

The background of the cover is a photograph of ancient stone statues and carvings, likely from an ancient civilization like the Mayans or Aztecs. The statues are dark and weathered, with some showing intricate carvings. The lighting is dramatic, with a warm, golden glow on the lower parts of the statues and a cooler, blueish light on the upper parts. The overall mood is historical and contemplative.

# The Agonist

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Nietzsche in History:  
with a Special Section on  
Nietzsche and Chinese Thought  
with Guest Editor, James Luchte

Nicholas Birns  
Soraj Hongladarom  
David Kilpatrick  
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# Table of Contents:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Editors' Introduction</b>   | 1   |
| <b>Essays</b>  |     |
| <b>Part I: Nietzsche and Chinese Thought</b>   |     |
| Introduction by James Luchte, Guest Editor for this Section  | 2   |
| Daggers and Spears: Lu Xun and Nietzsche on Cultural Revolution<br>by James Luchte                                   | 5   |
| Nietzsche on 'The Question Mark,' A Note on Section 346, Book Five of <i>The Gay Science</i><br>by Soraj Hongladarom | 28  |
| On Tranquility: The Essential Word of Nietzsche's <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i><br>by Wang Shunning                  | 40  |
| <b>Part II: Nietzsche in History</b>   |     |
| Every Name in History: The Cosmopolitan Kindergarten<br>Introduction by David Kilpatrick                             | 54  |
| <i>Libido Dominandi</i> : Nietzsche and Sallust<br>by Nicholas Birns   | 65  |
| Nietzsche, Darwin, and the Greeks: On the Aesthetic Interpretation of Life<br>by Michael Steinmann                   | 74  |
| The Seed of All Thought: Nietzsche's "The Uses and Disadvantages of History For Life"<br>by Barry Stephenson         | 117 |
| Nietzsche and La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Concise and Polemical Writing<br>by Yunus Tuncel                          | 135 |
| <b>Contributors' Bios</b>  | 146 |



# **Editors' Introduction**

**Dear Readers,**

We are excited to introduce several new essays to our readers. This special issue is structured in two parts. The first part examines Nietzsche reception in China and Nietzsche's relationship to current scholarship in China. The second part evolved out of an event, "Nietzsche in History," which was organized at Mercy College in March 2015. Three of the five essays, by Nicholas Birns, David Kilpatrick, and Yunus Tuncel, were presented at this event. With this issue we hope to revitalize the discussion on Nietzsche's relevance in the history of ideas, not only in Western context, but worldwide. We consider this issue to be a small, but an inspirational, step in that direction.

We would like to thank all contributors to this issue and look forward to hearing your thoughtful comments.

**Editors, December 2015**

# Part I: Nietzsche and Chinese Thought

## Nietzsche and Chinese Thought

### Prologue by James Luchte

Often when we think of Chinese thought, we immediately are transported to the ancient philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Moreover, when we juxtapose Chinese thought with the German philosopher Nietzsche, we tend to think of the latter philosopher's relationship with ancient Chinese thought. In this way, we have had many comparisons and contrasts between Nietzsche and specific Chinese thinkers, such as Laozi, Zhangzi, Confucius and Siddhartha. There is an established literature of such engagements between ancient Chinese thought and the early and later philosophies of Nietzsche.

Yet, such engagements remain incomplete if we are to understand the complexity and living relationship of Nietzsche and Chinese thought. After all, what is Chinese thought? Did the Chinese only think before the fall of the dynastic monarchy in 1911? In *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (1991, University of Chicago Press), a collection of essays edited by Graham Parkes, the latter already explores the early Nietzsche reception in Japan, and its 'Nietzsche Fever' of 1903, and David Kelly lays out the topography of Nietzsche's influence upon China in 'Nietzscheans' such as Lu Xun, the founder of modern Chinese literature, and Li Shicen, a philosopher in the May Fourth Movement, and details the history of Nietzsche scholarship in the China of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These essays contribute to an understanding of the living relationships between European philosophy and that of contemporary China.

In light of the contemporary reality of Asian thought, the essays in this section do not seek to merely rehash the comparisons and contrasts between Nietzsche and ancient Chinese thought. On the contrary, the essays are expressions of contemporary Asian thought upon the *topos* of Nietzsche's relationship with China.

The first essay, by Wang Shunning (Department of Philosophy of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China), 'Tranquillity as the Essential Word of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,' contests the significance and meaning of intoxication as it has been emphasized in Western scholarship. From a contemporary Daoist reading, she contends that tranquility is the highest transfiguration of intoxication, and that Nietzsche transforms his focus from music in the narrow sense to the tones of life in what she calls 'pan-musicalization.' Tranquility is the goal of life and it is a state that is achieved only by the one who creates his own values, away from the crowd.

The second essay, by Soraj Hongladarom (Department of Philosophy, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) maintains the contemporary perspective through a challenge to Nietzsche's understanding of Buddhism. Hongladarom claims that Nietzsche lacked a textually sound interpretation of Buddhism and suffered from his reliance upon the glosses of Schopenhauer, who maintained a 'dual world' perspective on Buddhism. Hongladarom claims, however, that, despite these misinterpretations, Nietzsche's philosophy has more of a kinship with Buddhism than he himself would have admitted, especially with respect to the question of nihilism. The essay seeks to create a relationship between the Buddhist aversion to suffering and Nietzsche's emphasis upon that which is useful for life. Such a reading requires a re-interpretation of the basic relationship between Buddhism and Nietzsche.

In the third essay, ‘Daggers and Spears: Lu Xun and Nietzsche on Cultural Revolution,’ James Luchte (Department of Philosophy, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China) engages in the longstanding and bitter contestation of the relationship of Lu Xun and Nietzsche. Luchte begins with an account of Lu Xun’s reading of Nietzsche and many other poets, philosophers, and writers from Russia, England, America and Europe. It was through these readings, especially of Byron and Shelley, that Lu Xun articulated his conception of revolutionary literature and cultural revolution in his early pre-1911 essays. Luchte then challenges those who would seek to dissociate Lu Xun from Nietzsche with what he calls the ‘Nietzsche caricature’ that still persists in many accounts of Nietzsche. In light of the shared focus upon revolutionary creativity between Nietzsche and Lu Xun, Luchte turns to Lu Xun’s early essays which announce a Chinese literature *to come*. Luchte next engages with this modern and revolutionary literature, which only began to appear seven years after the 1911 revolution. Lu Xun’s ‘daggers and spears’ were used to laugh the remnants of the old order out of existence. Luchte then turns to Lu Xun’s controversial essay, ‘Literature of a Revolutionary Period,’ in which he tells cadets that literature has no place once the fighting has begun. Luchte closes with a consideration of the existential difference between Nietzsche, the writer, poet and composer, travelling around Europe on his pension, and Lu Xun, the revolutionary republican and Marxist who directly engaged in revolution – but a difference which is merely a fulfilment of Nietzsche’s call to his fellow creators, ‘This is my way! Where is yours?’

# Daggers and Spears<sup>1</sup>: Lu Xun and Nietzsche on Cultural Revolution

James Luchte

O my brothers, not long will it be until new peoples will arise and new fountains rush down into new depths.

For the earthquake—it chokes up many wells, it causes much languishing: but it brings also to light inner powers and secrets.

The earthquake discloses new fountains. In the earthquake of old peoples, new fountains burst forth.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘On the Old and New Law Tablets’, 25.

## LU XUN – ON ‘CHINA’S NIETZSCHE’

Lu Xun was nineteen when Nietzsche died in 1900. He had already begun to write poetry, in classical Chinese style, and came into contact with Western literature in Nanking, where he attended a mining school. It was not until the following year however that he, with a government stipend to study mining in Japan, intensified his relationship with the available threads of world literature, European, British, Russian – and Nietzsche. The work of which he had the most access was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Japanese renditions of his thought, including the *Untimely Meditations*. Lu Xun travelled to Japan at the right time – amid the chaos of the post-war years and the reformation toward modernity, Japan sought to become an industrial and military power with the aid of Western, i.e. ‘Modern,’ science, including Western medicine and literature. Lu Xun immediately recognized the political and cultural significance of literature, especially that of the English Romantics, Byron and Shelley (to the exclusion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pusey, James Reeve. *Lu Xun and Evolution*, p. 182.



more introspective poets Wordsworth and Keats) in their individuality and defiance of a corrupt and oppressive cultural and political order. He found a similar though deeper message in Nietzsche, one simultaneously of a poetic and philosophical order. Yet, it is the meaning of this influence, and of Nietzsche's message, that has remained controversial. This current writing will be an attempt to dissolve this controversy through the exposure of the intellectual and artistic affinities of Lu Xun and Nietzsche upon their own respective and overlapping *topoi*. It could be argued that Nietzsche had his most immediate impact in Japan, which already by 1903 (at a time which Lu Xun was already in Japan) had a 'Nietzsche Dispute', and had experienced 'Nietzsche fever.' Such an intellectual event could hardly have been missed by Lu Xun, and his first essays of 1907 and 1908 mention Nietzsche, echo Nietzsche, yet, from the perspective of a Chinese radical democratic 'Mara' poet. Lu Xun is not served well by the name of 'China's Nietzsche' – unless, that is, it is clear what we mean by 'Nietzsche'. Such clarity seems to have been lacking in many of the early receptions of Nietzsche, especially in regards to the notion of the *Übermensch*, which in the context of the early Japanese reception resembles more closely Zarathustra's ape, a caricature of Zarathustra, of which Nietzsche had already anticipated, and which he warned would be due to poor reading, in his own prophesy of widespread misunderstanding of his philosophy. In this light, I will cast into the light the caricature of Nietzsche in order to exorcise it from our subsequent discussions.

### **ZARATHUSTRA'S APE: THE NIETZSCHE CARICATURE**

Amid the cultural vacuum of the scientific and positivistic turn of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, there was widespread popular cultural and political resistance, a struggle which erupted with the widespread establishment of industrial capitalism, of the *proletarianization* of large

proportions of the population as they were stripped of their customary rights to the land, either killed outright or huddled into small rooms in the city, destined to work in factories. In the midst of this radical transformation of the social *topos*, there emerged differing contradictions, and responses, novel forms of social relationships and struggle – the emergence of the entrepreneurial class with the commodification of the subject and of nature, eroding not only customary land rights, but also cultural memory, traditions in disarray, myriad dying cultures shattered in the wake of the Kronian power of fire and steel.

