast majority of individuals should be forced into a state of spiritual slavery in order for a spiritual aristocracy to be built up on their base. For Nietzsche, however, this kind of coercion is simply unnecessary and even unhelpful, because of his further insight that this state of affairs is perfectly acceptable and agreeable to everyone involved, both to the slaves and the free.²⁶ Most individuals would rather live as the typical worker than as a Beethoven. The freedom of a Beethoven is simply too demanding for most to bear, and it would seem more disagreeable, demanding, and stifling than spiritual slavery. Lacking the power for spiritual freedom, such individuals gravitate to the chains of spiritual slavery, chains that in actuality hold them up. Incredibly, in matters of the spirit, the slaves are very frequently more comfortable and content than the free. Nietzsche argues that most people are obedient by nature primarily because submission and obedience to external authorities is easier and more comfortable than the demands of independence and self-rule. This does not mean, of course, that a free man would ever willingly change places with a slave. A free man is not concerned with comfortable, petty happiness. He is instead concerned with his task, and if “we have our *why* of life, we shall get along with almost any *how*.”²⁷ As man becomes more free he “becomes more indifferent to difficulties, hardships, privation,” until he has no use for “the contemptible type of well-

²⁶ Each individual is generally led to the role in society and culture for which he is suited through his “pleasure in self-determination.” *Human, All Too Human*, 438.

²⁷ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Maxims and Arrows,” 12.

being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, and other democrats. The free man is a warrior.”²⁸

Nietzsche goes so far as to say that “the appearance of one who commands unconditionally strikes” most men “as an immense comfort and salvation from a gradually intolerable pressure, as was last attested in a major way by the effect of Napoleon’s appearance.”²⁹ Thus, true spiritual commanders and legislators, unless they are vulgar and crude, do not need to enforce their vision through violent, radical measures. Natural slaves and natural masters have a reciprocal relationship, and, indeed, the very same social conditions that contribute to the development of one also tend to contribute to the rise of the other.³⁰

For Nietzsche, any categorical morality is essentially a doctrine of abstinence only. Like Socrates’ daimonion it is content to only check actions and never truly demand them. But not all men are satisfied simply with doing no harm. Some seek with all their strength to do something positive, to create something great and beautiful in the world—and of themselves most of all. For these men, categorical codes of conduct can offer little guidance. Such individuals are inevitably forgotten or ignored by such codes, because they must smooth over differences between men, and in doing so, it is always easier to ignore the rare exceptions and speak instead to the typical case. Nietzsche’s

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 38.

²⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 199.

³⁰ “But while the democratization of Europe leads to the production of a type that is prepared for *slavery* in the subtlest sense, in single, exceptional cases the *strong* human being will have to turn out stronger and richer than perhaps ever before—thanks to the absence of prejudice from his training, thanks to the tremendous manifoldness of practice, art, and mask.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 242.

insight that categorical moral codes must ignore the most spiritual and creative natures, and his determination to fill this gap by providing a record of his own development, is, more than anything else, what seems to have been responsible for attracting artists and philosophers to his thought again and again. Nietzsche is one of the few major philosophers since the ancients to speak directly to the most exceptional natures and to demonstrate that his primary concern is for their unique needs, development, and tasks.

For all these reasons, the lion begins to move beyond the camel's understanding of morality. The lion distinguishes between the vague, categorical commands issued from outside ("Thou shalt") and the more individual, nuanced, and positive commands issued by himself, commands that are more consistent with his experiences and more appropriate for his needs and task ("I will"). For the lion, only the latter form of command is characteristic of self-legislation and true freedom—and thus consistent with the true ends of morality itself. The lion therefore seeks to "conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert."

Nietzsche therefore affirms something closer to what he calls an artist's morality.³¹ This kind of morality is more personal and particular in its applicability than categorical morality, but its particularity allows it to be more nuanced and demanding. In a crucial section of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche further describes this understanding of morality.

By doing we forego.— At bottom I abhor all those moralities which say: "Do not do this! Renounce! Overcome yourself!" But I am well disposed toward those moralities which goad me to do something and do it again, from morning till evening, and then to dream of it at night, and to think of nothing except doing this *well*, as well as *I* alone can do it. When one lives like that, one thing after another

³¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 188.

drops off. Without hatred or aversion one sees this take its leave today and that tomorrow, like yellow leaves that any slight stirring of the air takes off a tree. He may not even notice that it takes its leave; for his eye is riveted to his goal – forward, not sideward, backward, downward. What we do should determine what we forego; by doing we forego – that is how I like it, that is my *placitum*. But I do not wish to strive with open eyes for my own impoverishment; I do not like negative virtues – virtues whose very essence it is to negate and deny oneself something.³²

For the individual able to say “I will,” duty is no longer an external burden, something that constrains desire, keeping it within acceptable boundaries in order to render it safe for others and society. Instead, for such a man, duty and desire begin to coincide in his will. In Nietzsche’s preferred form of morality, freedom and necessity collapse into each other. This does not mean that he simply murders his conscience and convinces himself that his basest desires are in fact his duties. In passing through the stage of the camel, the spirit has already begun to refine its basest desires and elevate itself above them. The lion is not base as a matter of course because he is riveted to his goal and there is still so much of the noble, reverent camel in him that first caused him to set his sights above more typical, vulgar goals and assertions of power. The spirit’s metamorphosis into a lion does not represent a retreat from the noble and reverent aims of the camel, therefore. Instead, it represents only the movement beyond the relatively crude means employed by the camel in order to achieve his high ends. The lion no longer has the same need he had as a camel to chastise himself with notions of external, categorical duty. He now understands his former commitment to these notions to have been a necessary pedagogical tool and training device in his early education. Rather than external

³² *Gay Science*, 304.

authorities, the lion is instead beginning to be governed by his very personal spiritual task, and in pursuit of this task he lets much else fall away.

This helps to explain why Nietzsche, the great “immoralist,” lived more ascetically than the vast majority of priests, avoiding alcohol entirely, and at one point proudly presenting himself as a “man over forty-four who [could] say that he never strove for *honors*, for *women*, for *money*!”³³ Such an individual does not have to constantly chastise his will with notions of categorical duty because he does not feel the same attraction to baser, more potentially harmful things that most people do. He is instead riveted to his more spiritual ends and tasks that are incomprehensible to most people and misunderstood by them. Indeed,

the vast majority of things that interest and attract choosier and more refined tastes and every higher nature seem to the average man totally ‘uninteresting’; and when he nevertheless notices a devotion to such matters he calls it ‘disinteresse’ and wonders how it is possible to act ‘without interest.’³⁴

The “naked truth,” however, is that “the ‘disinterested’ action is an *exceedingly* interesting and interested action” to one with a higher, more spiritual nature.³⁵

Lion on the Prowl: Critique and Solitude

The goal the lion has set for itself is to move from “Thou shalt” to “I will.” He begins to move towards this goal through his criticism of past values, experimentation with alternative perspectives and values, and embrace of solitude.

³³ *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am So Clever,” 9.

³⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 220.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

One of the first things most readers of Nietzsche will notice is his biting humor and attitude of mocking irreverence towards some of the most influential figures and movements in world history. Nietzsche took pains to present himself as someone not afraid to sound out and topple idols, even and especially those idols most respected and revered.³⁶ Why he so frequently adopted such a combative style is a difficult and complicated question.

One could argue that Nietzsche increasingly turned to immoderate criticism and wild hyperbole out of increasing frustration with the lack of attention his works were receiving. One could also argue that Nietzsche generally had little respect for the views of others and believed he had essentially nothing to learn from them. According to this possible explanation, Nietzsche may have found it increasingly necessary to close himself off from external thought and influences, which could only be temptations and distractions from his own personal task and activity. It is in fact possible to observe in accounts of Nietzsche's life a movement towards increasing isolation and loneliness in which he grew increasingly distant from his mother and sister, retired early from his position as a classical philologist at the University of Basel, alienated many of his friends, mercilessly criticized earlier cultural influences, and finally began to understand and present himself as an opponent of German culture and an alternative to the entire Western

³⁶ For clear examples of this tendency see the preface to *Twilight of the Idols*: "There are more idols than realities in the world ... This little essay is a great declaration of war; and regarding the sounding out of the idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but eternal idols, which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork." The following statement of Zarathustra is also apt: "O my brothers, am I cruel? But I say: what is falling, we should still push. Everything today falls and decays: who would check it? But I—I even want to push it." *Zarathustra* III, "On the Old and the New Tablets," 20.

philosophical tradition. One could also argue that as Nietzsche's mind slipped into insanity it lost much of the caution and moderation of his earlier assessments of himself, his relation to others, and his place in history.

Each of these arguments has a certain degree of plausibility and it would therefore be unwise to discount any of them outright. Nonetheless, it is possible to formulate an alternative explanation for Nietzsche's critical attitude and style that does not rest content to simply attribute it to desperation, delusion, or oncoming insanity. Instead, this troubling aspect in Nietzsche's works can be explained in large part with reference to Zarathustra's speech on the three metamorphoses.

Nietzsche's critical, combative style represents his spirit's metamorphosis into a lion. In seeking to strengthen his will and his capacity for self-direction, Nietzsche says the lion must critique and combat external ideas and values in order to create the space needed for him to begin develop his own thought.³⁷ At least since the time of Plato,

³⁷ This is one reason Nietzsche seems to have employed such a style. I believe other reasons include: 1. Nietzsche's distaste for philosophy as a pious pose. He considered such pious posing overly self-satisfied and believed it contributed to making philosophy look weak and contemptible. He thus stresses (and perhaps overstresses) the dangerous and destructive elements in the philosophic activity. 2. He is looking for readers who are daring and bold, mocking and exuberant, who are unafraid of sounding out idols. 3. He is obviously extremely passionate about what he is writing about. He is not writing in a spirit of disinterested speculation; instead he feels great anxiety over the future of man and the future of great individuals. Nietzsche's passion is one of the things that he probably rightly calculated would draw especially the young to him in the future. 4. He was simply having fun. Before taking Nietzsche's style and the various controversial statements he makes too seriously, one should keep in mind Nietzsche's praise of laughter and gaiety. Nietzsche's criticisms of others are usually very fun to read, and, we should expect, were fun for him to write. Nietzsche's tone is misunderstood if one completely overlooks the humorous element in it. Incidentally, Nietzsche seems to have understood that this tone would be very rhetorically effective. Zarathustra therefore remarks in the section "On Reading and Writing" that not "by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!"

philosophers and artists have always been competitive with one another. As Nietzsche puts it “[p]hilosophy after the fashion of Plato might rather be defined as an erotic contest.”³⁸ This is one of the spurs to their greatness, since “without envy, jealousy, and ambition in the contest, the Hellenic city, like the Hellenic man, degenerates.”³⁹ Though such contests are, in part, a matter of vanity, they are much more than this. The contest is essential to the philosophic and artistic activity because it is essential to the securing of independence and the development of freedom. In such contests,

Independence of the soul!—that is at stake here. No sacrifice can be too great for that: one must be capable of sacrificing one’s dearest friend for it, even if he should also be the most glorious human being, an ornament to the world, a genius without peer.⁴⁰

In considering Nietzsche’s occasionally brutal attacks on figures such as Socrates, Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer, one should keep in mind his statement about Hegel and Schopenhauer being “two hostile brother geniuses in philosophy who ... wronged each other as only brothers wrong each other.”⁴¹ In conducting his critique of past thinkers, it is likely that Nietzsche saw himself as acting as philosophers have always acted and as they must act, and therefore as acting perfectly within the philosophic tradition rather than outside of it.

Unlike the camel, however, the lion does not conduct his critiques in accordance with the thoughts and values of particular cultural figures and movements that are more

³⁸ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 23.

³⁹ “Homer’s Contest,” 1872 fragment, quoted in Kaufmann, *Portable Nietzsche*, 39.

⁴⁰ *Gay Science*, 98.

⁴¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 252.

agreeable to him. Instead, the lion critiques especially the figures and fields that have been most influential to him up until now, precisely because these are closest to him and have shaped him most thoroughly.⁴² Nietzsche therefore says that part of the second metamorphosis on the path to wisdom involves the “idealization of the unvenerated.”⁴³ In both cases the lion reveals that he is engaged primarily in self-critique and self-overcoming. In an extremely insightful passage, Nietzsche says the lion

will destroy his happiness on earth, he must be an enemy to the men he loves and the institutions in which he grew up, he must spare neither person nor thing, however it may hurt him, he will be misunderstood and thought an ally of forces that he abhors, in his search for righteousness he will seem unrighteous by human standards.⁴⁴

This fact allows one to better understand Nietzsche’s complex relationship to figures such as Socrates, Schopenhauer, and Wagner, who were extremely influential to him, but he nevertheless subjected to merciless critique. Nietzsche has to fight battles against these men because he is so close to them, and the philosophic attitude and way of life demands self-examination and self-critique above all else.⁴⁵ Those who point to Nietzsche’s

⁴² “You have served the people and the superstition of the people, all you famous wise men—and *not* truth ... And now I should wish, you famous wise men, that you would at long last throw off the lion’s skin completely. The skin of the beast of prey, mottled, and the man of those who search, seek, and conquer ... Oh, to make me believe in your ‘truthfulness’ you would first have to break your revering will. Truthful I call him who goes into godless deserts, having broken his revering heart. In the yellow sands, burned by the sun, he squints thirstily at the islands abounding in wells, where living things rest under dark wells. Yet his thirst does not persuade him to become like these, dwelling in comfort; for where there are oases there are also idols.” *Zarathustra* II, “On the Famous Wise Men.”

⁴³ Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 24.

⁴⁴ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” IV.