It was in the midst of such a context that Nietzsche emerged, and he was quite honest as to his political filiations and disaffiliations, non-affiliations. Nietzsche sought a ‘grand politics’, one of cultural creativity, revolution and transfiguration, not of the state, which he calls the new idol, nor of the invisible hand, the market. He was averse to political parties, mocking the party man who in the end can speak only party. Nietzsche was a young student when he began to write his first poems and became a Professor of Classical Philology at the age of 25. Poetry and poetics remained central to his work and could be regarded as its explicit meaning with respect to the centrality of creativity, of making, *poiesis*. Reflecting upon his first work from 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in a new 1886 Preface, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche wrote that he wished he had written the latter work as a song. It is significant that his *magnum opus*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is composed in poetry in the form of a symphony, indicating the Dionysian power at the heart of his work. It was Nietzsche’s intention to create, through the Dionysian power of music and poetics, a counter-movement against and within nihilism in order to re-awaken the wellsprings of culture, of creativity, in the creation of ‘new peoples’.

That such an intention was shared between Nietzsche and Lu Xun would be relatively uncontroversial, except for those who, while not reading Nietzsche, spew vitriol upon what they

regard as his philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Yet, I would like to make a stronger argument of kinship between the two writers and influence upon Lu Xun by Nietzsche's philosophy. The usual caricature of Nietzsche is of a power-obsessed megalomaniac, who in his abhorrence of the common man, sought to enact an aristocracy based upon violence and cruelty. It is the *übermensch*, or the "superman," who, in this caricature, symbolizes this tyrant – and comparisons with various twentieth century dictators, in such a context, becomes sufficient to reject Nietzsche's philosophy. The caricature in many ways is a creature of political diatribe and journalistic distortions, misunderstandings, built up over decades. To be fair to the early Japanese reception, under the guiding hand of scholars such as Zhang Binglin—who became the inspiration for Lu Xun's infection of China with 'Nietzsche fever'—materials were sparse, with Lu Xun reading "The Prologue" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, accounts of *Untimely Mediations* and accounts of Nietzsche and others in surveys of European thought and history. Yet, one is less forgiving to more recent commentators who have maintained the caricature of Nietzsche and maintaining the controversy, or even embarrassment, over the relationship between Lu Xun and Nietzsche. Indeed, it is significant that Lu Xun not only read Nietzsche in the context of diverse world literature, especially the romantics, but also that he himself *translated* the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into Chinese.

One will recall that the Prologue is no mere opening, but a lengthy overture, which includes Zarathustra's initial salute to the sun, his first announcement of the Death of God as an aside to the hermit, the Overman and the Last Man to the people in the market, the tightrope walker and his death, the warning of the grave diggers, the supplication to the lone cabin for food

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, Mabel. "On Nietzsche and Modern Chinese Literature: From Lu Xun to Gao Xingjian," *Literature and Aesthetics*, 12:23-43, 2002. This essay is significant only in that its ignorance of Nietzsche and Lu Xun has no excuses. It exhibits a shocking lack of knowledge of its subject and is little more than propaganda and invective against Nietzsche and the Chinese government.

and drink, and the burial of the body after the coming of the first truth. With this latter truth, Zarathustra declares that in respect of the Good and the Just, of those who hypocritically rule the cities, he will become a lawbreaker and will seek companions to take away from the good and the just others who also seek to freedom, to create that which is beyond the *human-all-too-human*. In the Prologue, Nietzsche has built a world, and has named many of the characters, myriad juxtapositions within the world, the rulers and the ruled, the culture of stagnation and servitude, of conformity in the herd, the dissolution of individuality amid a regime of fear. In this way, Lu Xun would have had before him the basic situation that was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He moreover was familiar with the section, “On the Old and New Law Tablets,” in Part Three, another very long text. While the Prologue sets up a situation and alludes to that which is to come – the seeking of companions, fellow free spirits – it does not allow one to simply extrapolate and assume one knows the rest of the story, as if one had heard it an eternal number of times. The heroic tales of Carlyle, who Lu Xun also read, would not be fulfilled by Zarathustra, as, in his flight, he faces the gravest battle. Indeed, the section immediately following the Prologue, beginning Part 1, “On the Metamorphoses of the Spirit” throws a wrench into such a heroic tale with its procession from the Camel, to the Lion, and finally, to the Child. It is likely that Lu Xun would have also read “On the Metamorphoses of the Spirit,” as it can be documented that he was familiar with other sections of Part 1, such as the speeches, “On the New Idol” and “The Flies in the Marketplace.” The inexorable transformations on the part of the *übermensch* (and hence its meaning and domain) serve to undermine the caricature from the outset. The Camel is simple enough to understand, as the slave, the bearer of all burdens, which in the case of Nietzsche was European nihilism, and for Lu Xun, the rot of a dynastic corpse. Nietzsche, as Lu Xun himself would emulate when he quit his medical studies, saw himself as

the physician of culture, presiding over a dying culture. For Lu Xun, the bearer of the burdens is the Chinese nation, in its humiliation, suffering, fragmentation, a sterile official culture in submission to imperialist exploiters, far removed from the voices of contemporary humanity, and from the enduring mythological wisdom of the common people. The Lion comes as the one who destroys the old law tablets, who rebels, resists, roars on the eve of revolution, who incites the uprising of the people. For both Nietzsche and Lu Xun, the official culture of their respective *topoi* must undergo a cultural revolution, one that would involve the destruction of nihilistic forms which not only no longer serve life, but actively threaten it. Yet, in respect of the metamorphoses, although an act of destruction is also a creation, it is the Child who, growing up amidst the new world that he or she finds, bestows new values, and immerses himself in the creativity of a self-propelling wheel. The Child is far from the dictator envisaged by opponents of Nietzsche. In this way, one could seek to understand Nietzsche through the lens of the *active* political romantics such as Byron and Shelley, both of whom Nietzsche held in high regard. For Nietzsche and Lu Xun, cultural vitality must be provoked, the dominant forms must be subverted and displaced by new or suppressed forms and values – this is the destruction that is necessary as a prelude to cultural transfiguration.

Up to this point, Lu continues to walk with Zarathustra as he, five years in Japan, was already well on the revolutionary path when he published his first essays in *Henan* in 1907 and 1908. These works were written in response to the urgent situation in China (caused by Japanese and European imperialism and internal fragmentation) and the necessity of laying the ground for the Anti-Manchu revolutionary movement. Under the influence of his vast reading and in his relationship with the aforementioned radical intellectual Zhang Bingli, Lu Xun sought, as had Zarathustra, to find companions, and through his work, to influence the intellectual struggle

through the introduction of diverse perspectives upon the Chinese and global situation. Indeed, if we consider two other sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which Lu Xun knew, “On the New Idol” and “The Flies in the Marketplace” (not to mention “The Pale Criminal”, etc.) it is clear that Nietzsche has something else in mind for Zarathustra than political tyranny, in that the latter’s metamorphoses, from the Camel, to the Lion and the Child have the same trajectory as Lu Xun – that of cultural renaissance transcending the state and the market. Through his speeches to the people – as a preacher of radical transfiguration – Zarathustra seeks to steal sheep away from the herd, as a bird of prey of thought and wit, to seduce those with ears to hear to leave the herd and its hypocrisy and join with Zarathustra in *attempting* a path of one’s own. For this is Zarathustra’s *going under* and *going over*, his trajectory as a self-hangman<sup>3</sup> – he does not seek power, but to create, he flees the market place, the state and political parties – he seeks solitude so as to confront his heaviest weight, the eternal recurrence of the same – the eschatological Trojan horse. With this confrontation, one that intimates the radical singularity of human existence, Nietzsche has disclosed the sovereignty of the artist, and of mortal freedom beyond any temporary political construction. Zarathustra survives his confrontation with his tragic and comic singularity, convalescing with the food brought to him by his animals. He addresses the goddesses, soul, life and eternity – these handmaidens of the truth. He declares his love for eternity and the symphony ends, as Graham Parkes, would have it.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in Part Four, Nietzsche gives us a new ending of the story, and one that concurs with the subtitle: “A Book For All and None”. The first three parts can be enjoyed as a symphony of a being who came to terms with his own mortality – this is a book for all. But, as he leaves again to go into his solitude, Zarathustra is not merely contemplating death, but travels to face his own death without evasion.

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<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Dionysos Dithyrambs,” *The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche*, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> Parkes, Graham. “The Symphonic Structure of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,” *Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008.

As with Empedocles, Zarathustra is approaching his death, not as a sacrifice but as a completion of his life as a gift from fate. He does not aver from his path, despite the evasive temptations of the higher men, all of whom are marks of himself, of his drives, each of whom seek to evade death – Zarathustra will accept the gift with gratitude. The *übermensch* is that one who can stand and say, “Thus I willed it!”, looking back upon the fragmented chaos of history, places and times. This personal death, this ending of the story, is, as it is Zarathustra’s death, for none – it is Zarathustra’s death and the meaning that he divines for the world is his alone. Each will seek his or her own meaning – “This is my way, what is yours?” Zarathustra, in the end, does not seek followers, does not try to dominate or destroy lives or life. Instead, in the wake of his destruction of the falsifications of life in nihilistic religious and political eschatologies, he juxtaposes the culmination of his own life in its openness to fate with the nihilistic flights, seeking escape from the terrible truth. Zarathustra embraces fate without resentment, giving birth to himself, inseminated by the lightning bolt of eternity. Nietzsche, in his master work, demonstrates a life that is lived as a gift, one that conquers innocence, displacing the nihilistic cobwebs which suffocate our ability to create ourselves. Indeed, with his pseudo-eschatology, an ironic construct, he implodes all eschatologies. Yet, this is not merely a voluntaristic or arbitrary project, but one attuned to the condition of the age, of its exhaustion, and of its possible re-birth through a creative and critical deconstruction, over perhaps centuries, of the nihilistic hegemonic fantasm and its institutional lifeworld.

Lu Xun is well attuned to such a ‘Nietzsche,’ one who cultivates the freedom of the self in order to create, incite, and cultivate the conditions for new peoples, a world a creativity by means of creativity, an indefinite becoming of creativity, the self-propelling wheel of the child, the well springs. Lu Xun took heed of Nietzsche’s teaching, seeking a cultural transfiguration

through his own writing, a writing of biting satire, comic absurdism, surrealism, including, as with Alberto Savinio and George Bataille, among others, strange an-achronistic juxtapositions, epochal discordance and tragic and comic irony. Emulating the example of Byron and Shelley, as well as with Nietzsche, Lu Xun, well-armed and highly original, immersed himself in the East Asian pre-revolutionary intellectual struggle. Lu Xun confined himself to essays and short stories, poetry, but perhaps came close to *Thus spoke Zarathustra* with his own beggarly “The True Story of Ah Q”, a tale of the comic hero of the Chinese Republican revolution of 1911, led by Sun-Yat-Sen. Lu Xun came to be a stern critic of the so-called republican revolution – and the Nationalists as such - and joined sides with the Communists in the civil war which began in 1927 – and which coincided with his crucial essay, “Literature of a Revolutionary Period.”

In the following sections, I will consider, in light of our previous discussion of the context of emergence of Lu Xun, two of Lu Xun’s early essays from 1908, “Refutation of Malevolent Voices” and “The Power of Mara Poetry,” two of his stories, “A Diary of a Madman” (1918) and “The True Story of Ah Q” (1921), and his 1927 essay, just noted, “Literature in a Revolutionary Period.” We will find that Lu Xun, as with many other writers, such as the European surrealists, followed closely the perspectives, strategies, and Nietzsche’s philosophy, often with a Marxian supplement. Lu Xun participated, on China’s behalf, on the world stage of modern literature, upon a global *topos* of cultural and political activity and agitation. Lu Xun’s engagement was contemporaneous and inter-connected with those of an imperialist and monarchical Europe, which, as we have indicated, also suffered its own type of stagnation and suppression of creativity. Indeed, this is the *topos* which is truly illuminating in this context, the global relations of power between the imperialist powers of Japan and Europe in juxtaposition to an imperialized China, India, and the rest, Africa, South America, Eastern



Europe - the so-called 'primitive' or 'fallen nations'. It is clear, moreover, that these imperial assaults were prepared ideologically by the deprecation of China by the likes of Hegel. In this context, we can see what is at stake in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, both of whom had already delved deeply into Asian philosophy, with the latter resonating with the early Greek philosophers who were akin to the philosophies of Asia. In this way, there was and is a global circulation of literature as there is that of any commodity or object of trade. Yet, there is also communication, diffusion, person-to-person exchange, and the creation of relationships on a global level. It is in this way that Lu Xun was the founder of modern Chinese literature as he set forth a pathway in his own practice which cleared a space for the eruption of the energies of the people of China, in their own self-expression and continuous re-invention. Lu Xun confronted the singularity of the gaping vacuum that stood in the face of himself and his and others of his generation.

### **PROLOGUE TO REVOLUTION**

Lu Xun's essays "Refutation of Malevolent Voices" (1908) and "The Power of Mara Poetry" (1908), among others of this phase, provide a rough sketch of his political and cultural perspective, in which he distinctly casts his lot in favour of the republican revolution. His contribution in his essays is not only a meditation upon what sort of revolution it should be, its complexity and character, its scope, national and international, but also a provocation of those dissatisfied with the imperial culture to create something new. In 'Refutation', he criticises those who would seek to graft the results of modern Western science onto the existing power structure, together with the social Darwinist notion that the powerful are the most fit, and that the poor and their superstitions should be eliminated (such as the figure of dragons). Lu Xun defends the popular mythologies of the common people as an exercise of the heart, of bountiful imagination,

and as an example of hope in meaning *per se*. Nietzsche shared Lu Xun's disdain for crass and uncreative Darwinism, especially that applied to the socio-economic and political realms. Zarathustra warns the young creator to flee from the marketplace and declares that the state is the great idol and the death of peoples. Both Nietzsche and Lu Xun wanted to conjure and cultivate new peoples. For Lu Xun, the self-governance of the common people is the meaning of the republican revolution, the liberation of those who had suffered for centuries under dynastic rule, whose voices were silenced. Yet, the revolution was also about the further liberation of China as a nation in the face of the imperialist powers. For Lu Xun, the dynastic system had revealed itself to be completely out of touch with the reality of the contemporary world, that its bureaucratic system populated by those who passed the official examinations in ancient classics, had suffocated the potential of the people. Lu Xun criticized the 'Men of Aspiration' and later those who were pretend revolutionaries, as traitors who merely sought novel, modern methods of extracting wealth from the people, and who worked in collaboration with the imperialist powers. That which was required was not merely or even modernization, as was happening in Japan, but a cultural and social revolution which would liberate the people to build a new culture, one which would stand and resist as a new power in the face of internal and external aggressors.

The character of such a cultural revolution is intimated in his work, "The Power of Mara Poetry," in which he set forth the results of nearly a decade of intense study. His focus is upon 'Mara', the demonic, in respect to poetry, the power of the spirit and feeling and the transformational potential of such an awakening in China. He sketches the power of poet-revolutionaries such as Byron, Shelley, and Nietzsche – an intimation of the latter's own celebration of great poets and figures who may place their stamp upon an age – these would be the Lions who roar on the eve of revolutionary transfiguration. For Lu Xun, Byron was

simultaneously a forceful social critic, cultural rebel and revolutionary internationalist in his resistance at home and in his active and self-sacrificial support of Greek Independence. Shelley was the conscience of his age, especially in poems such as “The Mask of Anarchy” (1819), in which he dissects the monarchy and its power structure, exposed in its violent massacre and suppression of the people at Peterloo. Nietzsche himself, as well as his double Zarathustra, enacted his poetic work upon the philosophical and theological terrains – these are his targets, his daggers and spears, in a manner similar to Lu Xun’s post-1927 work, as we will see. Nietzsche has set forth something *new under the sun*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a displacement of the theoretical man of Socrates and the mono-theological axiomatics and politically constructed literatures - these which are to be regarded as a *fact* of revelation from the divine. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in its own scope and in its specific dramatic trajectory exhibits a parody of the crucifixion of Jesus with the death of Zarathustra; Nietzsche, returning to the prophet who first made the distinction between good and evil, Zarathustra of Persia, has this figure give innocence back to the earth, and to life. This is an ultimate pathway and experiment in freedom and affirmation, one which sought to grasp hold of the vast chaotic history of mortals and to cry, “Thus I willed it.” Zarathustra performs his task to return innocence to the world, to overcome *ressentiment* in the face of death, to put punishment to sleep, and to celebrate the Dionysian self. Nietzsche, in his existential encounter with his own mortal freedom, and his enactment of *amor fati*, beyond the jurisdictions of the state or the market, places affirmation as the *sine qua non* of human existence. Such affirmation is an allusion to the remainder of resistance which will always elude the attempt to totalize the myriad fields of power, of command and control. Human existence is freedom, death assures us, the singularity of existence will deconstruct from within the attempts to assert, as Schumann wrote, a hegemonic fantasm. In light of such freedom, one

is prodded by Nietzsche, the one who had established the freedom of the modern poet, and encouraged others, those to come in the future, philosophers, poets, artists to find their own pathways in the en-action of the cultural revolution.

Lu Xun did chose his own pathway, one which resonated with Nietzsche's world and his injunction to kill with laughter, the revolt of the imagination of the English romantics, the absurdity of Gogol of Russia, George Washington, as an example of a founder of a republic, mixed together with his own social and cultural perspectives, and his knowledge of the Classic cultural topography of China and the popular mythology of the common people. These threads are tied together to articulate a singular voice during the revolutionary transformation of China, a project from which he never wavered, but remained vigilant, standing guard over the course of the revolution – not a party man, but a philosophical poet, engaged in the cultural and political revolutions. He sought to encourage others to think differently, to engage a novel topography in which the spectators are at once the actors, in the procession of a new culture.

### **THE LITERATURE OF LU XUN**

It is ironic that Lu Xun could not afford to take the examination to become an official bureaucrat in the Qing dynasty. Instead, as we have alluded, he ostensibly studied mining, and then medicine, while for the most part, was engulfed in reading, Western history, literature, writing poetry, pre-revolution (1911) essays, as we have seen, and in 1918, his first short story "The Diary of a Madman" in the magazine *New Youth*. It should be noted that soon after the republican revolution, precipitated by dozens of local uprisings and led by Sun Yat-Sen, Lu Xun began to work for the Ministry of Education, copying books and teaching. His first story emerged only during the *May Fourth Movement* of students, in the late teens, who were

dissatisfied with the course of the revolution. The provisional government was a fractious regime which presided over a country torn to pieces from the inside and out, as warlords rivalled each other for control of land, resources and trade, and global imperialists continued to carve up China as the ‘concessions’ of a ‘fallen nation’. People starved in the streets and even, in a reported case at the time, resorted to cannibalism, as members of the provisional government, still dominated by Qing dynasty operatives, attempted to restore the old order.