⁴⁵ In an 1875 fragment Nietzsche wrote that Socrates was “so close” to him that “almost always” he had to “fight a fight against him.” Quoted in Walter Kaufmann,

critical statements as examples of his closed-mindedness and arrogance therefore miss the important sense in which, through criticizing others, Nietzsche is criticizing himself, or at least certain tendencies he found within himself. When critique is conducted in this manner, the external, critiqued subject serves as a microscope into one's own spirit that allows it to better see, understand, and dissect itself. This manner of proceeding is extremely helpful in one's attempt to gain self-knowledge since it is obviously easier and much more pleasant to find faults or problematic tendencies in others rather than in oneself.

One might still very reasonably ask, however, why Nietzsche's stance towards cultural figures and external thought is necessarily *so* critical and so often full of what appears to be arrogant disdain and ridicule. Whether we interpret the reasons behind his style and attitude in a more positive or negative light, this style obviously carries significant dangers of which a reader should be aware in order to avoid falling victim to them. Perhaps the greatest danger is that it frequently gives the impression that Nietzsche and his readers have nothing to learn—not only from their contemporaries, but even from the greatest minds in history. Indeed, Nietzsche often goes far in implying that with him history begins anew, that all old tablets are broken and completely new values created with the birth of his *overman*.⁴⁶ The great danger in this attitude is that it could very conceivably lead to a contemptible self-satisfaction, spiritual stagnation, and a

Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, Fourth Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 398.

⁴⁶ “It is my fate that I have to be the first *decent* human being; that I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia.— I was the first to *discover* the truth by being the first to experience lies as lies—smelling them out.” *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am a Destiny,” 1.

closing oneself off from all meaningful communication and shared experience with others. Since such a state would make self-knowledge, self-critique, and self-overcoming impossible, it would make one incapable of continuing on one's philosophic education. Thus, whatever benefits it may provide, Nietzsche's attitude is potentially a dangerous temptation for himself and his readers.

It is therefore easy to consider Nietzsche's critical style as an expression of his vanity and arrogance. Perhaps anticipating this objection to his style, however, Nietzsche reminds us that all too often the "vanity of others offends our taste only when it offends our vanity."⁴⁷ In other words, Nietzsche is quite aware that his style will be offensive to modern man, who demands humility and self-effacement above all else.

Humility is a useful and noble virtue, and it should be esteemed when it prevents one from developing false opinions about oneself, leading to a miserable, stagnant, self-satisfaction and contentment with one's flawed self. But when humility is held up and strictly enforced as the chief virtue of the age, it has precisely the opposite effect and intention: to make all individuals appear lower and smaller so that each individual can rest content with himself as he is rather than strive for any ideal of what he can and should be. Such humility is enforced contentment with mediocrity and the demand that no one disturb this contentment by claiming greater tasks and rights for oneself. Pushed to its extreme, humility comes full circle and leads to precisely the same negative spiritual state as extreme arrogance: a contemptible—because wholly unjustified—contentment with oneself. Nietzsche sought to achieve a higher and more difficult balance here, as elsewhere. According to Aristotle, the arrogant man claims more for

⁴⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 176.

himself than he deserves. Nietzsche undoubtedly claims very much for himself, but before one rushes to the judgment that he is simply arrogant or vain one must recall that whatever else Nietzsche was, he was certainly one who challenged himself and demanded greatness, and, in most important respects, his awareness of his character and destiny was in fact remarkable.⁴⁸

Nietzsche is obviously frequently critical of other thinkers. He also occasionally praises and shows deep gratitude to others. Thus, Nietzsche can say that he has criticized like no man has criticized before and is still the very opposite of a no-saying spirit.⁴⁹ This is not to deny the very real possibility that Nietzsche often goes too far in his mocking, dismissive attitude and that his style is a dangerous temptation, at least to his readers if not to himself. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from his example both positively and negatively if one does not fall into the trap of attributing to Nietzsche a straightforward stance towards cultural influences and external thought. Instead, it is important to begin by noting that Nietzsche's relationship to external thought is above all else complicated, and this relationship is one that he spent a great deal of time thinking about and defending with compelling reasons.

Critique is destructive and negative with regard to external influences, while solitude appears only neutral. Solitude is nonetheless a more extreme means to independence, because, while critique at least involves contact with others, solitude does

⁴⁸ "I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous—a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite." *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny," 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 6.

not. In criticizing external thought one is still being a reactive thinker, a match “that one has to strike to make them emit sparks—‘thoughts.’”⁵⁰ If the spirit seeks to be free, it must go even further in creating the open space necessary for independent thought. Nietzsche therefore says that the spirit must climb high mountains and enter into periods of solitude. At certain times, it must dispense with the aid of influential figures, teachers, books, and friends so that it can see what it is capable of on its own and begin to arrive at its own interpretation of nature.⁵¹

Nietzsche is therefore wary of external influences on his thought. This explains his attitude towards books, which must strike most educated people as very strange.

In my case, every kind of reading belongs among my recreations—hence among the things that liberate me from myself, that allow me to walk about in strange sciences and souls—that I no longer take seriously. Reading is precisely my recreation from my own seriousness. During periods when I am hard at work you will not find me surrounded by books: I’d beware of letting anyone near me talk, much less think. And that is what reading would mean ... One must avoid chance and outside stimuli as much as possible; a kind of walling oneself in belongs among the foremost instinctive precautions of spiritual pregnancy. Should I permit an *alien* thought to scale the wall secretly?—and that is what reading would mean ... The periods of work and fertility are followed by periods of recreation: come to me, pleasant, brilliant, clever books!⁵²

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, “Why I am So Clever,” 8

⁵¹ Another reason solitude is necessary is as a kind of self-defense mechanism for one who feels such great anxiety and despair over how most people waste their potential. One seeks solitude to avoid the many dispiriting elements in life. Nietzsche therefore says the “more a psychologist—a born and inevitable psychologist and unriddler of souls—applies himself to the more exquisite cases and human beings, the greater becomes the danger that he might suffocate of pity. He *needs* hardness and cheerfulness more than anyone else. For the corruption, the destruction, of the higher men is the rule: it is terrible to have such a rule before one’s eyes.” *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, “The Psychologist Speaks Up,” 1.

⁵² *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am So Clever,” 3.

It was only after Nietzsche's health had "put an end to all bookwormishness" that his "nethermost self which had, as it were, been buried and grown silent under the continual pressure of having to listen to other selves (and that is after all what reading means) awakened slowly, shyly, dubiously—but eventually it spoke again."⁵³

If one remains in a state of passive deference to external thought, always consulting the thought of others at every turn, one will become dizzy and paralyzed and will of necessity have to take refuge behind dogmatism of one form or another. The only way out of this is to seek to become creative and constructive oneself and to philosophize in accordance with one's own experiences, as limited and particular as these will of necessity be. While one's ideas will be necessarily limited and particular, in important senses they will not be arbitrary, because they will correspond to one's own experiences, needs, and task. Nietzsche is seeking a more immediate confrontation with nature and existence that is more typically thought of as poetic or artistic than scholarly.

When Nietzsche counsels solitude from books, people, and music—in short, from culture—such solitude must be understood as temporary and instrumental. The purpose of solitude is to enable an individual to better appreciate and make use of that which he temporarily distances himself from. In this way, if one

renounces something thoroughly and for a long time and then accidentally encounters it again, one may almost think that one has discovered it—and how much happiness there is in discovery! Let us be wiser than the serpents who lie too long in the same sunlight."⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*, "Human All-Too-Human," 4.

⁵⁴ *Gay Science*, 165.

This can be seen through the example of music. If one does not engage in periods of solitude from music, through over-saturation in it one tends no longer to hear it at all, or else to abuse it as a stimulant or narcotic.⁵⁵ His need for temporary isolation from people, meanwhile, is necessitated by his strong feelings of pity for others and the powerful anxiety this causes him.⁵⁶ Similarly, his need for solitude from books and cultural influences is necessitated by his earlier over-saturation in them.

Nietzsche is attempting to articulate a healthier way in which an individual can engage with culture without sacrificing one's capacity for independent, creative thought and one's own experiences, needs, and task. Though it is clearly impossible—and undesirable—to try to divorce oneself entirely from the opinions and views of others, those views should be used as a means to the development of one's own thoughts and works—to one's own more direct interpretation of nature. In an early work, Nietzsche therefore argues that a philosopher is “not only a great thinker, but also a real man” and a scholar or savant cannot be a real man because he “lets conceptions, opinions, events, books come between himself and things.”⁵⁷ Such a scholar

will never see anything at once, and never be himself a thing to ‘be seen at once’ though both these powers should be in the philosopher, as he must take most of his doctrine from himself and be himself the copy and compendium of the whole

⁵⁵ Nietzsche criticizes those who need and use Wagner's music “as an *opiate*: they forget themselves, they are rid of themselves for a moment.—What am I saying? For *five or six hours!*” *Ecce Homo*, “Human All-Too-Human,” 3. Elsewhere Nietzsche says that all most people really desire of art is that it should “scare away their discontent, boredom and uneasy conscience for moments or hours at a time.” *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, 170.

⁵⁶ Pity for the higher man is therefore Zarathustra's greatest danger and “final sin.” *Zarathustra* IV, “The Cry of Distress.”

⁵⁷ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VII.

world. If a man look at himself through a veil of other people's opinions, no wonder he sees nothing but—those opinions.⁵⁸

Nietzsche therefore says that for a true philosopher like Schopenhauer, someone who knew “men rather than books,” everything he “gained later from life and books, from all the realms of knowledge, was only a means of colour and expression to him.”⁵⁹

While what Nietzsche is counseling here will appear to many as almost self-evident, it is all the more surprising how contrary it is to the practice and activity of most highly educated people who give themselves so little time to develop their own thought and let it mature. For Nietzsche, periods of solitude are conducive to leisure, something that especially the most highly educated and gifted individuals are frequently lacking. Even those who are “active as officials, businessmen, scholars,” are “generally wanting in the higher activity: I mean that of the individual.”⁶⁰ In this activity “they are lazy. As at all times, so now too, men are divided into the slaves and the free; for he who does not have two-thirds of his day to himself is a slave, let him be what he may otherwise.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VI-VII.

⁶⁰ *Human, All Too Human*, 283.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Also see *Gay Science*, 329: “More and more, *work* enlists all good conscience on its side; the desire for joy already calls itself a ‘need to recuperate’ and is beginning to be ashamed of itself. ‘One owes it to one’s health’—that is what people say when they are caught on an excursion into the country. Soon we may well reach the point where people can no longer give in to the desire for a *vita contemplativa* (that is, taking a walk with ideas and friends) without self-contempt and a bad conscience. Well, formerly it was the other way around: it was work that was afflicted with the bad conscience. A person of good family used to conceal the fact that he was working if need compelled him to work. Slaves used to work, oppressed by the feeling that they were doing something contemptible: ‘doing’ itself was contemptible. ‘Nobility and honor are attached solely to otium [leisure] and bellum [war],’ that was the ancient prejudice.”

The professed aim of scholarship is to faithfully uncover the thoughts of others rather than use these thoughts as a means to develop one's own. This aim is not ignoble. Scholarship is a necessary and highly beneficial activity worthy of great respect. But scholarship and science "are merely preconditions" of the philosopher's task.⁶² The scholar and objective scientist is properly "an instrument" who "belongs in the hand of one more powerful," the philosopher.⁶³ For Nietzsche, the danger is always great that the masterly task of philosophy will be mistaken for and forced to present itself as knowledge of "the history of philosophy."⁶⁴

By gaining one's own perspective on existence one will have earned a standard by which to judge, order, and appropriate the work of others without falling into a dizzying relativism and confusion—or else needing the prop of dogmatism. One is also able to let fall away what does not concern one, those "questions that are none."⁶⁵ This is necessary because for finite human beings, "superfluous excess is the enemy of the necessary."⁶⁶

Until one achieves such a perspective, the thought of others will not be heard,⁶⁷ or in any event cannot be tested and measured against anything, so that one is led to a

⁶² See: *Beyond Good and Evil*, "We Scholars," particularly 211.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁴ "Schopenhauer as Educator," VIII

⁶⁵ *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Clever," 1.

⁶⁶ "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life," Preface.

⁶⁷ "Ultimately, nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear. Now let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience—that it is the first language for a new series of experiences. In that case, simply nothing will be heard,

passive deference and acceptance of all thought and becomes open to everything, even to what is contradictory. An individual cannot truly estimate or appreciate the thought of others until he attempts to think for himself, just as trying to write makes a person a better reader. The more an individual thinks and experiences himself, the more he can gain from reading the thoughts and experiences of others in books.

One's own hard-earned perspective should be a tall rock jutting out proudly into the ocean of becoming. Of course, in the face of a steady and constant tide, this rock will be molded and change. But it is not a sandcastle that is leveled by the first high-tide of a contradictory impression or thought. If one wave can upset everything, one is doomed to be tossed in all directions, until one either drowns or is forced to grasp hold of the first life-preserver.

Ultimately, philosophy is the direct and honest confrontation with nature. While one's more direct study of nature will also be an interpretation, it will at least be consistent with one's own experiences and needs and therefore will not be arbitrary—even though it will be objectively limited. But limitation is simply inescapable; in certain essential respects to be human *is* to be limited. At a certain point, a human being must make peace with the limitations of his experience and thought—though, of course, not

but there will be the acoustic illusion that where nothing is heard, nothing is there.” Ecce Homo, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” 1. Up to a point this seems true, but it is important not to take this statement too far. In a sense one can of course learn new insights and habits of thought from books, and in immersing oneself in a writer's works one learns to experience reality in a different way, to notice new things in one's own experience of life. But the process should be very gradual. One shouldn't simply give oneself over to another thinker, suspending one's own judgment and perceptive powers. Still, if gradual learning was not possible at all, one could never get anything out of another than what one already know. Nietzsche's testament to the influence of figures such as Schopenhauer, Wagner, Socrates, Heraclitus, Emerson, Dostoevsky and many others over his own thought reveals the possibility of education through books.

before he has to. The attempt to escape one's fundamental limitation, the unwillingness to say "My judgment is *my* judgment": no one else is easily entitled to it" is precisely what leads to dogmatism or disorientation.⁶⁸

Looked at through the frame of the three metamorphoses, one can see quite clearly how Nietzsche was able to claim that the critical, No-saying, even alienating tendencies of his thought are in the service of his positive, affirmative goals. This explains Nietzsche's perhaps surprising estimation of his style as "*affirmative*" in that it "deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means, only involuntarily."⁶⁹ Nietzsche obviously expects that most people will overlook the real motive behind his style, however. "What does the man of renunciation do?" Nietzsche asks,

He strives for a higher world, he wants to fly further and higher than all men of affirmation—he throws away much that would encumber his flight, including not a little that he esteems and likes; he sacrifices it to his desire for the heights. This sacrificing, this throwing away, however, is precisely what alone becomes visible and leads people to call him the man of renunciation."⁷⁰

In short, he engages in criticism and solitude in order to arrive at his own more direct interpretation of nature, and he must do this because it is an essential aspect of what it means to be free.