The works of Lu Xun in the May Fourth period are literary, short novellas and stories, in a satirical and comedic vein. The first, “The Diary of a Madman” has resonances with Gogol, who wrote a story of the same name, and Nietzsche, whose madman runs the streets announcing that we ourselves have killed God. There are also resonances with surrealism, in the bizarre juxtaposition of the ancient and the incipient modern aesthetics, supernatural occurrences, with biting caricature and absurdist humour. The madman, in Lu Xun’s story, sees the inscription, ‘Eat People’ amidst the juxtaposition of the Confucian ethical order, the order of the dynastic epoch and of the contemporary destruction of the nation. It was the same Confucians who presided over the centuries of exploitation of the people, who, in an economic sense (also resonating with Marx) of eating people, extracting their energy and life, labour, prohibiting their free cultural and political economic expression – the people remain a resource to be exploited or eliminated as the situation may ordain. In its dissociation with everyday reality, as it is lost in the fog of hollow and hypocritical official culture, Confucianism, in its emphasis upon harmony, order and peace, merely served to legitimize an authoritarian culture-political economic dynastic order. Peace meant the continuation of exploitation, as only rebellion and uprising can challenge a cultural and political order of extractive, exploitative relationships. In this way, the madman is also an allusion to the schizophrenia of the Confucian order, members of which were earnestly

seeking to undermine the republican revolution, to restore an order dangerously out of touch with the needs of the people, the solidity of the nation, and the standing of China upon the topography of an interconnected, though asymmetrical world order. The madman throws the charge of cannibalism to the Confucian conservatives, of collaborating with exploitation, in contradiction to their own teachings, participating in the extraction of a social order which was in perpetual war with its own people. Lu Xun targeted the traditionalist elements, the Qing restorationists, with the daggers and arrows of his stories, as he, as Nietzsche recommended, killed with laughter, though sometimes with tragic terror, a feature that recurs throughout all of his 1920's writings. Indeed, it would seem that these stories, if not directly effectual in their casting light, in a specific way, upon the corruption of the new order, seemed to have been moving in the anti-traditionalist direction, when in 1927, the two remaining viable forces in China, the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists of Mao Tse-Tung entered into a civil war. In many of his writings of the 1920's, Lu Xun prepared the meta-narrative ground for this civil war and directly involved himself in the war on the side of the Communists.

In "The True Story of Ah Q" (1921) Lu Xun already had begun his drift toward the communists in a scathing satire of the 1911 Xinhai revolution and the subsequent capitulations of the republic government, which had been ceding land for peace. After the death of Sun Yat-Sen in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek, in 1926, undertook the Northern March, seeking to establish hegemony over the Chinese mainland. His attempt at hegemony was met with a communist insurrection and a prolonged civil war. Lu Xun would not live to see the end of the civil war, the Second World War in which the Chinese lost 20 million people in its theatre of the war with Imperial Japan (The Great Patriotic War Against Japanese Aggression), the renewed civil war after the Japanese defeat and the triumph of the Communists who declared the People's Republic

of China in 1949. In his “The True Story of Ah Q,” Lu Xun exposes the Xinhai revolution to ridicule, as a false and drastically incomplete affair, a farce of self-delusion. Indeed, as early as ‘Refutation of Malevolent Voices,’ in 1908, he wrote of the shift toward modernity and pseudo-revolution amongst members of the gentry and the order of official bureaucrats. In Ah Q, this is exactly the flaw of the Xinhai revolution. Despite being made possible by countless bloody uprisings of the people, the transition of power was itself tightly controlled. There was a displacement of most emblems of the traditional feudal order, yet the structure of power itself was not altered. In this way, none of the three central goals of Lu Xun had been fulfilled by the republican national government: the country has not been unified, political economic equality has not been obtained by the people, and the standing of China on the world stage continued to be that of humiliation. Lu Xun describes Ah Q, the leader of the revolution, in an absurd light, a Don Quixote who fights with windmills, or in this case, who is repeatedly humiliated, defeated, though interpreting each of these defeats as a victory, so that he may better sleep. Despite the destruction of the prominent elements of the traditional order in the anti-Manchu riots, the revolution remained incomplete, in danger not only of the restoration of the dynastic order, but also the destruction of China itself. A revolution only in name maintains the politico-economic and cultural order of obedience and suppresses the imaginative energies of the people, while leaving unscathed the extractive and exploitive relationships within and without China. Lu Xun continued to throw his daggers and arrows until 1927, when he shockingly announced, in an address, the peculiar character of “Literature of a Revolutionary Period.”

## LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION

One of the perspectives shared by Lu Xun and Nietzsche was their suspicion regarding a false peace, of the Platonic or Confucian mask of anarchy, one of rest and repose, covering over the truth of a system of political, economic and cultural violence, cannibalism. For Nietzsche, a disciple of the early Greek thinkers, such as Heraclitus and Empedocles, and of Hölderlin, the world, the cosmos, was a unity of opposites, life is this tension, and without the tension, there would only be death, or its epochal instantiations as moribund cultures, suffocating new life and new possibilities. The tension of the bow is harnessed and falsified amid a vampiric relationship between the aristocracy, the powerful, and the common people. As for war, Lu Xun and Nietzsche both fought with their pens for the liberation of the creative spirit, of this tension. Zarathustra, far from seeking a mere street-fight, seeks a cultural revolution, one which gives to mortals their innocence and their sovereignty over their own creative practice. Nietzsche until the day he collapsed the street, composed poetry and music, travelling extensively, while keeping extensive notes. In a cultural war, one must use cultural weapons – although those weapons may announce the ‘not yet’ of literature, such as in one of Lu Xun’s last pre-civil war absurdities, “Forging the Swords,” (1926) in which a litany of supernatural farce unfolds in a surrealist (heads singing in dancing in a boiling cauldron) assassination of the Emperor, symbolizing in this case, Chiang Kai-Shek.

In his April 8, 1927 address to the Hangpu Military academy, “Literature of a Revolutionary Period”, Lu Xun makes a grave announcement that he is no longer going to write literature. He has been asked to give an address on revolutionary literature and simply responds that no such literature can yet exist. Literature transforms the cultural situation, transfigures the way each regards country, world, the meaning of life itself, yet, it cannot fight and win a war. It



could be suggested that herein lies a difference between Nietzsche and Lu Xun. The latter silenced his art to engage in a real war, not as a metaphor for the blood of a pen, but with the blood of corpses. Lu Xun, due to his inclination for social revolution – and not merely cultural – sought to transfigure the order of power within China and its relationships upon the global topography. Nietzsche was not involved in a revolutionary war outside the bounds of his writings in the cultural revolution. Lu Xu said bluntly in his address that there is no place for revolutionary literature during a revolution. During a revolution, he contended, there is a need for revolutionaries. Literature may, with its roars and howls against its enemy, beckon the oncoming struggle, but it has no place in battle. If there is to be revolutionary literature, then there must be revolutionaries. But, revolutionaries are those who are fighting a revolution and not writing. Lu Xun suggests that perhaps after the fighting is over there will be time to write for the revolutionary. But, once the war has begun, the time for literature is over – as it is writing which prepared the ground for the onset of critical action. Literature not only revealed the enemy, but it also disclosed the fact that the alleged revolutionaries who were merely rebranded bureaucrats, were unwilling to give up power regardless of the destruction of China and its people. In such a state of urgency, literature must become silent - one's energy must engage in warfare. He states at the end of his address, directly to his audience of cadets, who will soon go to war:

You gentlemen are actual fighters, fighters for the revolution, I think you had better not admire literature just yet. Studying literature will not help in the war — at most you may write a battle son which, if well written, may make pleasant reading when you rest after fighting. To put it more poetically, it is like planting a

willow: when the willow grows and gives shade, peasants knocking off work at noon can eat and rest beneath it. The present situation in China is such that only the actual revolutionary war counts. A poem could not have frightened away Sun Chuanfang, but a cannon-shell scared him away. I know some people think literature has a great influence on revolution, but personally I doubt this, literature is after all a product of leisure which does, it is true, reflect a nation's culture.

Men are seldom satisfied with their own occupation. I have never been able to do anything but write a few essays, and I am tired of that; yet you who carry rifles want to hear about literature. I myself would naturally rather hear the roar of guns, for it seems to me that the roar of guns is much sweeter to listen to than literature. This is all I have to say. Thank you for hearing me out.

In his humble and beggarly way, Lu Xun, a “writer of a few essays” stands before men who will fight and die in imminent revolutionary civil war. He addresses them, modestly stating that while these men die, he will write no more literature. The civil war resonated in this address. Yet, Lu Xun did not remain silent, but worked in a network of writers, the *League of Leftwing Writers*, and began to write critical communications against various tendencies of thought, such as Trotskyism. This phase of polemical and political writing, deploying his skills as a writer in the context of revolutionary struggle, lasted eight years, when he returned with a new short story, “Curbing the Flood.” (1935). That he had returned to literature was symbolic of his declaration

of a pause in the revolutionary civil war in the wake of the rise of Hitler and the immanent menace of Imperial Japan which continuously sought to capitalize on the disunity within China. Lu Xun's position was for there to be a break in the civil war so that the Nationalists and the Communists could unite to fight against the Japanese. This fight against the Japanese lasted until 1945. In this story, the absurd and ridiculous status of the rulers is cast into clear view. Headed by Yu, the second to be entrusted to solve the problem of the flood, the rulers are blind to the flood, unknowing of a solution, and in hedonistic disregard for the suffering of the people, of the nation, seeks ways to further gratify themselves. The officialdom of the bureaucracy goes into full force, enacting an intricate ritual of postponements, misdirection, and theatrical non-action, evident of schizophrenic dissociation. All the while, the officialdom wallows in the vortex of the usual self-satisfaction – multiple investigations, each with dinners, provision by the people of their needs while they evade the crisis (which they themselves have created and allow to fester) – while, pathetically maintaining the much needed optimism that at least the people have lots of water – and fish. Lu Xun wrote several more short stories before his death in 1936, increasingly satirical and comedic, gaining the increasing scorn of the nationalists. Nevertheless, the pause ensued and the project of national sovereignty was placed upon the flames. Though Lu Xun had only intimations of the events that would unfold after his death, and as the result of his work, was posthumously named as the “commander of China's cultural revolution” by Mao Tse-Tung in posthumous recognition of his role as the founder of modern Chinese literature.