⁶⁸ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 43.

⁶⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans Lack," 6.

⁷⁰ *Gay Science*, 27.

The Possibility of Philosophy

Given the focus of my investigation, it is not possible for me to go into a full account of Nietzsche's epistemology.⁷¹ It is necessary for me to say something about it, however, in order to meet an obvious objection to my argument: that what I am describing as the stage of the lion—in which the prospective philosopher begins to interpret nature himself rather than rest satisfied with the interpretations of others—is simply not possible for Nietzsche, because Nietzsche ultimately does not believe truth exists or can be attained.

Nietzsche is sometimes portrayed as a “skeptic” without much clarification as to what exactly is meant by this term. Significantly, Nietzsche distinguishes between at least two different kinds of skepticism. The first he calls a skepticism of weakness. This is contrasted negatively with his preferred skepticism of strength.

Skepticism born of weakness denies the intellect the right to answer or even seriously consider the great questions and problems of life. This type of skeptic, “frightened all too easily,” “likes to treat his virtue to a feast of noble abstinence, say, by repeating Montaigne's ‘What do I know?’ or Socrates' ‘I know that I know nothing.’ Or: ‘Here I don't trust myself, here no door is open to me.’”⁷² Nietzsche considered this kind of skepticism to be “the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in ordinary language is called nervous exhaustion and sickliness” in which

⁷¹ Book-length arguments that better explain and defend the general view of Nietzsche's epistemology and skepticism offered in this section include Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Tsarina Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁷² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 208.

what “becomes sickest and degenerates most ... is the *will*.”⁷³ This kind of skepticism, which he rejected, is philosophy

reduced to ‘theory of knowledge,’ in fact no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence—a philosophy that never gets beyond the threshold and takes pains to *deny* itself the right to enter—that is philosophy in its last throes, an end, an agony, something inspiring pity. How could such a philosophy—*dominate!*⁷⁴

A better term for Nietzsche’s approach is “perspectivism,” but Nietzsche says his perspectivism is not really an epistemological position at all, at least in any usual sense.⁷⁵ Instead, it is a way around what he considered to be the rigid, ascetic nature of modern epistemology. Nietzsche says that

Deeply mistrustful of the dogmas of epistemology, I loved to look now out of this window, now out of that; I guarded against settling down with any of these dogmas, considered them harmful—and finally: is it likely that a tool is *able* to criticize its own fitness?—What I noticed was rather that no epistemological skepticism or dogmatism had ever arisen free from ulterior motives.⁷⁶

It seems likely to me that he would have considered the later, radically skeptical postmodernist and deconstructionist movements to be extensions of this skepticism of weakness and intellectual abstinence.⁷⁷ Because of the complexity of Nietzsche’s views on reason and truth, one should be generally dubious of categorical, vague statements that Nietzsche rejected reason or truth.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* ., 204

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Will to Power*, 410.

⁷⁷ Ken Gemes therefore argues that postmodernists “are nearer Nietzsche’s idea of the Last Man than his idea of the Overman.” Gemes, “Postmodernism’s Use and Abuse of Nietzsche” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62.2, 2001, 337.

Nietzsche's preferred skepticism is a "stronger type of skepticism."⁷⁸ He describes it as one that "despises and nevertheless seizes; it undermines and takes possession; it does not believe but does not lose itself in the process; it gives the spirit dangerous freedom, but is severe on the heart."⁷⁹ This skepticism is best understood as the tough scientific empiricism of the kind exhibited by "the great German philologists and critical historians" in their "critical and historical mistrust" and their anti-romantic orientation.⁸⁰ This virile skepticism is seen in "an intrepid eye," "the courage and hardness of analysis," and "the tough will to undertake dangerous journeys."⁸¹ Nietzsche's idea of skepticism of strength is therefore closely related to what he called, in a later preface to the *Birth of Tragedy*, "pessimism of *strength*." Pessimism of strength is an "intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence."⁸² Weakness, conversely, often manifests itself both in the need for beautiful illusion and self-deception as well as in the spiritual exhaustion he saw as inherent in all doctrines of skepticism of weakness and intellectual abstinence.

Nietzsche very famously denies the reality of permanent, universal, metaphysical Truth, but he nonetheless believes that truths—true relational statements that pay regard to perspective—exist and are accessible by the human mind. Maudemarie Clark

⁷⁸ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 209.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Birth of Tragedy*, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 1.

convincingly argues that while Nietzsche rejects the idea of truth as correspondence to a metaphysical thing-in-itself, he does not reject rationality or any idea of truth itself.⁸³ For Nietzsche, “our beliefs do fail to correspond to things-in-themselves, but ... since the whole idea of such things is a contradiction in terms, we cannot consider our knowledge limited or devalued by this ‘failure.’”⁸⁴ Since the idea of a thing-in-itself is contradictory because “there is no look things have from no perspective,” the “perspectival character of knowledge places no limit whatsoever on our cognitive capacities.”⁸⁵ Just as “creative power is not limited by the inability to make a square triangle, cognitive power is not limited by the inability to have nonperspectival knowledge.”⁸⁶ It is in fact possible for an individual to make his way in the world and gain a great deal of knowledge about reality as it presents itself to the human mind. For Doyle, the idea that “our perspectival knowledge is cut off from the world entails a contentless view of the world as something divorced from all point of view.”⁸⁷ Nietzsche maintains instead that “our perspectives are always perspective *in* rather than *on* the world, having reality in view to varying degrees.”⁸⁸ As Tsarina Doyle notes, Nietzsche’s “claim that knowledge is perspectival is ... an enabling rather than a limiting thesis.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 21.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 122.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

But in order to acquire such knowledge and avoid common mistakes in the pursuit of it, one must proceed with caution. Even though our perspectives sometimes simplify the complexity of reality, it is possible, “through careful and rigorous analysis, strive towards achieving more refined accounts of the nature of things.”⁹⁰ This is why in Nietzsche’s account of his own skepticism he insists on “discipline and every habit that is conducive to cleanliness and severity in matters of the spirit.”⁹¹ Alerting his readers to these many common mistakes and dangers is, as I understand it, the primary purpose of Nietzsche’s skeptical writings. Nietzsche wants to lead his readers to think more carefully, rigorously, and scientifically, not to give them reasons to give up and rest content with whatever illusions they wish to arbitrarily cling to. Nietzsche considered such a wish to be the expression of weakness, cowardice, and spiritual lethargy.

Nietzsche is clear that given the character of reality, the human mind, and their interplay, philosophic inquiry must recognize perspective and move forward in a spirit of experimentation, turning questions around in one’s mind and looking at them from new and unexpected angles.

Because Nietzsche’s preferred form of skepticism is not a doctrine of intellectual abstinence, holding to it does not bar one from pursuing the great questions of life. It also does not close oneself off from engagement with the answers to these questions given by others. Indeed, according to Maudemarie Clark, while Nietzsche’s perspectivism and rejection of the thing-in-itself does not entail that our perspectives are false, it does entail “the thesis of radical corrigibility or revisability. If we deny that our

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 210.

beliefs possess an absolute or neutral foundation, we must admit that they could be false, or that we may have reason to revise them in the future.”⁹² Nietzsche’s perspectivism does not deny “an important sense in which our capacity for truth is limited, namely, that there are always more truths than any human being can know. We are, after all, finite creatures with a limited amount of time to discover truths.”⁹³ It is therefore essential for the lion to remain open to the perspectives of others even if he will ultimately be engaged in criticizing them. The lion’s criticisms are not conducted in a spirit of arbitrary willfulness, moreover, but rather in light of his honest understanding of nature.

Will to Power

The lion’s thought does not remain merely critical or experimental, therefore. Criticism cannot be conducted without some idea of the truth—even if dimly conceived initially. Nietzsche’s critical, destructive activity therefore culminated in a comprehensive theory about the nature of existence. Nietzsche calls this theory the will to power.⁹⁴ While Nietzsche admits that the will to power is a kind of thought experiment that can probably be pushed to absurdity, he obviously believes it is better

⁹² Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 131.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁴ Kaufmann notes that the “will to power did not spring from Nietzsche’s head full grown. There is no point in his writings where it suddenly appears as a surprising inspiration.” Though the idea “makes its first appearance in the notes of the late eighteen-seventies ... no published work refers to it by name before its proclamation by Zarathustra.” Kaufmann surmises that Nietzsche, proceeding “unsystematically and considering each problem on its own merits, without a theory to prove or an ax to grind ... reverts now and then to explanations in terms of what he was later to call a will to power,” which he thought of as a psychological drive in terms of which many diverse phenomena could be explained.” *Nietzsche*, 179-185

able to explain existence than alternative theories. One might ask, however, whether Nietzsche's understanding of nature as will to power is as dogmatic—and thus as indefensible—as the understandings he criticizes.

The will to power is the idea that “every power draws its ultimate consequences at every moment.”⁹⁵ Rather than self-preservation, any living thing “seeks above all to *discharge* its strength.”⁹⁶ Though man often seems to act in ways in which his own power is not his primary motivating factor (i.e. in his decision to sacrifice himself for another, in acts of love and friendship, etc.), if one looks closer, one sees that such actions are still motivated by considerations of power. Despite the common tendency to praise only the supposedly disinterested, sacrificial action, Nietzsche says that anyone who has made sacrifices “knows that he wanted and got something in return—perhaps something of himself in return for something of himself—that he gave up here in order to have more there, perhaps in order to *be* more or at least to feel that he was ‘more.’”⁹⁷ In matters of morality, therefore, man frequently “treats himself not as *individuum* but as *dividuum*.”⁹⁸ That is, he sacrifices one part of himself, one set of interests or goals, in order to satisfy another.

While this insight might seem to be cause for cynicism or despair, this is only because power has been misunderstood and unfairly denigrated throughout history. It is possible to understand power in a nobler and more spiritual sense. Nietzsche follows

⁹⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 220.

⁹⁸ *Human, All-Too-Human*, 57.

Aristotle in distinguishing between a baser and nobler kind of egoism, or self-love.⁹⁹ As Nietzsche puts it: “Egoism! But no one has yet asked: what kind of ego? On the contrary, everyone unconsciously thinks every ego equal to every other ego. This is the consequence of the slaves’ theory of *suffrage universel* and ‘equality.’”¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche’s motivation in positing the will to power seems to be to undermine the modern denigration of egoism which leads in turn to a denigration of a world in which all actions can be traced back to egoism, whether such egoism is subtle and refined and interested in what is noble and beautiful, or whether it is instead transparent and blatant and concerned with the crude and base. He therefore speaks of

The Christian gloominess in La Rochefoucauld which extracted egoism from everything and thought he had thereby *reduced* the value of things and of virtues! To counter that, I at first sought to prove that there could not be anything other than egoism—that in men whose ego is weak and thin the power of great love also grows weak—that the greatest lovers are so from the strength of their ego—that love is an expression of egoism, etc.”¹⁰¹

The idea that all human actions can be reduced to egoism is only cause for despair if one has the simplified, base view of the ego that Nietzsche rejects.

Whatever the justification behind Nietzsche’s positing of the will to power, however, one might still ask whether this theory becomes a dogmatic metaphysical Truth

⁹⁹ According to Aristotle, while most men are self-lovers or egoists in the sense that they seek constant gratification of their baser appetites, there is a nobler kind of egoism in which a man “allots to himself the noblest things and the greatest goods” by gratifying “the most authoritative part of himself.” *Ethics*, IX.8 1168a29-b35. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins.

¹⁰⁰ *Will to Power*, 364.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 362.

for him, something he elsewhere argues is impossible and even logically implausible.

Does Nietzsche flatly contradict himself here?

Though at times Nietzsche comes very close to presenting the will to power dogmatically, overall he shows his openness to alternatives and his willingness to question his own ideas by presenting and considering the will to power as a fruitful hypothesis and thought experiment. After laying out an interpretation of nature as will to power, Nietzsche anticipates a possible objection that “this also is only interpretation,” only to answer it, “well, so much the better.”¹⁰²

It is obvious that he believes his thought experiment has a great amount of explanatory power, but having opinions and ideas one believes to be true about the nature of reality is not dogmatic; it is one of the fundamental conditions of life. To be dogmatic is to refuse to argue on behalf of one’s ideas with thoughtful reasons or to seriously address and consider alternatives to one’s own ideas.

The will to power is not dogmatic by Nietzsche’s standards for another reason noted by Tsarina Doyle: while the theory seeks to be a comprehensive explanation about reality, it does not deny perspective, but instead seeks to be valid within all perspectives.¹⁰³ This strength of Nietzsche’s theory ultimately becomes one of its

¹⁰² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22.