## **EPILOGUE**

Given the controversy and even embarrassment in some quarters regarding the relationship between Lu Xun and Friedrich Nietzsche, it is ironic that it was only Lu Xun who was actively

engaged in revolutionary warfare and who had advocated actual war. Nietzsche stayed clear of the political parties, the state (except for his pension), and the marketplace – especially in regards to his sales. Yet, another irony presents itself that Nietzsche is perhaps only famous due to the appropriations and misappropriations of his work by political parties and revolutionary art movements. He attempted to flee from them, but thinking that he must be their leader, they followed him. Lu Xun maintained his literary and philosophical integrity and independence, yet, he did take sides, and it was a choice that was taken from the heart, as he would write in his early essays. In this way, while Nietzsche ultimately remained a visionary and revolutionist in the literary, philosophical and religious domains, especially after his ill-fated attempts to join with Wagner in the resuscitation of German culture, Lu Xun remained a practitioner of revolution in its various guises until the end. There remains a core agreement between Lu Xun and Nietzsche as to principles, a shared understanding as to the inherent strife and tension of human existence, and of their strategic and perspectival approach to cultural revolution. Yet, their respective positions in society and the specific events of their own respective eras encouraged differing responses, as complementary as they turned out to be. Lu Xun favoured the common people as he was one of them, while Nietzsche's family feigned aristocracy, a trait that Nietzsche would endorse. As he was seeking philosophers of the future and the birth of new peoples from the earthquake, he was also seeking a new aristocracy, one of artists, a non-political cultural aristocracy which would bring the state and the market to heal through the disclosure of a different world. Nietzsche regarded himself both as a 'good European', a pied piper of the best European national writers, and as untimely – he joked that he would be born posthumously, and indeed he was, in Japan, China, in Germany and the rest of Europe and America in the decade and a half after his death – and in most cases, his impact was directly political.

Lu Xun, on the other, was born at the right time, as the founder of modern Chinese literature and as a cultural and political revolutionist, though he, tragically, did not live to see his work come to fruition in either a China which gave its blood in the defeat of Japan (his advocacy of an alliance between the Nationalists and the Communists), nor in the final victory of the Communists with the creation of the People's Republic of China, which, given his radical criticism of the ineffectuality of the first nationalist revolution, could have been coined by himself. Lu Xun exalted the common people in his writings as the heart of the Chinese nation and language, and for whom he fought in his writings and political activities. It was precisely the lack of decisive cultural and socio-economic transformation in the Nationalist programme which drew him away from their camp in the first place. For, in the end, a "republic" without radical political economic and cultural equality is not a public thing, but, as in the case of China, more of the same tyranny in a different mask. And, while such an order may have been exposed through literature, the order itself had to be displaced by a novel configuration of culture and power, one which seeks the emancipation of contemporary possibilities, energies and voices.

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## Nietzsche on ‘The Question Mark’

### A Note on Section 346, Book Five of *The Gay Science*

**Soraj Hongladarom**

Section 346 of the Book Five of *The Gay Science* by Nietzsche must belong to some of the most interesting passages in all of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Here Nietzsche talks about the role of value in human life. He also talks about the total loss of value and disenchantment of the world, and not only that we find ourselves in opposition to certain traditional values. The ‘Question Mark’ is mentioned at the beginning is a kind of topic for the Section, and toward the end Nietzsche mentions the Question Mark again: Human beings seem to face a dilemma — either accept the values or face nihilism, but Nietzsche’s point is that the values themselves can be nihilistic too. And this is perhaps the real meaning of the Question Mark. He does not explicitly provide a way out of this very debilitating dilemma. Furthermore, he also mentions that the teaching of the Buddha is an expression of self-denying, world-renouncing values that we ‘have turned our backs on.’

It is the contention of this paper that even though Nietzsche does appear to be advocating nihilism, he in fact does affirm life in a very interesting way. Through denying the traditional values as well as any attempt to negotiate those values on their terms, Nietzsche opens up a new vista which hitherto has not been possible. One must not miss the irony in the tone of his writing here. Hence the Question Mark—whether we must go down the traditional route of revering invented values, or face nihilism, or whether everything is nihilistic—is answered in the affirmative, or better in the ironic form. It is through nihilism that nihilism is destroyed, so

opening up new vistas of possibilities. The Overhuman blazes a trail for himself through brandishing the nihilistic fire.

In this paper, I will examine the Section thoroughly; my assumption is that we can gain a glimpse of Nietzsche's thought better if we look at one aspect of his works very closely. This is so because Nietzsche's thoughts are highly complicated, and more importantly are not presented in a structured, linear manner typical of most philosophers. On the contrary, Nietzsche presents a huge jigsaw of thoughts and ideas, all connected to one another in a vast web of interconnected statements. This presents a challenge to anyone who tries to understand what he is up to, but perhaps a way to unravel these complexities could be found in a very close look at one small passage of his writing. If his thoughts are there in a vast interconnected network, then chances are that one node in the network could 'mirror' and 'be mirrored by' other aspects. Since his thoughts have no clear place where they begin and since the progress (if such a word can be used at all with how his ideas are developed and presented) of his thoughts is not linear at all, if we then focus upon one place very carefully, then there is a good chance that this close look could illuminate most of his thoughts. This is the technique I will be employing in this paper.

Let us then look at the Section in its entirety, starting with the first paragraph:

346. *Our question mark.* -- But you do not understand this? Indeed, people will have trouble understanding us. We are looking for words; perhaps we are also looking for ears. Who are we anyway? If we simply called ourselves, using an old expression, godless, or unbelievers, or perhaps immoralists, we do not believe that this would even come close to designating us: We are all three in such an advanced stage that one--that *you*, my curious friends--could



never comprehend how we feel at this point. Ours is no longer the bitterness and passion of the person who has torn himself away and still feels compelled to turn his unbelief into a new belief, a purpose, a martyrdom. We have become cold, hard, and tough in the realization that the way of this world is anything but divine; even by human standards, it is not rational, merciful, or just. We know it well, the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, 'inhuman'; we have interpreted it far too long in a false and mendacious way, in accordance with the wishes of our reverence, which is to say, according to our *needs*. For man is a reverent animal. But, he is also mistrustful; and that the world is *not* worth what we thought it was, that is about as certain as anything of which our mistrust has finally got hold. The more mistrust, the more philosophy.

We are far from claiming that the world is worth *less*; indeed it would seem laughable to us today if man were to insist on inventing values that were supposed to *excel* the value of the actual world. This is precisely what we have turned our backs on as an extravagant aberration of human vanity and unreason that for a long time was not recognized as such. It found its final expression in modern pessimism, and a more ancient and stronger expression in the teaching of Buddha; but it is part of Christianity also, if more

doubtfully and ambiguously so but not for that reason any less seductive.

The whole pose of ‘man *against* the world,’ of man as a ‘world-negating’ principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting--the monstrous insipidity of this post has finally come home to us and we are sick of it. We laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of ‘man *and* world,’ separated by the sublime presumption of the little word ‘and.’ But look, when we laugh like that, have we not simply carried the contempt for man one step further? And thus, also pessimism, the contempt for that existence which is knowable by *us*? Have we not exposed ourselves to the suspicion of an opposition--an opposition between the world in which we were at home up to now with our reverences that perhaps made it possible for us to *endure* life, and another world that consists of us--an inexorable, fundamental, and deepest suspicion about ourselves that is more and more gaining worse and worse control of us Europeans and that could easily confront coming generations with the terrifying Either/Or: ‘Either abolish your reverences or--

*yourselves!*' The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be--nihilism?--This is *our* question mark.<sup>1</sup>

It is not much to say that this short passage contains much of Nietzsche's mature philosophy, especially those concerning nihilism and the revaluation of all values. Nietzsche says that he should not be described as one who is 'godless,' an 'unbeliever,' or an 'immoralist,' for he has gone much further than that. For him value means nothing at all except as a natural phenomenon, something that is clearly part of nature itself. To be a 'godless' person or an 'unbeliever' means that one still operates within the confines of the gods, so to speak. One still refers to the gods and asserts that they do not exist, or one refers to an article of belief and asserts that it is not true. Either way one still refers to the entity which one wants to refuse. By talking about the gods, even when such a talk is a denial that the gods exist, one somehow surreptitiously maintains the gods in the discourse. One, in other words, still talks largely in the same language, inhabits the same conceptual world, as those who believe in the gods. However, for Nietzsche to be called 'godless' or 'unbeliever' or even 'immoralist' does not even come close to describing what he is in fact. He says, "[w]e are all three in such an advanced stage that one—that *you*, my curious friends--could never comprehend how we feel at this point." Nietzsche is no longer, strictly speaking, godless; he does not merely accept the gods or God through denying that He exists; on the contrary, he does not inhabit the conceptual world in which God resides all together. To see what this actually means one needs to imagine a situation where God is not in the picture at all. Since God used to function as the ultimate basis for all values and meanings, to live as if God does not matter at all, to live in such a way that even being 'godless' is too weak a description,

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 285 – 287.

would mean that the source of values and meanings cannot be found in any kind of transcendent source at all. Instead such a source can only be found in the mundane world itself, through pragmatic consideration of whether an action leads to desirable results or not. In such a situation, however, there might still be an occasion to talk about God or other transcendent beings; such a talk, nevertheless, must relegate God to be something directly tangible. God thus is a way for humans to answer to their needs. Thus Nietzsche, “We have become cold, hard, and tough in the realization that the way of this world is anything but divine.” God seems to have been banished forever from Nietzsche’s universe.

Banishing God from the universe means that Nietzsche’s project does not include any act of valuation of the world itself; his is not a task of arguing that the world is worth less than what it should be. To do that Nietzsche would still have to refer to some kind of foundation which presumably would function as the ultimate source of any form of objective valuation. Since Nietzsche wants to bring back valuation to the purely human and social realm, such an act of referring to this type of foundation would be untenable. Hence, for Nietzsche, there is no valuation of the world as being either better or worse than what it is, or as exactly what it is, for it is the act of valuation itself, one whose foundation lies in the supra-social realm beyond human enterprise, that is suspect here.