¹⁰³ Doyle argues that the philosophical defense of Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power actually “derives from Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Rather than constituting merely an expression of Nietzsche’s own values or an extra-perspectival claim to knowledge, Nietzsche presents the will to power as a comprehensive perspective that is warranted in multiple perspectives. The will to power is thus intra-contextually warranted rather than justified outside all contexts.” Therefore, although “the will to power is not confined to one particular context, it is not extra-perspectival ... Nietzsche’s will to power is contextual because it must be warranted in each particular context.” The “test” of the will to power’s “comprehensive status will be its ability to offer better explanations in

weaknesses, however, as Nietzsche seems to have recognized would be the case. He therefore explains his application of the will to power to all aspects of life as an experiment to refrain from assuming “several kinds of causality until the experiment of making do with a single one has been pushed to its utmost limit (to the point of nonsense, if I may say so).”¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche admits in this crucial parenthetical aside that reality is almost certainly too complex and mysterious to be adequately explained with a single concept, and that the attempt to do so will ultimately lead to absurdity.

Nietzsche’s use of the will to power calls to mind his estimation of the significance of Thales. Nietzsche argues that what made Thales the first Greek philosopher was his proposition that water was the primal origin of all things, which “contained in it, if only embryonically ... the thought ‘all things are one.’”¹⁰⁵

By presenting his unity-concept in the form of his water-hypothesis, Thales did not, it is true, overcome the low level of empiric insight prevalent in his time. What he did was to pass over its horizon. The sparse and un-ordered observations of an empirical nature which he made regarding the occurrence and transformations of water ... would have allowed, much less made advisable, no such gigantic generalization. What drove him to it was a metaphysical conviction which had its origin in a mystic intuition. We meet it in every philosophy, together with ever-renewed attempts at a more suitable expression, this proposition that ‘all things are one.’ It is strange how high-handedly such a faith deals with all empiricism.¹⁰⁶

The difference between Nietzsche’s will to power hypothesis and Thales’ water-hypothesis is not in the activity of the two thinkers; instead, it is in the fact that Nietzsche

both the physical and the anthropological sciences than its competitors.” Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 11, 121-126.

¹⁰⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 36.

¹⁰⁵ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

is quite aware of what he is doing. Nietzsche is aware that his empirical observations do not quite allow the gigantic generalization of the will to power. Nietzsche is aware of the will to power's status as a creative intuition that he pushes and tests with empirical analysis as far as possible. Where Thales' hypothesis becomes a metaphysical conviction, Nietzsche's remains a fruitful thought experiment. The experimental nature of philosophy is inescapable according to Nietzsche, since whenever philosophy wishes to reach its goal "past all the hedges of experience," it "leaps ahead on tiny toe-holds ... propelled by an alien, illogical power—the power of creative imagination. Lifted by it, it leaps from possibility to possibility, using each one as a temporary resting place."¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche's statements about Thales are therefore quite applicable to his own philosophical attitude and method, particularly its praise of light feet and dancing.

While the idea of the will to power is plausible within all perspectives, what power looks like, how it operates, and what its goals are will be so vastly different in each context that it hardly seems to be the same thing in one place as it is in another. It will therefore be potentially misleading to use the same limited terminology across various contexts. The power of a police officer and that of a priest appear to be very different things, and it is not at all clear that the difference is merely one of quantity. Instead, there appear to be real qualitative differences. In seeking to make the will to power plausible within all contexts, Nietzsche must posit many different types and degrees of power, therefore. At one point he even goes so far as to say that "[o]ne pays heavily for coming to power: power *makes stupid*."¹⁰⁸ Given his praise of power

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans Lack," 1.

elsewhere, this statement might seem contradictory or inexplicable but for the fact that he is clearly talking about the *political* power of the Germans leading to a lack of *spiritual* and intellectual power.¹⁰⁹

It would therefore seem to be a bad idea to try to remake language in a way that is more compatible with the will to power theory. That Nietzsche recognized this is seen in the fact that he never abandons concepts such as “spiritual” and “material,” “noble” and “base,” “good” and “bad,” “natural” and “unnatural,” and “healthy” and “unhealthy.” Such concepts are not only necessary for ease of comprehension, they even seem to grasp some of the extremely complex aspects of reality that are not accessible with the single concept, “power.”

In his critical, destructive activity and attitude, therefore, the lion has undermined much in the world he used to find meaningful. His experimental philosophy has led up to an idea of the world as will to power, but it is unclear that one can live with such a picture of the world. The will to power is a difficult doctrine to accept, indeed. The

everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual ... is, as Heraclitus teaches it, a terrible, paralyzing thought. Its impact on men can most nearly be likened to the sensation during an earthquake when one loses one’s familiar confidence in a firmly grounded earth.¹¹⁰

One who seeks to understand nature and human psychology in terms of the will to power “will suffer from such a view of things as from seasickness,” and “there are in fact a hundred good reasons why everyone should keep away from it who—can.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ In Nietzsche’s estimation, German culture is declining because in “the end, no one can spend more than he has: that is true of the individual, it is true of a people. If one spends oneself for power, for power politics, for economics, world trade, parliamentarianism, and military interests—if one spends in *this* direction the quantum of understanding, seriousness, will, and self-overcoming which one represents, then it will be lacking for the other direction” *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack,” 4.

The lion has won his independence and become master in his own desert, but no one lost to the world is truly free, because he is lacking in anything positive for which to live. He cannot answer the question, “free *for* what?” At this decisive moment in his spiritual development, the lion is confronted with an idea of the world that appears meaningless by previous standards. In short, he is confronted with nihilism. Faced with this deadly illness, the lion will either perish, proud but alone—or else, if he can, return to the world, and even conquer it, by becoming a child through his revaluation of values and his sacred “Yes” to life.

¹¹⁰ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 5.

¹¹¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23.

CHAPTER FIVE

Nietzsche as Child

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred “Yes.” For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred “Yes” is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.

Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit I have told you: how the spirit became a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “On the Three Metamorphoses”

Just as the thought of others should only be considered a means to the development of one’s own thought, one’s own thought should be considered a means to *living* philosophically, to being one of the “real artists of life.”¹ When one has reached this stage one’s thoughts influence one’s life and one’s life and experiences influence one’s thought in turn. One is no longer a divided being. One’s thinking and life are put into harmony and make up a whole in which inner and outer correspond.²

The philosopher not only articulates new values, he signifies them in the world. The lion’s critical, destructive activity led him to see through so much in life, unveiling the false, petty, and ugly aspects of existence. This activity led to a state of alienation in which he was “lost to the world.” In becoming a child the philosopher returns to life and

¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

² “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 4. Such a life overcomes the influences of false culture, which create in man “the remarkable opposition of an inside to which no outside and an outside to which no inside corresponds, an opposition unknown to ancient peoples.” True culture, meanwhile, leads to “unity of artistic style in all expressions of life of a people.”

the world and overcomes his alienation and solitude. Nietzsche describes this stage as a “step further in convalescence,” in which

the free spirit again draws near to life—slowly, to be sure, almost reluctantly, almost mistrustfully. It again grows warmer around him, yellower, as it were; feeling and feeling for others acquire depth ... It seems to him as if his eyes are only now open to what is *close at hand*. He is astonished and sits silent: where *had* he been? These close and closet things: how changed they seem! what bloom and magic they have acquired! He looks back gratefully—grateful to his wandering, to his hardness and self-alienation, to his viewing of far-off distances and bird-like flights in cold heights. What a good thing he had not always stayed ‘at home.’³

But how is such homecoming and convalescence possible? How is the philosopher able to return to the world and live in accordance with the troubling philosophic insights he gained as a lion? This is the question of value. In terms of previous values, life as Nietzsche now understands it is devoid of meaning and must be rejected. According to these values, it would have been better not to have been born at all in the world Nietzsche has uncovered. But in creating his own values, in his “innocence and forgetting,” the child is able to embark on “a new beginning,” and “the game of creation” with his “sacred Yes” to the world and to his own will. He does not remain in a state of detached theoretical speculation about life—he must live himself, he must find a way of life and a code, rule, measure by which to order his own life. When this is accomplished, “he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.” The child is able to affirm meaning in the world and embrace life once more.

In arriving at the idea of the will to power, Nietzsche reached the outer limits of the stage of the lion. His philosophic activity was not yet complete, however, because it

³ *Human, All-Too-Human*, “1886 Preface,” 5.

was still left for him to determine how he should respond to this idea.⁴ It is not enough for the philosopher to study nature, according to Nietzsche; he must also create values. But what does it mean to create values? What exactly does a revaluation of values entail? In such an activity, are there any limitations on the philosopher's will other than his arbitrary whims? Finally, how much influence over others is a revaluation intended to have?

What are Values? What is Value Creation?

One helpful way of determining what value creation or revaluation means for Nietzsche is to first determine what he means by values. Nietzsche says that values represent the "Whither and For What of man," the ends or tasks for which a particular individual lives.⁵ A man's values are his estimations of what is noble, good, and choice-worthy in life, and, conversely, what is base and contemptible. A man's values might be thought of as what he conceives of as his duty to himself.

Nietzsche therefore says that values determine what is "good"⁶ and "noble" and what will be esteemed and a revaluation of values gives a new answer to these questions. It is therefore appropriate that the final chapter title of *Beyond Good and Evil* raises the question, "What is Noble?" A revaluation of values is a fundamental reordering of man's ideas of what is noble, good, and beautiful given his understanding of nature and his

⁴ The account in this chapter of what values are and what their purpose is influenced by the work of Laurence Lampert in his *Nietzsche's Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

place within it. It is “an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity.”⁷ Such a self-examination and reordering of ideas and commitments is possible because the “concept of greatness is changeable in the realm of morality as well as in that of aesthetics. And so philosophy starts by legislating greatness. Part of this is a sort of name-giving. ‘This is a great thing,’ says philosophy.”⁸

The clearest and most extended example Nietzsche gives of a revaluation through name-giving is the Jewish revaluation of Roman values. Nietzsche says the Jews “brought off that miraculous feat of an inversion of values,” when their prophets “fused ‘rich,’ ‘godless,’ ‘evil,’ ‘violent,’ and ‘sensual’ into one and were the first to use the word ‘world’ as an opprobrium” and “the word ‘poor’ as synonymous with ‘holy’ and ‘friend.’”⁹ In large part, value creation or revaluation is a rhetorical act engaged in changing the formerly accepted meaning of words. Values are not created as if from scratch, therefore. Instead, value creation involves esteeming and condemning activities, dispositions, and ways of life in a different way than before. One fundamentally misunderstands the essence of creative activity if one thinks of it as involving the creation *ex nihilo* of wholly new dispositions, attitudes, and character types. Instead, the creative individual takes what is already in the world, even if barely perceptible or in inchoate form, and elevates or lowers its value through the particular emphasis he gives it. Nietzsche asks “what does all art do? does it not praise? glorify? choose? prefer? With

⁷ *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am a Destiny,” 1.

⁸ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 3.

⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 195.

all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations.”¹⁰ Esteeming and creating are so linked together that Zarathustra even says that “[t]o esteem is to create.”¹¹

One could think of this creative, rhetorical act as arbitrary, and imagine the philosopher as a kind of merry prankster or experimental scientist who turns the meaning of words upside down simply for the fun of it or out of idle curiosity. This idea of revaluation is even suggested when Nietzsche speaks of “the game of creation” and the free spirit being a man of attempts and experiments.¹² But revaluation is not arbitrary and it is not conducted in a spirit of mere playfulness or idle curiosity. Rather, Nietzsche provides many weighty reasons why value creation is an essential aspect of philosophic development and why a revaluation of values was necessary in his own time.¹³ Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick are therefore correct in noting that Nietzsche’s rhetorical act of revaluation “seems to have something to do with giving reasons,” and this reason-giving is “central to Nietzsche’s understanding of value creation and ethical

¹⁰ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 24.

¹¹ *Zarathustra*, “On the Thousand and One Goals.”

¹² *Beyond Good and Evil*, 42. The German word Nietzsche uses to “baptize” his new species of philosophers, *Versucher*, could mean attempters, experimenters, or tempters, and the context suggests that all three are meant to some extent.

¹³ Nadeem J.Z. Hussain considers Nietzsche a strict nihilist, someone for whom nothing has value in itself. Value is only ascribed by humans. She therefore interprets Nietzsche’s value judgments as “the generation of ‘honest illusions’ ... a form of make-believe, pretending.” Hussain, “Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (New York: Routledge, 2002), 166.

discourse.”¹⁴ Nietzsche’s demand of intellectual conscience means that “the capacity to consider reasons for and against attitudes, beliefs, or actions—and particularly non-prudential reasons—and to act on these reasons is essential to being human.”¹⁵

Values are properly articulated only in accordance with one’s honest confrontation with the nature of reality, with man’s existential situation as it presents itself. The philosopher must earn the right to his revaluation through his engagement with culture and his honest inquiry into nature. Any claim that Nietzsche’s revaluation is simply arbitrary and limited by nothing but his own will therefore ignores his presentation of the first and second stages of the philosopher’s development. Nietzsche therefore criticizes the unnatural aspects of the Jewish and Christian revaluation, which he says opposed “everything natural, every natural value, every *reality*” in order to “devalue nature and natural values.”¹⁶

The philosopher’s spiritual development and pursuit of freedom takes place in culture, and, for Nietzsche, culture perfects and completes nature rather than discards or replaces it. True culture

does not give artificial limbs, wax noses, or spectacles for the eyes ... it is rather a liberation, a removal of all the weeds and rubbish and vermin that attack the delicate shoots ... it is the following and the adoring of Nature when she is pitifully-minded as a mother;—her completion.¹⁷

¹⁴ Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick. "Nietzsche and Moral Objectivity: The Development of Nietzsche's Metaethics" in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu, 209.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 210

¹⁶ *Antichrist*, 27 & 38.

¹⁷ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” I.

The peak and crown of the individual's spiritual development and freedom—his creation of values—must then be understood as his attempt to complete and perfect nature rather than ignore it or replace it outright. Nietzsche's revaluation is therefore intended to arrive at natural values, values capable of esteeming human life and world honestly understood. The real limiting consideration in any revaluation is therefore one's honest interpretation of nature and one's place within it. Nietzsche believed that in his own time a revaluation of values was especially necessary because previous values could not find meaning in the world as Nietzsche and many others were coming to understand it. Because of this disjunction between conventional values and truth, Nietzsche believed that modern man would soon be confronted with nihilism of his own making.

One could object, however, that this account of value creation is problematic given Nietzsche's views on nature. Nietzsche criticizes the Stoic's treatment of nature, after all, asking,

‘According to nature’ you want to *live*? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like Nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power—how *could* you live according to this indifference? Is not living—estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different?

Nietzsche plainly rejects the idea that nature follows a rationally ordained course inevitably tending towards the good. According to Nietzsche, nature is not necessarily benevolent. By human standards, much in nature is violent, chaotic, and terrifying. Because of this, Nietzsche also rejects the idea that one can easily orient oneself to nature by simply modeling oneself on it.

Nonetheless, it is possible accept and affirm even the most troubling aspects of nature if one lives in a certain way. Man is also nature and his intellect is nature in its most spiritual manifestation. Nietzsche therefore calls the philosopher and his activity the most spiritual manifestation of the will to power, which he identifies as the fundamental principle of nature. Through his intellectual and cultural activities, man is able to complete and perfect—even justify and redeem, at least from his own vantage point—the problematic and terrifying aspects of nature.

But what could it mean for man to complete nature understood in this sense? According to Nietzsche, while nature possesses near limitless potential, it is chaotic and random and squandering in its efforts to reach this potential. In effect, nature provides the rough materials, but man, through his spiritual and intellectual efforts, fashions them into something by which he can live. This is what all art and even philosophy attempts to do. True culture and art moves forward with true insight into the nature of reality, but provides a way of living in accordance with it through the values it articulates.

On the personal level, individuals can attempt to perfect or complete nature by attempting to “‘give style’ to one’s character.”¹⁸ This is done by surveying “the strengths and weaknesses of their nature” and then attempt to “fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye.”¹⁹ In this process, “[h]ere a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at

¹⁸ *Gay Science*, 290.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

it.”²⁰ Rather than the castration of one’s desires and passions, which is typically of anti-natural morality, however, Nietzsche praises the “spiritualization of passion,” which occurs when desires eventually wed themselves to the spirit.²¹ An example of this is love, which Nietzsche calls the spiritualization of sensuality.²²

On the communal level, Nietzsche speaks of cultural activity as the process by which human beings aid nature in the development of future great individuals. While nature has equipped man the potential for the highest and noblest tasks, the vast majority of cases end in failure. As Nietzsche puts it, [n]ature always desires the greatest utility, but does not understand how to find the best and handiest means to her end ... The impulse towards her own redemption shows clearly her wish to give men a significant existence by the generation of the philosopher and the artist: but how unclear and weak is the effect she generally obtains with her artists and philosophers, and how seldom is there any effect at all! ... Her actions seem those of a spendthrift ... Nature is a bad manager; her expenses are far greater than her profits.²³

Because of this state of affairs, it is necessary for individuals to consider “some means to help” nature in “the production of the great philosopher.”²⁴ Nietzsche makes his own contribution to this end through his legislation of values.

Nietzsche therefore always has nature in view in his act of value creation, which suggests the problems inherent in any argument that Nietzsche conducts his revaluation on the basis of what he considers healthy and conducive to life rather than what he

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ “Schopenhauer as Educator,” VII.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

considers true or natural.²⁵ To argue that the limiting consideration of value creation is what is healthy or conducive to life is true as far as it goes, but this does not tell us anything new or important because by definition one's "values" express what one values in life, one's estimation of noble and base, healthy and unhealthy actions and ways of life. In any such judgment, however, one will always be faced with the further question of what makes one's values conducive to health and life in the first place. The concept of "health" is unintelligible and completely indeterminate taken by itself. "Healthy" and "unhealthy" always presume some idea of a natural standard of health, a standard one arrives at through the use of one's reason and that one believes to be true. The concept of "health" presupposes knowledge of the normal or optimal state of a particular being, which implies knowledge of the nature of that being, its characteristics and possible ends. Ideas of health are therefore always derived from knowledge—or, at the very least, presuppositions—about nature. "Life" is not a better standard for Nietzsche, because he is almost always relatively unconcerned with life as bare, minimal survival. Nietzsche's concerns with life always concern specific ways of life, some understanding of what a noble life entails. Accordingly, Nietzsche considers self-preservation to be only one indirect manifestation of the will to power.²⁶

²⁵ This approach is seen in works such as Paul E. Kirkland, "Nietzsche's Honest Masks: From Truth to Nobility Beyond Good and Evil," *The Review of Politics* 66.4, 2004, 575-604 and Patrick Fitzsimons, "Revaluing the Self: Nietzsche's Critique of Liberal Education," in *Nietzsche's Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 140. According to Fitzsimons, for instance, "Nietzsche derives social values from a new scale of values that are located on a continuum that has health and sickness at its poles (rather than, for example, truth/falsity and rational/unrational dichotomies." He thus argues that it "is clear" that "value lies in practices that promote survival, health and life."

²⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 13.

If the only limiting consideration in value creation was what is conducive to life or health, Nietzsche would presumably have had no difficulty in accepting Platonic or Christian values, which have been (and by many accounts still are) successful in guiding man as he makes his way in the world, in providing him with an understanding of the world and his place within it, giving him a sense of purpose, duty, and challenging spiritual tasks to accomplish. Indeed, perhaps every religion and philosophy in history has been conducive to life and health in the sense that its adherents were at least potentially able to live according to its principles. That Nietzsche is extremely critical of Platonic, Christian, and democratic values suggests he does not believe one is simply free to create whatever values one pleases as long as one can live in accordance with them.²⁷ Nietzsche's critique of these value systems is not that they are unlivable but that they are untrue, unnatural, and cowardly in the face of reality. It is only when values are inconsistent with nature and truth that one can expect and explain a proliferation of unhealthy, sick beings. Because human beings are limited and finite in the amount of time and strength they have, some intellectual shortcuts and even illusions will always be necessary for life and health. Nietzsche nevertheless suggests that the strongest and healthiest man, the philosopher, will be able to uncover and accept the most truth. He says that "the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure."²⁸ For the philosopher, what is conducive to life and the truth most closely correspond.

²⁷ Thus, the Jews not only survived by adhering to slave morality, but even thrived. *Genealogy of Morals* I. Similarly, Socrates' influence helped prevent the Greek world from tearing itself apart. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 15.

²⁸ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 39.

Any appeal to what is “healthy” or “conducive to life” must of necessity involve an appeal to what is “natural” or “true” or else the appeal becomes circular. To be healthy for Nietzsche *is* in large part to be natural—once nature is understood in its full complexity and spirituality. There is a complex mixture of truth and health, discovery and creation at work in the philosopher’s activity and life. In an important sense, value creation *is* an act of will, but it is an act of will based on one’s honest perception of the truth about reality. Thus, Nietzsche cannot willfully ignore what he perceives to be the nature of reality (will to power) despite the fact that this is an extremely hard doctrine to accept. In his confrontation with this fact, however, he was eventually able to accept and even affirm it by creating new standards of value in accordance with it that are life-affirming and conducive to health.

Responding to the Idea of the Will to Power

Nietzsche believed that the extensive, millennia-long influence of Platonism and Christianity had conditioned man to respond to the idea of the will to power in certain closely related ways. In accepting that the world as we know it is governed according to the idea of the will to power, one could determine that life is essentially meaningless. At this point, one could either resign oneself to nihilism, or else attempt a metaphysical solution to an unwelcome physics—the positing of another world, a true world, an eternal, wholly perfect world. In either case, the lack of these ideal qualities in the empirical world causes it to be devalued and even rejected. As different as these responses appear, they are closely related in that both reveal that one is only able or willing to value that which is eternal and perfect and entirely unmixed with troubling and dissatisfying aspects. In other words, neither response is able to affirm the world as it is.

In essence, metaphysical response is only a dressed-up, delayed nihilism. The metaphysical response contains the same nihilistic core, though this is difficult to see because in its acts of esteeming and condemning it appears to be the opposite of nihilism. Nevertheless, to value only that which does not exist is the same as to value nothing at all. Nietzsche therefore says that “man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.”²⁹ Neither the nihilistic nor metaphysical attitude is able to accept or find meaning in the temporal, the imperfect, the mixed and the questionable.

Nietzsche’s revaluation is characterized by his ability to respond to what he identified as the fundamental fact of existence in a new way. In passing into the stage of the creative child, Nietzsche was finally able to articulate and express his own values by not only accepting, but even *affirming* the fact of the world as will to power. The cornerstone of Nietzsche’s new values is therefore Nietzsche’s challenging experiment in affirmation, the idea of the eternal recurrence.

Early on, Nietzsche had arrived at the idea of the will to power, but for a long time it was unclear to him how to respond to this idea. That everything in life is in flux and involved in an unceasing struggle for power couples nicely with the resignation and dissolution of the will expressed in Schopenhauer’s values as well as with the “artist’s metaphysics” Nietzsche originally built on Schopenhauer’s foundation in the *Birth of Tragedy*.³⁰ Even the solution to the problematic idea of will to power, the eternal recurrence, is present in the *Birth of Tragedy* in an embryonic form. It is essential to

²⁹ *Genealogy of Morals* III, 28.

³⁰ Nietzsche says the book “knows only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events—a ‘god,’ if you please, but certainly only an entirely reckless and amoral artist-god.” *Birth of Tragedy*, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” 5.

realize that, strictly speaking, the three stages of spiritual development do not, in every respect, occur in rigid sequential order; instead, each occurs to some extent simultaneously. The image of the three metamorphoses is intended to simplify the complexities of spiritual development for ease of comprehension, but it is unwise to push it to the point of absurdity. In order to engage in coherent critique of external thought, the lion must have had a positive ideal in mind—even if only vaguely—all the time. In all of his writings and at every stage in his development, Nietzsche was somehow always animated and guided by his positive values even though they only later gained clarity and greater force in his mind.³¹ The philosopher's complex activity always involves a tenuous balance between creativity and discovery—between facts and values. Though Nietzsche placed a greater emphasis on one or the other at each stage in his development, he sought to keep both in mind throughout, and attempted to make his values correspond to his understanding of the true nature of reality.³²

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was able to affirm existence in all of its troubling aspects, but only with recourse to an artist's metaphysics that tended towards resignation, spiritual lethargy, and contentment with Nirvana and the dissolution of one's

³¹ Nietzsche therefore says that in an individual's spiritual development "the organizing 'idea' that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down—it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole." *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," 9.

³² "Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too, shall say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first thought to run across my heart this year—what thought shall be for me the reason, warranty, and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth!" *Gay Science*, 276.

individuality.³³ Later, in his middle period works, Nietzsche retained this desire to affirm life even in its troubling and disconcerting aspects, but he tended to stress the ways in which the demands of truth came into conflict with those of life. Nietzsche therefore says that “whether psychological observation is more advantageous or disadvantageous to man may remain undecided; what is certain, however, is that it is necessary, because science cannot dispense without it.”³⁴ While Nietzsche thinks that science will tend towards the well-being of mankind, his claim that it is “certain” that an activity should be engaged in simply because science cannot dispense without it reveals a very different orientation from that seen in his first (and third) period writings. Only in his later works was Nietzsche able to affirm existence as it is and believe that the highest forms of life could be justified on the solid foundation of true knowledge of the nature of existence.

In his early works, Nietzsche followed Schopenhauer and Wagner in the estimation that life is essentially tragic collision of the needs of life and the demands of truth, and that happiness or joy is beyond man, who, at best, and in very rare cases, can instead attain a kind of heroism. Eventually, however, as Nietzsche cleared away the debris left over from the previous value systems of Schopenhauer, Christianity, and Platonism, his own values gained clarity and power in his mind. Laughter, gaiety, and joy punctured and transformed the tragic pathos, and Nietzsche was able to achieve a more celebratory and affirmative Dionysian view of existence.

³³ In this work Nietzsche therefore speaks of “the state of individuation as the origin and primal cause of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself.” *Birth of Tragedy*, 10.

³⁴ *Human, All Too Human*, 38.

Nietzsche's eventual response to the idea of the will to power reveals that he values truth over pleasant, unchallenging illusion. It reveals that he is able to find value in the temporal, the limited, and the imperfect, and that he can therefore accept and affirm all of existence, even its most troubling and dispiriting aspects.

But how can Nietzsche simply choose to value that which is temporal, limited, imperfect, and destined to failure and death?³⁵ If there is no eternal, omnipotent, omniscient God who has already laid his meaning into things, it might seem that things must be simply meaningless in themselves.³⁶

How is Nietzsche justified in creating meaning for himself through an act of his own will? The move from "Thou Shalt" to "I Will" seems illegitimate, even "the most outrageous human aberration and as idolatry itself," because it seems that things must either be meaningful in themselves or not.³⁷ To convince oneself that what is meaningless *in itself* is meaningful *for him* seems to be delusion.

³⁵ Bernd Magnus argues that, according to Nietzsche, "Western speech and thought have been dominated by dualism ... What is universal is to be contrasted with what is particular ... Eternity is to be contrasted with that which is temporal ... This schizoid habit of speech and thought does not merely result in double-vision but in hierarchical vision as well. For in each of the above couples an order of rank, an order of ontological dignity, is attached. Our philosophic predisposition is to prize and praise the universal, the timeless. We consecrate it by baptizing it 'being' or 'reality.'" Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 21.

³⁶ Whether Nietzsche's atheism is unjustifiably dogmatic is an interesting question too complex to cover here adequately here. Agnosticism might seem to be more consistent with his philosophical principles, if it is possible to live consistently under agnostic presuppositions. For an interesting account of the reasons for Nietzsche's atheism see Robert C. Miner, "Leo Strauss's Adherence to Nietzsche's 'Atheism from Intellectual Probity,'" *Perspectives on Political Science* 41.3 (2012): 155-164.