Nietzsche says that this kind of valuation through objective, supra-social foundation has its ancient source in Buddhism and also in Christianity, and in its modern expression one finds it in ‘modern pessimism,’ such as in Schopenhauer’s philosophy. For Schopenhauer, the world is full of suffering because it is a manifestation of the cold, dark, impersonal Will; the suffering happens when the Will is frustrated, and it is only through complete denial of the Will, which amounts to nihilism, that true happiness can be achieved, a task which for Schopenhauer is

almost impossible. This referring back to the Will as the ultimate source of valuation of things as either good or bad then is singled out by Nietzsche as an act of supra-social valuation which is ultimately untenable. Looking back toward the ancient sources, Nietzsche says, interestingly, that this reference to the supra-social source is found in Buddhism also. Presumably he thinks that according to Buddhism there is something that functions as the metaphysical source of normativity, this could be Nirvana, the state where all sufferings cease. But we have to bear in mind that the knowledge of Buddhism that was available to Nietzsche during his time was in its infancy, and many of the modern scholarships that have allowed people in the West to know more accurately about Buddhism were simply not available to him. So, one has to talk about the Buddhism as understood by Nietzsche as opposed to the real Buddhism. Nevertheless, it is apparent that here Nietzsche is criticizing the Buddha for engendering this kind of supra-human, supra-social form of valuation. Perhaps, he means that the Buddha, by saying that the world itself is worth 'less' than Nirvana as the ultimate reality, set into motion the movement where people tried to *renounce* the world. Seeing that the world is full of suffering and is totally unsatisfactory, the Buddhist practitioner set about to release himself or herself from this world through rigorous forms of self-discipline. Now the story is familiar to Buddhists. It is through self-discipline that the defilements are washed away, resulting in the practitioner becoming liberated, thereby entering Nirvana.

But in fact Buddhism does not have to fall to Nietzsche's criticism at this stage. By renouncing the world, the Buddha does not mean that one should totally abandon the world and search for another, purer and cleaner one, which lies beyond it. In fact that seems to run counter to the spirit of the Buddha's thought in the first place. Nietzsche seems to believe that the Buddhist subscribes to the two world theory which is also there in Schopenhauer. The apparent

world is unsatisfactory whereas the ultimate world is where truth really is. However, there is a tradition within Buddhism that maintains that the apparently two worlds are in fact one, and from the perspective of the doctrine of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) even this one world is itself empty of any inherent characteristics. This does not mean that the one world is an illusory one, but it means that this one world is characterized by causes and conditions, such that no part of this world can be held up and maintained that it is free from its causal and constitutive relation with all other parts.

Hence in Buddhism one does not value the world as either better or worse than some ideal world, because in the end both the worlds are empty of their inherent characteristics from the beginning. Here Buddhism agrees with Nietzsche. In fact Nietzsche's view of regarding values as entirely natural would not be too far from the spirit of Buddhism either, since the latter does not accept any supra-human source of normativity as do the theistic religions such as Christianity or Islam. For Buddhism, normativity always stems from the fact that valuing something to be good is a result of it leading to a desired position. Since becoming released from suffering is the supreme good, then any action or decision that leads to this condition would be valued as good, and any action that leads to the opposite direction will of course be labeled as bad. Furthermore, Buddhism also agrees with Nietzsche that values are not there objectively as Kant argued. According to Kant, normativity stems from the basic facts of human beings as rational, autonomous agents each one deserving respect as ends and not means. In any case, Kant's normativity is objective in the sense that each human being's rational capacity is objective. However, in Buddhism, whether an action can be regarded as good or bad does not stem from some objectively existing foundation (either God or the human capacity to reason), but from whether the action can lead to what kind of results. Even the result that is taught by the

Buddha himself to be the ‘supreme goal’ - since it signifies end of suffering—is in the ultimate sense a contingent one. The teaching is: If you desire to achieve the state of final liberation, then such a course of action and of believing would be *good* for you. Nothing is good or bad for you *per se*. Nietzsche would not have objected, had he learned that this is in fact the real teaching of Buddhism.

The last paragraph of Section 346 is the most important one, the climax of the piece. The reason why Nietzsche objects to any kind of confrontation between man and world - any attempt at representing the world to the consciousness of man so that the latter could judge it—is for Nietzsche untenable because that would be turning back to the judging through relying on the supra-human and supra-social foundation that he has already denigrated. Phrases such as ‘man against the world,’ ‘man as measure of the value of things,’ or ‘judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting’ are all derivative of this assumption that there be an objective source of values and normativity which lies beyond simple human judgment. What Nietzsche appears to be advocating here is that, instead of accepting these supra-social source, humans should do better to recognize things as they really are (since to believe that such extramundane source exists would be, in Nietzsche’s worlds, a ‘mendacious’ way of looking at the world), and realize that values are only ways of conceptualizing the world in such a way that some desired results happen, and there is no way to guarantee that in all cases the results being desired now will always be desirable in the future. For Nietzsche, instead of separating man and world, we should do better by regarding man as part of the world itself. *Man* and *world* are one and are indivisible. This is also a Buddhist viewpoint.

Then in the last few sentences, the real climax of the passage, Nietzsche talks about an opposition, one between “the world in which we were at home up to now with our reverences,”

on the one hand, and “another world that consists of us--an inexorable, fundamental, and deepest suspicion about ourselves.” The former is the world that is familiar to us, one populated by God, the gods, spirits of all kinds which we are revering. This world is also Kant’s world of objective morality based on human reasoning capability. Nietzsche says that it is this world that makes it possible for us to ‘*endure* life.’ This kind of world can help us endure life because it gives us hope and the belief that things are as they should be. When we revere something we certainly believe that it exists and that it can help us go through our troubles. It is a comforting picture, but Nietzsche knows, and we know, that this world is no longer with us. Later on in Book Five, Nietzsche will say in a very famous passage that God is dead, meaning that the belief in God, the reverence that we have had with God, has already left us and it is we ourselves, human beings in the modern world, that are responsible for His death. God is alive in the former world, but in the latter world, world without ultimate, objective source of values, God can find no place to live.

From the perspective of those who believe in objective, supra-social normativity, a place where God (or the ultimate source of normativity according to Kant) can find no place to live would be a nihilistic one. Denying any ultimate source of normativity would be tantamount to denying any objective morality, leading to a situation where only naked, raw power dominates. Nietzsche’s dilemma toward the end of the passage: “Abolish your reverences, or—*yourselves*” is uttered precisely in this context. There is a choice--either you live in the world populated by God or the human power of reason which ensures objective morality, or you do not live anywhere at all since presumably everything becomes nihilistic at this point. If you do not abolish the reverences, then you yourselves are abolished instead. There would then be absolutely nothing for you to hold on to, nothing that will tell you what is right and wrong, and you are totally adrift in the alien world, since to act as if there are God or the gods would be



mendacious any way. This is what Nietzsche probably means when he presents the following dilemma: if you do not abolish your reverences, then you abolish yourselves, since the gods are our own creation, affirming them and believing them to have power over us human beings would be to put them above us, thereby 'abandoning' ourselves. Nietzsche sees this as the major malady that afflicts modern people in his time, those in late nineteenth-century Europe, but by extension he means all of us who put our faith in something beyond ourselves. By doing so, we abandon and abolish ourselves.

In the last sentence of the passage, Nietzsche says that to abolish the latter horn of the dilemma, to abolish one's own self, is clearly an act of nihilism. The picture we have just seen is that if one does not abolish the reverences, if one still keeps God in the picture, then one, very ironically, embraces the nihilistic worldview. However, Nietzsche also says that to take on the first horn of the dilemma is also an expression of nihilism. What does it mean, then, to say that the first horn, to abolish all reverences, is nihilistic? We understand the second horn well enough, when we ourselves are 'abolished' as a result of maintaining all sources of extra-human normativity, we have the very ironic nihilistic picture maintained by Nietzsche through his depiction of external situation where God is already dead. But here Nietzsche says that even the very act of abolishing all reverences is nihilistic. And Nietzsche strongly underscores this point by noting that this is the 'question mark' which is the topic of the entire Section. Perhaps the question mark signifies that when the first horn of the dilemma is taken, then what is abolished is the very identity of people themselves. On the contrary, in order for the new kind of being to come forward, one which has no regard for the traditional system of morality and one who takes the matter to one's own hand, all the reverences to the old system of morality have to be relinquished totally. Here is a reference, then, to the Overhuman, the kind of being advocated by

Nietzsche, exemplified by Zarathustra, a being who invents his or her own values and lives by them, a being who has no regard for either God, the gods, or the human rational power. All the references to the old God or the human power of reason as the source of normativity have to be abolished, done away with, before this new kind of self emerges.

In conclusion, then, the 'question mark' in the Section refers to the question as to what would happen if human beings embraced the nihilism that is implicit in their choice when they 'abolish all reverences.' That is, when they themselves act as does Nietzsche himself when he goes beyond being merely 'godless' and 'unbelieving.' What would happen to humans when they dispel all kinds of metaphysical, putatively objective, sources of normativity? The answer is that one needs to be Overhuman, one who takes care of the task of inventing new values by himself. This does not have to mean that the Overhuman can act whatever way he pleases, but it does mean that any choice that the Overhuman is making is ultimately something that only he himself is responsible.

## On Tranquility:

### The Essential Word of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*<sup>1</sup>

Wang Shunning

Nietzsche views tranquility as the root of all cultures. In 1876, during the Bayreuth music festival, Nietzsche felt intensely that modern art had become all-too-noisy and over-excited, and he became enchanted by “tranquility on which all cultural existences depend.”<sup>2</sup> He hoped to “give all of these back to all mankind, tranquility, purification, and nobility.”<sup>3</sup> If, for Nietzsche, tranquility is the basis of all cultures, and at the same time, intoxication is the root of ancient Greek spirit, do these characterizations conflict with each other? This essay attempts to indicate that tranquility is the transfiguration of intoxication, and Zarathustra is the Spirit of Dionysus.