³⁷ *Gay Science*, 143.

The move is no longer illegitimate, however, once one recognizes that, as a concept, “meaning” necessarily assumes an interaction and relationship between an individual and that which has meaning for him, that which he values. Meaning-in-itself is nonsensical, because meaning only arises in an interaction between at least two “things.” This interaction and relationship has always involved judgment and choice. Any talk of “meaning” always has behind it the questions “meaning for what?” and “meaning for whom?” The idea of “meaning-in-itself” is as unthinkable, and thus as logically indefensible, as the idea of any other thing-in-itself for Nietzsche. Nietzsche says that “contradictory concepts” such as “pure reason” and “knowledge-in-itself” always “demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking.”³⁸

That “meaning-in-itself” is logically impossible does not imply that all things are inherently meaningless or worthless in the sense of quality-less. It only requires that “meaning” is an inherently relational concept, and a person or thing’s qualities, characteristics, and virtues are only given meaning when placed in a kind of relationship with another subject or object or a particular end or task.

One might think of a woman with innumerable virtues and talents. She is not an empty vessel. It is absurd to think of some value-creating philosopher stumbling upon her and “giving her meaning.” To begin, if everything is inherently meaningless in the sense of quality-less, then this value creating philosopher is meaningless, and thus, cannot bestow meaning on others. More significantly, however, anything this value-

³⁸ *Genealogy of Morals* III, 12

creating philosopher finds in this woman, anything in her he deems worthy of assigning meaning to, anything he values in her, is hers rather than his. Probably the sharper his eye and the greater his intelligence the more he will find, but this does not change the fact that what he finds is hers rather than his. He only selects particular qualities as meaningful for him and to him. What others find of meaning and significance in this woman will be different depending on their relation to her. Her son and daughter will value different things in her than her husband, her best friend, her coworkers, her parents, her neighbors. Her own understanding of the meaning and significance of her life will doubtless be different from all these other understandings. The meaning and significance of all her various relationships and what others mean to her will also be different. To be sure, all of these people find meaning *in* her. But as a concept, “meaning” must always refer back to the person for whom, or the purpose for which, something has meaning. In any discussion of meaning, what is being described is necessarily a relationship. A meaning with no reference to a context is simply unthinkable.

The same is true of a man’s search for meaning in the world. In a state of frenzy the artist idealizes by bringing out the “main features” of something “so that the others disappear in the process.”³⁹ When one does this “one enriches everything out of one’s own fullness,” though it is possible “to imagine an opposite state, a specific anti-artistry by instinct ... that would impoverish all things, making them thin and consumptive.”⁴⁰ Nietzsche therefore says that

³⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

What distinguishes the higher human beings from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear thoughtfully—and precisely this distinguishes human beings from animals, and the higher animals from the lower. For anyone who grows up into the heights of humanity the world becomes ever fuller; ever more fishhooks are cast in his direction to capture his interest; the number of things that stimulate him grows constantly, as does the number of different kinds of pleasure and displeasure.⁴¹

To personally determine what one finds meaningful is not illegitimate according to Nietzsche, therefore, because it is simply inescapable. Man has always determined what will have meaning for him. Thus, in creating gods, man has always chosen what actions, attitudes, and ways of life would be meaningful for him, and thereby created his own value. The few men who dared throughout history to posit their own ideal “always felt the need to apologize to themselves, usually by saying: ‘It wasn’t I! Not I! But *a god* through me.’”⁴²

Hitherto man always convinced himself he had nothing to do with this creation, and so he reflected his own values back to himself through his intermediary creation of divine gods and goddesses. As artists and creators of value, man had always played the roles of both sun and earth, reflecting his own values back to himself off the divine moon, conceived as an objective source and guarantor of meaning. Only because this self-deception has been so successful and so powerful does man now find any talk of finding or creating meaning for himself so suspicious and illegitimate.

When the meaning of the world is called into question it is usually for one of the following reasons: the world is temporal, infinitely small and inconsequential in relation to the universe, and imperfect in the sense that it is full of suffering, decay, and death.

⁴¹ *Gay Science*, 301.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 143.

For Nietzsche, however, the temporality of the world is no argument against its meaning. The meaning of the world and of one's own life must be a question of essence rather than duration. Either one considers one's life meaningful or not. If it is meaningful, it will have been meaningful no matter how short its duration. Duration is a secondary matter. Sometimes even a single moment is enough to stamp an entire life with meaning. If one holds one's life to be meaningless, conversely, it will be meaningless no matter how long it is extended, even if it is extended into eternity. Temporal duration says very little about the inherent worth and nobility of a life or even life itself.⁴³

That, in all likelihood, human life will one day come to an end on the earth does not mean that what happens on earth and what one does in one's own life is meaningless. To say this is only to reveal one's need for an audience and external and eternal spectators of one's life. It reveals one has an actor's sentiments, and such a person would also no doubt believe that to perform a noble action is worthless if there are no witnesses. Similarly, that the earth is infinitely small in relation to the universe can only be a serious argument against life for one who finds its meaning in big effects and parades. But

⁴³ Duration is sometimes very important in determining the meaning, value, and nobility of certain actions and dispositions, of course. According to Nietzsche, it is "not the intensity but the duration of high feelings" that "makes high men." *Beyond Good and Evil*, 72. If a man buys his wife flowers and an expensive dinner on Valentine's Day but treats her badly the other 364 days of the year, probably no one would consider him a good husband. But, from the general importance of duration, it does not follow that a life must be *eternal* in order to be meaningful, especially since death is natural and a man has no control over the fact that one day he must die.

Nietzsche is one who listens “maliciously” to the “big county-fair boom-boom” and whose ears are hurt by the “theatrical scream of passion.”⁴⁴

Ultimately, according to Nietzsche, man has no grounds for condemning life and the world, because “judgments of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have values only as symptoms ... *the value of life cannot be estimated* ... by the living, for they are an interested party.”⁴⁵ Since man has no perspective and standpoint outside of life, and since he himself is a small part of the whole of life, any denial of life is nonsensical. But Nietzsche says judgments for life, affirmations of life, are equally untrue.⁴⁶ Here again, therefore, we see that while values are only legitimate if based on an honest understanding of the true nature of existence, they are somehow different from facts or truths. But this still leaves unanswered the question of how life can be positively affirmed given all its problematic and troubling aspects. How can one live so that one affirms life and finds meaning in one’s own life despite all the suffering it may entail?

Nietzsche believes he answers this question with the eternal recurrence. His values show him to be a philosopher in the most profound and complete sense of the word, as one who not only studies nature and loves his wisdom, but one who even *loves nature*, not merely in its most pleasant aspects, and not merely in his own conceptual ideas about it. According to Nietzsche, the philosophers of the past were not able to

⁴⁴ *Gay Science*, “1886 Preface,” 4.

⁴⁵ *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Problem of Socrates,” 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

affirm nature in its totality and so took flight into idealism,⁴⁷ resigned themselves to pessimism,⁴⁸ or else went too far in limiting and narrowing themselves through pragmatism, over-specialization, or skepticism of weakness.⁴⁹

Nietzsche is able to face up to nature in its myriad complexity and questionableness without recourse to comforting, even if healthy, illusion. When Nietzsche says that lesser men would perish from the values of the philosopher he suggests, of course, that they cannot accept the truths the philosopher uncovers. Even more fundamental, however, is the further suggestion that they cannot accept the value the philosopher places on uncovering and facing up to the truth, the value in not living in a state of willful delusion, no matter how happy this delusion makes one. Such men do not or cannot accept the “whither and for what” of the philosopher, his activity and task.

Nietzsche’s revaluation therefore retains the traditional framework of who the philosopher is and what he does, but it also shows why previous manifestations of the philosophic life fell short in living up to its own principles, in carrying the idea of the philosopher to its necessary conclusions. Philosophy is not the love of one’s wisdom, one’s purification and reinvention of nature, but of nature itself. Nietzsche is therefore very much engaged in the philosophic tradition even as he attempts to offer a compelling

⁴⁷ “In the end, it is *courage* in the face of reality that distinguishes a man like Thucydides from Plato: Plato is a coward before reality, consequently he flees into the ideal.” *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” 2.

⁴⁸ “[T]o become sick in the manner of these free spirits, to remain sick for a long time and then, slowly, slowly, to become healthy, by which I mean ‘healthier,’ is a fundamental *cure* for all pessimism (the cancerous and inveterate vice, as is well known, of old idealists and inveterate liars.)” *Human, All Too Human*, “1886 Preface,” 5.

⁴⁹ See Chapter Four for Nietzsche’s rejection of a skepticism of weakness. For a critique of scholarly over-specialization, see “On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” particularly section 5, as well as “Schopenhauer as Educator.”

alternative to it. Dialogue is still possible because in this important respect Nietzsche retains the traditional framework of philosophy and the philosophic life.

The Eternal Recurrence

The cornerstone of Nietzsche's revaluation is not a simple rejection of morality or "attempt to abolish all decent feelings."⁵⁰ Neither is it a piece of legislation intended to govern all of humanity. Instead, it is a thought experiment: the eternal recurrence. The final hurdle in an individual's spiritual development, the final test of his power and nobility, is whether he can pass the test raised by the eternal recurrence.

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence ... The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.'⁵¹

But what is the meaning of the eternal recurrence? What does Nietzsche intend to convey through this story? The eternal recurrence seems to express several different meanings at once, and that it is even intended to do so.

In part, the eternal recurrence seems to be a poetic illustration of the theoretical idea that everything that occurs in the universe is connected and necessary. Thus, if one has experienced even one profound, wonderful moment, one must affirm everything else that has happened, because it all led to that moment. As Walter Kaufmann puts it, the

⁵⁰ *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," 1.

⁵¹ *Gay Science*, 341.

man who affirms himself “would also realize how inextricably his own being was involved in the totality of the cosmos: and in affirming his own being, he would also affirm all that is, has been, or will be.”⁵² In this way, the eternal recurrence encourages a certain “state of being” and is the test of whether one’s state of being affirms life.⁵³

Though these are beautiful ideas, it is not yet apparent why one moment in an individual’s life should make all the difference for him if it is surrounded by countless moments of misery, wretchedness, and suffering. While this aspect of the eternal recurrence is undoubtedly a large and important part of what Nietzsche intends to convey through it, it does not seem to me that it alone is sufficient in leading one from the idea of the will to power to the affirmation of all existence.

Part of the reason for the deficiency of this aspect of the eternal recurrence is that it merely conveys a theoretical idea. Values are somehow distinct from theoretical ideas because they involve action and commitment to certain habits of being and ways of life. Articulating a particular theory of nature and how the various parts of it connect to each other and make up a necessary whole is not sufficient to serve as a value system, because this theory alone suggests no response to the idea it articulates. As a theoretical idea, the interconnectedness and necessity of each aspect of existence could just as easily lead to feelings of powerlessness and resignation as it could to profound gratitude and affirmation.

It is therefore necessary to consider the eternal recurrence in another sense, as a kind of thought experiment carrying perhaps the most demanding ethical imperative ever

⁵² Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 320.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 325.

conceived. That the eternal recurrence has an ethical aspect to it is difficult to deny, since Nietzsche suggests that if this idea

gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight.⁵⁴

It seems difficult to deny the ethical dimension of an idea that could “change” someone as they are or even “crush” them, that causes one “question” “each and every thing,” and lies upon one’s “actions” as the “greatest weight.” Nonetheless, Kaufmann and others have argued that “Nietzsche was not primarily a moral philosopher at all” in that he was less concerned with particular actions than with inculcating a certain affirmative state of being.⁵⁵ For Kaufmann, the eternal recurrence is “plainly” not interested “in devising a criterion for particular acts but, insofar as it concerns our behavior at all, to provide an incentive for man to raise his state of being.”⁵⁶ It seems to me, however, that any talk of attaining to a state of being must involve, particular actions, especially as one habituates oneself to the dispositions that any state of being involves.

To be sure, the imperative of the eternal recurrence is neither susceptible to rigid formulation nor is it categorical. In both respects, it can be contrasted with the

⁵⁴ *Gay Science*, 341. The eternal recurrence has also been interpreted as carrying an ethical imperative by Gilles Deleuze, who argues that the eternal recurrence is an “*ethical and selective thought*” in that “it gives the will a rule as rigorous as the Kantian one ... As an ethical thought the eternal return is the new formulation of the practical synthesis: *whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.*” He observes that “[o]ne thing in the world disheartens Nietzsche: the little compensations, the little pleasures, the little joys and everything that is granted once, only once. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Columbia University Press, 1986), 68.

⁵⁵ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 322.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 325.

categorical imperative of Kant. The eternal recurrence is both extremely particular and extremely demanding. Because of these features, the imperative it carries is perfectly suited to the kind of artist's morality Nietzsche prefers. It is the opposite of popular moralities that, in order to be categorical, must also be lax and undemanding. The flexibility of the imperative in the eternal recurrence allows it to have greater strength for each individual. The eternal recurrence does not presuppose a very narrow and specific task or way,⁵⁷ but it is extremely demanding in guiding the individual to see to it that his every action leads up to his task as he conceives it.⁵⁸

The artist's morality encouraged by the eternal recurrence is certainly not a no-saying, no-doing morality of "negative virtues" that leads one "to strive with open eyes" for one's own "impoverishment."⁵⁹ Instead, it is a morality concerned with ordering the passions into an artistic whole in order to achieve a great and positive task in the world.

As an imperative, the eternal recurrence bids an individual to live in such a way that he could wish the eternal recurrence of *every* moment of his life. This aspect of the

⁵⁷ "'This is *my* way; where is yours?'—thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For *the* way—that does not exist." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2.