Since Nietzsche confesses that Zarathustra is Dionysus, certainly tranquility can mean intoxication in some senses. But, the former does not completely equal to the latter. They are the same in difference. If Nietzsche's thinking could be regarded as a ternary form of musical structure, it is obviously impossible for a later section to repeat thoroughly the previous one. For, why would we produce three sections? Although the dominant motif is one, variations are many. Various tones, rhythms, harmonies create together to compose the musical movements of

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was the second section in the first chapter of my doctorate dissertation entitled *Pan-musicalization of Intoxication: on Nietzsche on Art and the Will to Power* in 2003, then I translated and edited and read it at the international academic conference on Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the Department of Philosophy at University of Wales (Lampeter) in Autumn 2008. Currently, I did some modifications again with the help of Prof. And Dr. James Luchte. As Schopenhauer said in his preface to the third edition of *The World As Will and Representation* in 1859, “I find consolation for this in the words of Petrarch: Si quis tota die currens, pervenit ad vesperam, satis est (De Vera Sapientia, p. 140)” .

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Halevy, *Nietzsche*. Trans. By Tan Beifang. Nanchang: Baihuazhou Literature and Art Press. 1996. China. P. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

intoxication. Along this line, both music and plastic arts ‘may’ all be the movements of intoxication. The former is the temporal flux of life, while the latter is spatial blooming of life. Rachmaninov’s ‘Piano Concerto No. 2’ and Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night’ strike our bodies with the same bolt of lightning that we feel a chill down the spine, fluttering in our stomach, and once we feel them, they will still send the same feelings surging through our bodies to the future during our lives.

In a word, in the transition from Dionysus’ musical frisson to Zarathustra’s tranquil beauty of life, there is not merely a transformation in the meaning of art, but also of Nietzsche’s perspectives, namely, art shifts from music as a specific category to tones of life. Therefore, the horizons of Nietzsche’s thinking become wider. If the essence or character of Dionysus is ecstasy, then the essence of Zarathustra is tranquility, light, and purification.

### **1. TRANQUILITY AS BEAUTY**

When the noisy and colorful world gradually fades away behind the climbers, life starts to open itself to the most beautiful musical tones in the sound of silence. A summer in the highest spheres with cold wells and blissful silence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is not the transition of physical time and space. Rather, loftiness and aloneness in the height above 6000 feet is not sublimity and loneliness, but the strong power of Heraclitus of Ephesus, separated from the scale of the public.

Because power replaces beauty, the latter does not occur frequently in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Yet, this does not prevent his text from being an aesthetic one, although aesthetics has traditionally focused upon mainly such issues as beauty in itself, absolute beauty and so on, as the origin and developments of this subject has suggested. While, the point is, even

if beauty is not a key word of his aesthetic thought, Nietzsche's writings do show us where the most beautiful thing lies. That is the beauty of the Overhuman (Übermensch), 'the stillest and lightest of all things once came to me. The beauty of the Overhuman came to me as a shadow. O my brothers, what are the gods to me now?' (TSZ, 199).

Generally, people argue that the Overhuman is a symbol of strength, and should be characterized as the strongest, even including the Nazi's interpretations and distortions. Yet, Nietzsche describes it with such words as the stillest and lightest beauty. Reading Nietzsche, this is the crucial point which deserves to be considered carefully. Why, in Nietzsche, does *tranquility* become the characteristic of the Overhuman? And, why "the bright, the bold, the transparent who are cleverest among those who are silent..."? (TSZ, 286)

Reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is not difficult for us to sense and conclude that the whole text is an ode dedicated to tranquility, such as sea, mountains, sky, wells, green, cool breezes, glorious light, soul, and utter tranquility, so on and so forth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here are some distinct examples in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, The Portable Nietzsche*, Selected and Translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press, 1962, pp. 135, 272, 276, 296, 343, 349, 352, 388, 408, 432:

'Amazed, Zarathustra looked into the woods and the silence.' (TSZ, 135)

'When all light grows quieter. For whatever of happiness is still on its way between heaven and earth now seeks a shelter in a bright soul; it is from happiness that all light has grown quieter.' (TSZ, 272)

'Gods are shrouded by their beauty; thus you conceal your stars. You do not speak; thus you proclaim your wisdom to me. Today you rose for me silently over the roaring sea; your love and your shyness are a revelation to my roaring soul. That you came to me, beautiful, shrouded in your beauty, that you speak to me silently, revealing your wisdom.' (TSZ, 276)

'O happy silence around me! O clean smells around me! Oh, how this silence draws deep breaths of clean air! Oh, how it listens, this happy silence!' (TSZ, 296)

'If ever I spread tranquil skies over myself and soared on my own wings into my own skies; if I swam playfully in the deep light-distances, and the bird-wisdom of my freedom came-but bird-wisdom speaks thus: behold, there is no above, no below! Throw yourself around, out, back, you who are light! Sing! Speak no more! Are not all words made for the grave and heavy? Are not all words lies to those who are light? Sing! Speak no more!' (TSZ, 343)

'It is the honey in my veins that makes my blood thicker and my soul calmer.' (SZ, 349)

'What rose-red stillness! What unclouded silence!' (TSZ, 352)

Obviously, for Nietzsche, tranquility makes the measure of beauty. Zarathustra values everything by means of it. As the measure of all, such a scale of beauty is utterly different from the traditional one. In the latter, beauty is basically related with two aspects: on the one hand are colors and proportion, both of which are dealing with the appearance of objects. On the other hand is the highest reason. These two scales come from the division of the dual world, where they can be shown in different aesthetic stairs, for example, Plato's stairs of beauties, from individual beauty of form ascending along common beauty of form, beauty of laws and institutions, beauty of knowledge, to beauty in itself eventually. If metaphysics was the mainstream of Western tradition, then traditional beauty also belonged to the categories of highest rationality. Hence, such a traditional beauty is evacuated from their vivid lives and at last becomes an ultimate cessation, end.

However, the ultimate end would better be regarded as death rather than tranquility. After all, life loses its whole flavor, sound, light, color, taste, etc. Only inner spirits, or invisible eyes exist. In both the Eastern and Western worlds, there are such kinds of thought. The renunciation of life is regarded as the precondition of the highest state. They said "Life is suffering", (TSZ, 157) and, "Lust is sin, let's step aside and beget no children." (ibid.) As for Nietzsche, they are preachers of death. Nietzsche said, "Let them preach renunciation of life and pass away themselves!" (ibid.). In other words, the beauty of rationality lies in a dual world and makes use of an ultimate rationality to dissolve the process of life. On the contrary, the tranquil beauty of life is the becoming of life. Through traditional metaphysics where it was named, aesthetics does not achieve its independence because it was subjected to theoretical science or practical science.

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'He lay on the ground in the stillness and secrecy of the many-hued grass.' (TSZ, 388)

'O pure smells about me !.....O happy silence about me.' (TSZ, 408)

'The moon is cool, the wind is silent.' (TSZ,432)

With the tranquil beauty of Zarathustra, Nietzsche pronounces the Declaration of Independence for aesthetics.

Additionally, the tranquility of Zarathustra differs from its kinship in late Hellenistic period. No matter whether it is Stoic, Epicurian or Pyrrhonian, tranquility is their highest life goal. For the Stoics "... to be a lasting peace of mind"<sup>5</sup> is the most important because it is the only real 'good', rather than the surface of 'good.' This 'good' is consistent, pure, in the depths of a hidden value. Epicurus argues that so-called happiness is "the body without pain and soul without turmoil,"<sup>6</sup> This is the beginning of the happy life and it becomes the purpose of life, and thus becomes the highest good. All in all, the scale or the measure, is happiness, and every kind of happiness is good, but not every kind of happiness deserves to be pursued. As for Pyrrho, "the highest good is to judge nothing, and along with this attitude is the peace of soul."<sup>7</sup> Since things are consistent, without contrast, feeling or opinion cannot account for the true and false.

It shows us that under the swords and horses of Alexander the Great, ancient Greek philosophers encountered the destruction of the four traditional virtues, and attempted to construct new ethics, sought the highest good and happiness. That is peace of mind or soul. We can figure out there is a distinct point that makes Hellenistic peace far from Zarathustra's tranquility. As for the former, because the pursuit is of the same kind of pure 'good', it cannot avoid crashing into the shackles of rationality, even though it tries to be free from the bind of the body. Or, in rejecting suffering, it cannot gain happiness as well, for happiness is always

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<sup>5</sup> Seneca, *On the Happy Life, Selected Readings of Western Philosophy*. Vol.1, edited by Section of Foreign Philosophy History in Department of Philosophy at Peking University, Shangwu Publishing House: Beijing, 1981, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> *Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, edited by Section of Foreign Philosophy History in Department of Philosophy at Peking University, Sanlian Publishing House, Beijing, 1957, p. 368.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 342.

accompanied with suffering. Or, with the cancellation of any judgment, it destructs tranquility ultimately as well.

For example, in Stoicism, good as pure identity is actually a variation of Parmenides' well-rounded sphere. Such a peace can only be contemplated and spoken by reason, the supreme one of the dual world, while the tranquility of Zarathustra is non-rational. In the eyes of Epicurus, as every happiness is good and every suffering is bad, what makes life happy is sober contemplation. Suffering is nonsense, unless it can bring happiness. Zarathustra, on the contrary, affirms that life comes along with suffering. As for Pyrrho, the world is neither the self-identity of being of Parmenides, nor the existence and non-existence of Heraclitus. The world is neither non-existence or existence. That is the absolute negative, definitely opposed to the *song of yes and amen* of Zarathustra.

In a word, these thoughts on peace in the Hellenistic period are essentially a reconstruction of ethics. It comes from negation and withdrawal, in the final analysis, and belongs to Nietzsche's opposite, the decadence of life. As he writes, "Pyrrho, like Epicurus, two forms of Greek decadence." (WP, 241)

## 2. TRANQUILITY AS INTOXICATION

When Zarathustra says, "Still is the bottom of my sea; who would guess that it harbors sportive monsters? Imperturbable is my depth, but it sparkles with swimming riddles and laughter" (TSZ, 228), he utters the oracle of tranquility. Yet, why does the spirit of Dionysus, Zarathustra,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), 'Attempt at a Self-criticism', p. 26, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Translated and Edited, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1968: "The spirit of Dionysus who owned the name of Zarathustra."



preach tranquility to us? Why is it imperturbable when the sea sparkles with swimming riddles and laughter?