⁵⁸ That the greater flexibility of the eternal recurrence allows it to be stronger for each individual is seen in Robert Solomon's account of what it meant for him as a student. Solomon says that "as a serious ethical proposal, say, along the lines of Kant's 'Categorical Imperative,'" the eternal recurrence "is without substance." Despite the supposed lack of substance in the eternal recurrence, upon hearing about it for the first time while auditing a Philosophy in Literature course, Solomon immediately walked out of the class and dropped out of the medical school in order to begin an education in philosophy. It seems to me that Kant's categorical imperative would have told him to remain in the medical school. Robert C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great "Immoralist" Has to Teach Us* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 14-15.

⁵⁹ *Gay Science*, 304.

eternal recurrence articulates a response to Nietzsche's understanding of nature by showing what kinds of human life can have meaning given this understanding, and this is primarily the purpose of values rather than facts or theories about nature. The ethical and affirmative aspects of eternal recurrence are related in that the thought experiment teaches an individual to live in such a way that he is much more likely to experience the kinds of profound joyous moments that allow him to affirm all of existence. The ethical and affirmative aspects of the eternal recurrence therefore go hand in hand. Far from being contradictory impulses, as some have supposed, one necessarily presupposes the other.

But how exactly, one might ask, can Nietzsche's frequent dissatisfaction with aspects of existence and his desire for self-overcoming possibly be reconciled with the idea that everything in existence is connected and necessary and must be affirmed? The two tendencies appear contradictory. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter therefore argues that Nietzsche's idea of the overman splits into "two mutually incompatible images. One of these overmen is able to say "Yes without restriction" to everything that was, is, and will be. The other type of overman is "the relentless strong man" who attempts meanwhile to stamp his character on existence and the world.⁶⁰

The inconsistency largely disappears, however, when one recognizes that affirmation of existence as a whole does not mean that each part is equally lovable. Zarathustra therefore says that he does

⁶⁰ Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) trans. David J. Parent, 73-75.

not like those who consider everything good and this world the best. Such men I call the omni-satisfied. Omni-satisfaction, which knows how to taste everything, that is not the best taste. I honor the recalcitrant choosy tongues and stomachs.⁶¹

The last man and the overman are obviously not equally lovable for Nietzsche. But in affirming the overman, and seeing that without the last man there can be no overman, Nietzsche learns to affirm even the existence of the last man.⁶² Existence is affirmed for its heights, heights that justify existence in its very depths. Without tasting of the heights one cannot even face—let alone begin to accept and affirm—the depths.

The attitude of eternal recurrence is not merely a passive acceptance of everything as it is, but the affirmation of it, which involves one's active involvement with it. The eternal recurrence attempts a balance between gratitude and lazy contentment. Part of affirming everything is to affirm oneself, to affirm all one is capable of. Nietzsche therefore opposes gratitude with contentment. He considers gratitude almost the essence of what is noble, saying of the ancient Greeks that what is “amazing” about their religion “is the enormous abundance of gratitude it exudes: it is a very noble type of man that confronts nature and life in *this* way.”⁶³ Gratitude is not the same thing as contentment, however. Nietzsche says that modern man is becoming smaller due to their modest understanding of virtue, which is a result of their desire for contentment, as “only a

⁶¹ *Zarathustra* III, “On the Spirit of Gravity,” 2. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche criticizes the objective scholar for exhibiting the same omni-satisfaction. He says that the objective scholar “no longer knows how to affirm or negate; he does not command, neither does he destroy.” *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207.

⁶² See: *Gay Science*, 76: “*We others are the exception and the danger—and we need eternally to be defended.—Well, there actually are things to be said in favor of the exception, provided that it never wants to become the rule.*”

⁶³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 49.

modest virtue gets along with contentment.”⁶⁴ To see the two elements of the eternal recurrence as contradictory rather than involved in a necessary tension is to mistake affirmation with omni-satisfaction, gratitude with contentment. Nietzsche looks at the artist as one who finds the meaning of his life in his task, and feels his deepest gratitude to life while he is engaged in it. One who seeks contentment, meanwhile, seeks out a final end-state rather than a task.

While the tendency of the vast majority of people is to be dissatisfied with the world but content with themselves, the eternal recurrence teaches one to be grateful for that which is necessary in the world and dissatisfied with all that can be improved and developed—oneself first of all. Because of this, the same man who preaches *amor fati*, love of fate, can also say that

For my part, the most important question philosophy has to decide seems to be, how far things have acquired an unalterable stamp and form, and, once this question has been answered, I think it the duty of philosophy unhesitatingly and courageously to proceed with the task of *improving that part of the world which has been recognized as still susceptible to change*.⁶⁵

Indeed, “genuine philosophers do, as a matter of fact,” no matter their views on freedom and necessity, “teach this doctrine themselves, inasmuch as they work at endeavoring to alter the very changeable views of men, and do not keep their opinions to themselves.”⁶⁶ For Nietzsche, philosophy is not “an opiate or a sleeping draught.”⁶⁷ Instead, it should lead one to develop “a more decisive and inflexible will.”

⁶⁴ *Zarathustra* III, “On the Virtue that Makes Small.”

⁶⁵ *Untimely Meditations*, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” III.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

As an imperative suitable for an artist's morality, the eternal recurrence blends the ethical with the aesthetic. Its aim is to live artistically, to take the "chaos in oneself" and "give birth to a dancing star."⁶⁸ It is essential to keep in mind, however, that art is intimately connected with life for Nietzsche; and life involves action, not standing apart from the world in order to view it from afar. Nietzsche is plainly not an aesthete in the sense of Oscar Wilde's Lord Henry or Kierkegaard's "A" from *Either/Or*.

The eternal recurrence teaches one to view his life aesthetically, according to many of the standards by which he might judge an artwork.⁶⁹ When one views an artwork, one expects each part to stand alone in its beauty but also contribute to an ordered whole. In this way, the eternal recurrence teaches one to seek to "'give style' to one's character" and "survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan." If one is successful in this, there will be a necessity and order in one's actions, such that every action is connected and makes up a whole contributing to one's task.⁷⁰ The eternal recurrence teaches one to minimize the random and arbitrary aspects of one's life, the little cowardices and compromises that one could not easily bear to live through again, despite the fact that too often one is willing to make them every day of one's life. The eternal recurrence therefore affirms a kind of life that is the very opposite of that of the last man, the modern democratic man who "lives for the day...

⁶⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," 5.

⁶⁹ The eternal recurrence has also been interpreted aesthetically, though in a different way, by Alexander Nehamas in "The Eternal Recurrence." *The Philosophical Review* (1980): 331-356. See section III in particular. For the most part, Nehamas remains within Kaufmann's framework of interpreting the eternal recurrence as an ideal of affirmation, while underplaying any possible ethical imperative in the idea.

⁷⁰ *Gay Science*, 290.

lives very fast ... lives very irresponsibly.”⁷¹ When one lives in this way, necessity and freedom collapse into each other. It allows an individual to see the sense in which there is a finality and permanence to all of his actions, so that he is every action he has ever committed or will commit.

The eternal recurrence teaches an individual to view the totality of his life as something that will repeat indefinitely and always in precisely the same sequence, as a book will each time he opens it. It teaches one to live in such a way that one would gladly live each moment again, as one gladly returns to a great book. This is the kind of eternity and infinity known by art. It has no concern with an infinity of pages because there are moments of eternity on each page, moments that last “a long time, or a short

⁷¹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 39. This criticism of modern man is reminiscent of Plato’s description of democratic man in Plato’s *Republic*. According to Plato’s Socrates, such a man “lives along day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another drowning water and reducing; now practical gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were engaged in philosophy. Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him; and if he ever admires any soldiers, he turns in that direction; and if it’s money-makers, in that one. And there is neither order nor necessity in his life, but calling this life sweet, free, and blessed he follows it throughout. *Republic* VIII 561c5-e9. The eternal recurrence forces one to think of living a life of order and necessity.

According to Magnus, “Nietzsche was persuaded that Platonism and Christianity had so thoroughly disfigured Western consciousness that being weaned from them, without an eternalistic countermyth, would result in the triumph of shallowness; the tepid cheerfulness that slumbers while God dies.” Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 192. This account seems to me to underestimate the extent to which Nietzsche, who always sought to be the artist of his own life, longed for order, duration, necessity, and eternity himself. It is not that Platonism and Christianity disfigured Western consciousness so much that it tapped powerfully into very human impulses, which Nietzsche had previously characterized as Apollinian in the *Birth of Tragedy*.

time: for properly speaking, there is *no* time on earth for such things.”⁷² When the time is right, it therefore knows how to end.⁷³

The eternal recurrence therefore teaches one to consider and value the process of life itself as an end rather than a means to some other end. Because of this, it is impossible to affirm the eternal recurrence of one’s life if “one values life only as a means to something beyond the process itself.”⁷⁴ Nietzsche’s idea of affirmation is to “value the process of living as an end and not merely as a means.”⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze is therefore correct that “Nietzsche’s account of the eternal return presupposes a critique of the terminal or equilibrium state.”⁷⁶ Nietzsche opposes every “philosophy that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some *finale*, some final state of some sort.”⁷⁷ One values a terminal or equilibrium state as the highest end out of weakness and weariness. To the

⁷² *Zarathustra* IV, “The Sign.”

⁷³ See: *Zarathustra* I “The Free Death”: “Everybody considers dying important; but as yet death is no festival. As yet men have not learned how one hallows the most beautiful festivals ... He that consummates his life dies his death victoriously, surrounded by those who hope and promise ... Free to die and free in death, able to say a holy No when the time for Yes has passed ... In your dying, your spirit and virtue should still glow like a sunset around the earth ... Verily, Zarathustra had a goal; he threw his ball: now you, my friends, are the heirs of my goal; to you I throw my golden ball.”

⁷⁴ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 272.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Columbia University Press, 1986), 47.

⁷⁷ *Gay Science*, “1886 Preface,” 2.

weary and overworked, sleep seems the highest good.⁷⁸ For the man of power and health, however, rest and sleep is merely a temporary means to his own positive activity. Nietzsche therefore values “a specific type of activity, that of confronting and overcoming resistance. The valuation of this sort of activity implies a valuation of becoming and impermanence.”⁷⁹ Creativity as an expression of the will to power demands resistance, and “once that resistance is overcome, the activity comes to a close,” which “induces the individual to seek out new opportunities for it.”⁸⁰ The will to power is anti-teleological in that it “does not allow for *permanent* ... satisfaction. Its pursuit, on the contrary, necessarily assumes the form of an indefinite, perpetually renewed striving ... an indefinite ‘becoming.’”⁸¹ It is also ultimately tragic in that it leads an individual to seek out ever greater challenges until, eventually, the challenge cannot be met. Thus, Nietzsche’s praise of those who set themselves “a purpose, a goal, a ‘for this,’ a lofty and noble ‘for this’. And perish in the attempt—I know of no better life’s purpose than to perish ... in attempting the great and impossible.”⁸²

⁷⁸ See: *Zarathustra I*, “On the Teachers of Virtue”: “This sage ... is a fool; but I believe that he knows well how to sleep ... His wisdom is: to wake in order to sleep well. And verily, if life had no sense and I had to choose nonsense, then I too should consider this the most sensible nonsense.”

⁷⁹ Bernard Reginster, “The Will to Power and the Ethics of Creativity” in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (New York: Routledge, 2002), 52.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 9.

That the eternal recurrence exhibits a tragic view of life is true enough, therefore, provided one has the correct idea of tragedy in mind and does not confuse it with Schopenhauerian resignation and pessimism of weakness. The tragic view of the eternal recurrence is instead essentially the same tragic view Nietzsche found exhibited by the Greeks. This is the way in which one can understand Nietzsche, in presenting the eternal recurrence, to stand on the “same soil” as he did in his first important work, the *Birth of Tragedy*, which he calls his “first revaluation of values.”⁸³ The two elements of eternal recurrence, the ethical imperative to live artistically, and the insight that all is connected and necessary in the larger whole, are the same two elements Nietzsche uncovered in Greek tragedy, the Apollinian and Dionysian. The Apollinian is represented in the “art of sculpture” and in “*dreams*,” the Dionysian in the “art of music” and “*intoxication*.”⁸⁴ The Apollinian deals in “forms,” “measured restraint,” “freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god.”⁸⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the Apollinian represents the “*principium individuationis* [principle of individuation].” It is a very Apollinian notion that “the goal of humanity cannot lie at the end but only in its highest specimens.”⁸⁶ The Apollinian sanctions the artistic self-mastery and self-overcoming of the highest natures. The Dionysian, meanwhile, in its intoxicated “blissful ecstasy” at the “collapse of the “*principium individuationis*” and its reaffirmation of the “union between man and man” and even between man and “nature,” calls to mind those aspects of eternal

⁸³ *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” 5.

⁸⁴ *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 9

recurrence that affirm the necessity and connectedness of everything that has happened and is to happen.⁸⁷ Through Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, therefore, the Apollinian and Dionysian are once again brought together.

De Capo!

And with this thought, Nietzsche again returns to the beginning. There is no end-point or final destination in one's spiritual development, because freedom can only be pursued, never captured. Though the education Nietzsche underwent was in some sense a *path* to wisdom, in other senses it is a *circle* that continually dives back into itself as the philosopher eventually fulfills the promise of all three metamorphoses simultaneously. The free man is never done seeking after knowledge. He is never "finished" with his education, with challenging his spirit. Rather than resting content with himself and his knowledge, thinking he has it "figured out," he must remain open to the ideas and perspectives of others.⁸⁸ It is significant that in the third metamorphosis, the spirit becomes a child rather than, as one might expect, a wise old man. The third metamorphosis signals a new beginning rather than an end, and a return to the world rather than a retreat from it. Only to the cowardly man is philosophy a means of escape from a wicked game.

⁸⁷ *The Birth of Tragedy*, 2.

⁸⁸ Thomas Brobjer's historical study of Nietzsche's reading habits show that contrary to "Nietzsche's claims in *Ecce Homo* and elsewhere that he read few books and little in general, he was in fact a rather substantial reader, sometimes a voracious one." This was true of him not only in his younger days, but throughout "his entire life, including even his last active years." Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 1-7.

Nietzsche therefore praises the benefit of communicating not only with other great men, but also with average men and even cynics.⁸⁹ Though he does not quite seek friendship with such men, he is still polite and gracious with them, not only because this is a mark of good taste, but, more importantly, because they provide him with an opportunity to learn. According to Nietzsche, therefore, perhaps the most important basis for the philosopher's sociability is the drive for knowledge.⁹⁰ Though every "choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where he is saved from the crowd, the many, the great majority—where he may forget 'men who are the rule,' being their exception," such individuals are nevertheless "pushed straight to such men by a still stronger instinct, as a seeker after knowledge in the great and exceptional sense."⁹¹ If he remains

hidden in his citadel, one thing is certain: he was not made, he was not predestined, for knowledge. If he were, he would one day have to say to himself: 'The devil take my good taste! but the rule is more interesting than the exception—than myself, the exception!' And he would go *down*, and above all, he would go 'inside.'⁹²

⁸⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 26.

⁹⁰ In identifying the desire for knowledge as the primary basis of sociability for potential philosophers, Nietzsche appears to go beyond Plato's account in the *Republic*, where the philosopher goes back down into the cave only out of a sense of duty to his fellow man—a duty motivated perhaps by pity, or else out of a nobler desire to help unleash the potential he sees trapped within others. The idea that the philosopher goes down in order to learn anything from those in the cave does not seem to be present in Socrates' allegory. In most of Plato's Socratic dialogues, moreover, one would be hard-pressed to find instances in which Socrates appears to genuinely learn something from one of his interlocutors—although a few such instances do in fact occur, particularly in the dialogues that occur earlier in Socrates' life, such as the *Parmenides*. Typically, however, Socrates' conversations appear primarily intended to serve a pedagogical effect for Socrates' interlocutors and for the readers of Plato's dialogues themselves.

⁹¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 26.

⁹² *Ibid.*

The genuine philosopher comes down from his mountain. He “lives ‘unphilosophically’ and ‘unwisely,’ above all *imprudently*, and feels the burden and the duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life—he risks *himself* constantly, he plays the wicked game.”⁹³ To carry out his task, the philosopher must involve himself not only in cultural study, but in the lives of his contemporaries as well.

At this point, the philosopher is finally capable of friendship and love in the fullest sense. This is because it is necessary to “sit firmly upon *oneself*” and “stand bravely on one’s own two legs, otherwise one is simply *incapable* of loving.”⁹⁴ If one is a slave he “cannot be a friend;” if a tyrant, he “cannot have friends.”⁹⁵ True friendship and love is only possible among those who are free and joyful together in their freedom. Only when one is free and has oneself under control can one love the world as it is, rather than approach it on one’s knees in a state of neediness. Through love and friendship the free man seeks to embrace others and even the world itself.⁹⁶

Legislation of Values

But what is the character of the philosopher’s relationship with others, and how far should his influence over them properly extend? In addition to being a creator of values, Nietzsche also says that genuine philosophers “*are commanders and legislators*:

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁹⁴ *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” 5.

⁹⁵ *Zarathustra* I, “On the Friend.”

⁹⁶ For much more detailed accounts of Nietzsche’s views on friendship and its requirements see Ruth Abbey, “Circles, Ladders, and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2 (1999) and Robert C. Miner, “Nietzsche on Friendship,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010): 47-69.

they say, ‘*thus it shall be!*’ They first determine the Whither and For What of man.”⁹⁷

But what does Nietzsche mean by legislation of values?

In the final stage of the philosopher’s education he himself becomes an educator. Indeed, he is a supreme educator who must “educate educators! But the first ones must educate themselves! And for these I write.”⁹⁸ The educators who are needed for this task are those who have

themselves been educated, superior, noble spirits, proved at every moment, proved by words and silence, representing culture which has grown ripe and sweet—not the learned louts whom secondary schools and universities today offer our youth as ‘higher wet nurses.’⁹⁹

It is possible to take Nietzsche’s language of “value legislation” on its face and interpret values as commands issued from above to those below. Though Nietzsche often uses political and war metaphors in describing matters of the spirit in the philosophic life, in calling the philosopher a legislator and commander one should not jump to the conclusion that Nietzsche’s revaluation is intended to immediately reshape political society and culture, although it must be intended to have at least some indirect effect on these spheres over time.¹⁰⁰

This extremely political idea of value legislation is ultimately untenable because Nietzsche recognizes that it is not possible or desirable for all men to be animated by the

⁹⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

⁹⁸ Quoted from Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 50.

⁹⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack,” 5.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche also frequently uses navigational metaphors in describing the philosophic activity, but no one argues that Nietzsche’s philosopher is actually engaged in conducting voyages of exploration over stormy seas.

same values. Nietzsche therefore says that he does "not wish to persuade anyone to philosophy: it is inevitable, it is perhaps also desirable, that the philosopher should be a *rare plant*."¹⁰¹ Because of this, Zarathustra quickly learns that he should "speak not to the people but to companions. Zarathustra shall not become the shepherd and herd of a dog. To lure many away from the herd, for that I have come."¹⁰² Revaluation of values is an intensely personal activity because it involves an individual's finding the values by which he can live and thrive in the world, and because the highest forms of existence will repel most individuals unsuited for them. Throughout his works, from the first to the last, Nietzsche voices his conviction that the "noblest and highest has no effect on the masses,"¹⁰³ and one "misunderstands great human beings if one views them from the miserable perspective of some public use. That one cannot put them to any use, that in itself may belong to greatness."¹⁰⁴

In what sense, then, can the philosopher engage in value legislation for others rather than solely for himself? The philosopher's influence is meant for the very few—at least directly—and only up to a certain point even for these few. Eventually a philosopher's students must also resist their teachers and become who they are. These students will eventually become lions themselves, and, anticipating this need, Zarathustra tells his followers that "only when you have all denied me will I return to you."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *Will to Power*, 420.

¹⁰² *Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," 9.

¹⁰³ "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life," 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Zarathustra*, "On the Gift-Giving Virtue," 3.

Zarathustra wants no disciples, since one “repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil.”¹⁰⁶ The philosopher therefore teaches not through any legislation of doctrine, but through the example of his life and his process of spiritual development.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, the value and ideal Nietzsche is “imposing” is the value of pursuing the truth, viewing life through multiple perspectives, and living in honest accordance with what one discovers. The philosopher’s “commanding” is not crude imposition of form, but the setting of example through his life and works in a cultural community. This is seen very clearly in “Schopenhauer as Educator,” where again and again Schopenhauer is praised and considered a model for the independence he attained and exhibited rather than for any doctrine he held or method he employed. Any teacher must rest content with the fact that his influence is properly over only but a few, and over these few in a limited sense. The limits of Nietzsche’s proper influence are necessitated by his ideas of education and freedom. In Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, Wotan creates a race of heroes to defend Valhalla. He fails miserably, however, and learns that one cannot create free men or lead another to

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ This helps resolve another aspect of the tension Müller-Lauter finds in Nietzsche’s presentation of the overman and eternal recurrence. He argues that “we find, on the one hand, portrayals according to which man’s greatness consists in the absolutization of his perspective” but the “great man can do this only if he shuts himself off from whatever is alien to him ... On the other hand, he also characterizes him ... as the one who withdraws from no possible knowledge ... He should learn to see in various kinds of perspectives, with more and more eyes.” He concludes that Nietzsche’s “great man ... must... be *either* the strongest *or* the wisest. Each precludes the other in principle.” Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) trans. David J. Parent, 73-75. The tension is largely resolved when one recognizes the necessary limitations Nietzsche sees in any man’s proper influence over another. In my interpretation of Nietzsche, the wise man as knower is primary. The wise man is a legislator only in a secondary and a limited sense. In this way, the conflict between wisdom and power is resolved in the only way truly possible on earth.

freedom through one's efforts, however dedicated or skilled. A man must become free on his own power, or not at all. The best one man can do for another is to lead through his own by example, by leaving an account of himself and the path he took in his own attainment of freedom.

In a beautiful image, Nietzsche's Zarathustra therefore says that "to sit on high masts of knowledge seemed to me no small happiness: to flicker like small flames on high masts—a small light only and yet a great comfort for shipwrecked sailors and castaways."¹⁰⁸ This is the limit of any man's proper influence over others. To want more than this is to want disciples, and if one seeks disciples in order to multiply himself, he should "Seek *zeros!*"¹⁰⁹ In his essay on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche commended Schopenhauer's philosophy for demanding "the highest activity in those who will follow it."¹¹⁰ Nietzsche clearly hopes his philosophy will have the same effect in demanding the highest activity, the attainment of freedom. If enough men followed his example in embarking on this most challenging and dangerous task, Nietzsche believed a cultural rejuvenation was possible, which in turn would aid the spiritual development of future individuals.¹¹¹ But to make cultural and political influence one's direct aim is to corrupt

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*, "Maxims and Arrows," 14.

¹¹⁰ "Schopenhauer as Educator," IV.

¹¹¹ Nietzsche's writings contain gloomy predictions of the future as well as cautious optimism. This tension in his thought is understandable, of course, since it is difficult to predict the future. For an example of his optimism regarding the possibility of cultural rejuvenation, see *Ecce Homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy," 4, where Nietzsche writes that a "tremendous hope speaks out of this essay. In the end I lack all reason to renounce the hope for a Dionysian future of music ... I promise a tragic age: the highest art in saying Yes to life, tragedy, will be reborn."

the only process by which lasting, beneficial cultural change is and ever was possible. As in the time of the Renaissance, which was “raised on the shoulders of ... a group of one hundred men,” it is first necessary to develop one’s own spirit, and only thereby can one hope one day to leave behind a signpost pointing the way to a few brave fellow-adventurers.¹¹²

¹¹² “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” 2.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The three metamorphoses provide a key by which to navigate Nietzsche's complex and challenging corpus. This frame helps to show the order and coherence in Nietzsche's thought as a whole, despite the real and apparent tensions within it. The speech on the three metamorphoses suggests that Nietzsche's different periods, works, and ideas inform and speak to each other. Rather than considering any of Nietzsche ideas out of context, each aspect of Nietzsche's thought must be considered in light of the others in order to avoid serious errors of interpretation. As Nietzsche says, since he is often "*brief*," his readers

must become long and comprehensive in order to bring up and together all that I have thought, and thought deep down ... one must be able to see a problem in its proper place—that is, in the context of the other problems that *belong with it*.¹

The speech on the three metamorphoses provides such a context.

Whether or not Nietzsche was ultimately successful in balancing the warring tendencies and commitments in his thought will doubtless remain a matter of dispute. What I hope to have demonstrated, however, is that Nietzsche was aware of at least the great majority tensions in his thought, that he considered them inescapable aspects of the philosophic activity and life, and that he saw the need to strike a balance between them, which he attempted to do throughout his life.

¹ Part of a discarded draft for section 3 of *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," 3. Quoted in Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 796.

Only through a careful examination of the first metamorphosis can one see that the pursuit of freedom begins with disciplined cultural study and apprenticeship. Nietzsche's stance towards past thought is not entirely—or even predominantly—negative. In fact, the study of past thought is considered essential in order to free oneself from the prejudices and predilections of the present. Only after examining the second metamorphosis, furthermore, can one see that Nietzsche's praise of solitude and independence is temporary and subservient to other concerns. For Nietzsche, cultural study and solitude are both necessary ingredients in philosophic development, but both carry their own dangers and temptations that threaten the true end of education, freedom. It is therefore necessary to consider cultural study as well as independence as potentially problematic means to the same higher end.

Considering the second and third metamorphoses together provides insight into two of Nietzsche's most important and complex ideas, the will to power and the eternal recurrence. That the second metamorphosis—in which the philosopher moves beyond his cultural apprenticeship in order to arrive at his own interpretation of nature—is necessary and possible suggests that the skeptical tendencies in Nietzsche's thought are more limited than is often thought. What begins as the lion's critical, destructive activity even culminates eventually in a positive, comprehensive theory of nature, the will to power.

In the course of the second metamorphosis, one also sees that Nietzsche's critique of conventional morality is aimed at its unnatural or “anti-natural” tendencies.² Rather

² See especially, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Morality as Anti-Nature.”

than promoting the “abolition of all decent feelings,”³ Nietzsche is attempting to articulate natural values and promote ways of life able to affirm them. The critical, destructive activity of the lion is therefore not only consistent with the child’s positive, constructive task of value creation, it is essential to it. The commitment to truth and honesty exemplified by the camel and the lion is not abandoned in the third metamorphosis. Instead, the child’s creative activity is limited by the honest understanding of nature it arrived at in its earlier stages of spiritual development.

The speech on the three metamorphoses also reveals the necessary limitations of the philosopher’s influence over others through his revaluation of values. Just as the philosopher resisted his earlier teachers and influences during his time as a lion, so too will his students one day resist him.

In short, the speech on the three metamorphoses reveals that freedom is only attainable within the spiritual community of culture. In each of the three stages of spiritual development, the philosopher is learning from, resisting, and teaching others through his cultural activities. Meaningful human relationships and communities are not only consistent with Nietzsche’s over-arching commitment to freedom, therefore, they are absolutely essential to it. For Nietzsche, freedom cannot even be conceptualized—let alone attained—apart from culture.

Nietzsche’s estimation of the supreme importance of culture for spiritual development decisively undermines arguments that he is a radical individualist or a radical skeptic. Whatever else Nietzsche’s views on truth, freedom, and community are, they are not simple. For Nietzsche, truth is attainable by man, though his grasp on it will

³ *Ibid.*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 37.

always be, to some extent, partial and tentative. The record of man's attempts at capturing these elusive truths is preserved and communicated across continents and millennia through our noblest, most spiritual community.

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