First of all, intoxication is not sick madness and noise. It is imperturbable. “When the Greek body and Greek soul ‘bloomed,’ and not in conditions of morbid exaltation and madness, there arose that mysterious symbol of the highest world-affirmation and transfiguration of existence that has yet been attained on earth.” (WP, 541). Along this line, on the one hand, intoxication as affirmation is far from negation. On the other hand, what it affirms is the world. Here the world is life because what it affirms is the body and soul. And, the path of affirmation is not morbid exaltation, because morbid exaltation will speed up time.

The extreme calm in certain sensations of intoxication (more strictly: the impedance of the feelings of time and space) likes to be reflected in a vision of the calmest gestures and types of soul. The classical style is essentially a representation of this calm, simplification, abbreviation, concentration—the highest feeling of power is concentrated in the classical type. To react slowly, a great consciousness; no feeling of struggle. (WP, 420)<sup>9</sup>

Not to hurry up, rather, slow down; no turmoil, rather, calm; no complexity, rather, simplification; that is Zarathustra's essential personality or character.

So intoxication is tranquility. That is the reason Zarathustra utters the oracle of tranquility as the spirit of Dionysus. If intoxication is spherical music of the original life of universe, tranquility as intoxication is the most amazing cadenza. That is, the most amazing movement is transparent tranquility. What kind of ears does it need to be heard? Nietzsche is insisting upon his strict border, as he said, “My whole Zarathustra is a dithyramb on solitude or, if I have been

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<sup>9</sup> It has long been shown, since at least Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* (1950) that the Nazi's sense of ‘power’ has nothing to do with Nietzsche's indication of the ‘will to power’.

understood, on cleanliness - fortunately not on pure foolishness” (EH, 690), because Wagner himself had characterized his Parsifal as the pure fool.

As mentioned above, if intoxication is performed as the visible music of the universe, tranquility is its invisible musical piece. Like the *eternal recurrence of the same* as the highest affirmation of existence (the will to power), tranquility as the highest tone of intoxication leaves itself to the most powerful ears, because “superior, noble spirits, proved at every moment, proved by words and silence.” (TI, 510)

As a result, the ‘Night Song’ is not the song of the beloved, it is the song of the lover. “Night has come; now all fountains speak more loudly. And my soul too is a fountain. Night has come; now all the songs of lovers awaken. And my soul too is the song of a lover.” (TSZ, 219) A lover lives in his own light. Hence, when Zarathustra sees lions and doves (his children), he is calm. In a word, as intoxication, tranquility is not dead silence in the meaning of traditional metaphysics. It contains storm. “It is the stillest words that bring on the storm. Thoughts that come on dove’s feet guide the world.” (EH, 675)

But, tranquility is the higher appearance of intoxication rather than keeping entirely in correspondence with it, just as the eternal recurrence of the same is the highest tone of the will to power. To listen to the will to power does not require too much power, yet, the ears which can listen to eternal recurrence are not common, “the tempo of these speeches is a tender adagio. Such things reach only the most select. It is a privilege without equal to be a listener here. Nobody is free to have ears for Zarathustra.” (EH, 676)

Such a kind of privilege is not political, economic or military superiority, but of ears who can listen to Zarathustra. The reason it is special lies here, what Zarathustra utters is not manic allegretto, but gentle adagio, as the good and sweet figs falling from the trees and the north wind

ripping figs under pure sky of afternoon in autumn. It is gently from the Blessed Isles, from the will to creation. If intoxication as the power of life is experienced in everyone's life, then the experience of tranquility is not so common. Basically, when we understand tranquility and the eternal recurrence of the same, we start to walk toward Nietzsche. "In my books, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* occupies a special position." (EH, 675)<sup>10</sup>

In his early text, intoxication is origin of music, or the nature of music. In his late writing, *The Will to Power*, intoxication is the basic essence of all existence. The thinking road goes through such a tunnel, the tranquility of life in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This reveals the shift in Nietzsche's perspectives from a specific category of art (specifically music) to the great art of life, from intoxication to tranquility. Here, life is human *being*, that is, becoming from human being to Overhuman, which is the stillest and lightest of all things. That is the beauty of the Overhuman. In this way, from intoxication to tranquility, it means from specific music to a pan-musicalization.

At the same time, how is it possible that the world is intoxication? It must be by means of listening to the sound of tranquility. In other words, only when tranquility is understood as intoxication, the world could be intoxicating or pan-musicalizing. Because it is obvious that world is the becoming of intoxication only when it sees becoming. But the world does not always look like becoming. If a volcanic eruption means intoxication, a quiet volcano might be considered as 'dead.' In this light, tranquility is a more secret status of intoxication.

From this perspective, we can ascertain that if intoxication is the explicit becoming of existence, then the becoming of tranquility remains implicit. If the former impacts on sense, then the latter pertains to spirituality. It is not sensuality, but 'the spiritualization of sensuality.'

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<sup>10</sup> *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Translated and Edited, with Commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1968.

Nietzsche writes, “The spiritualization of sensuality is called love: it represents a great triumph over Christianity.” (TI, 488) Spontaneous sensuality occurs from any emotional life, but spirituality is not the same. That is why the will to power is quite often mis-interpreted as the physical impulse of life, distorted further as the desire for military and political power, because it fits more closely to the emotional life. If Nietzsche's ten-year wandering and writing are only preaching physiology and military and political power, it is completely and unnecessarily time-wasting, because any emotional life could therefore be Overhuman. While, Nietzsche said he never has yet found an Overhuman, for even Zarathustra is only the prelude of the Overhuman.

Such a meditation shows that, through tranquility, intoxication gains spiritual significance. At the same time, the characteristics of Zarathustra's *flute* are also light and purification. As Nietzsche writes, “from an infinite abundance of light and depth of happiness falls drop upon drop, word upon word; the tempo of these speeches is a tender adagio.” (EH, 675) Zarathustra is “fond of all that is clean”, for as Nietzsche writes in ‘On the Rabble’, he does not “wish to see the grinning snouts and the thirst of the unclean.” (TSZ, 208)

### **3. TRANQUILITY AND LIGHT, PURIFICATION**

Within the context of ancient Greek music, the characteristic nature of the Dithyramb is light, purification and tranquility. And, with the flute of Dionysus, the preaching of Zarathustra is light, purification and tranquility too. There are no variegated colors, no wild sounds.

We have mentioned earlier that the preaching of Zarathustra is tranquility. At the same time, its companions are purification and light. Let us look at light firstly. The beauty of the Overhuman is the stillest and brightest. If tranquility is the implicit intoxication, which means the

development of the music motif, from Dionysus to Zarathustra, where is Apollo now, who first arose in *The Birth of Tragedy*?

Occurring in the earlier text, Apollo as dream is opposed to the intoxication of Dionysus and forms the dual world. But such an opposition quickly *compromises* into the Dithyramb. In the late text, both Apollo and Dionysus belong to intoxication. Only in middle period's text, as perhaps a slight against Wagner's *Opera and Drama*, it seems to us that Apollo disappears, though Dionysus also disappears. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche said Zarathustra is Dionysus, so it is seemingly that only Apollo gets lost. But, that is not true. Apollo has a special status as the tranquility of Zarathustra: as one aspect of the beauty of the Overhuman.

Just as tranquility is a variation of intoxication, light is an aspect of the beauty of the Overhuman as symbol of life. Nevertheless, as we all put it, Apollo is the god of light. As the name suggests, Apollo is the symbol of light undoubtedly.

After ten years in the mountains, in the prelude of TSZ, Zarathustra first utters an ode dedicated to the sun, the overflowing cup of life as follows:

We waited for you every morning, took your overflow from you,  
and blessed you for it...For that I must descend to the depths, as  
you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and still bring  
light to the underworld, you over-rich star. (TSZ, 122)

And, in the last section 'The Sign', Zarathustra honors the sun again:

'Thou great star,' spake he, as he had spoken once before, 'thou  
deep eye of happiness, what would be all thy happiness if thou  
hadst not THOSE for whom thou shinest' (TSZ, 436)

From the first section to the last one, the praise to the Sun shows clearly the motif of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as an ode to Apollo as tranquility, the variation of Dionysus' intoxication.

Not only that, the still and bright is the clean. If light comes from the dream of Apollo, the tranquility of intoxication, then purification comes from the heart of solitude. While the Dithyramb honors solitude and purification, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* distinctly differs from the expressionist poets' laments, Zarathustra's Ape, which is lack of life. This kind of decadence of power is the cause of Late Romanticism to which Nietzsche is opposed.

At the same time, the solitary is the strong. The solitary is far away from the crowd, which means it gives up all admitted standards and establishes its own standards. It shows that, at midnight, it separates from 'the old sun' and stands by itself. Such a kind of human being is the strongest. In Nietzsche's moral scale, the first value in ancient Greece is courage, rather than wisdom. So the noble man is not a destroyer, a churl, a mocker, rather, a creator. (TSZ, 156) In section 8, Part One, Zarathustra speaks:

This tree stands lonely here in the mountains: it grew high above man and beast. And if it wanted to speak it would have nobody who could understand it, so high has it grown. Now it waits and waits -----for what is it waiting? It dwells too near the seat of the clouds: surely, it waits for the first lightning. (TSZ, 155)

The tree is also the solitary. Its solitude comes from its powerful strength. Because it is strong enough to be solitary, therefore it is the noble one. But, the noble one is not a voluptuary. As Zarathustra counsels, "...and even the liberated spirit must still purify himself. Much prison and mustiness still remain in him: his eyes must still become pure." (TSZ, 156)

As the overflowing of original life of the universe, in the ancient world, music has its main function, purgation, that is, catharsis of disease and ghosts.<sup>11</sup> Even in ancient Greek religions, such as the archaic religions of Dionysus and Orpheus, more relevant theme is purification of spirituality, rather than a physical one. It is not strange that Nietzsche emphasizes purification so much. In *Ecce Homo*, he said his abhorrence to the unclean person is natural and instinctive. As he declares he is the first philosopher to highlight scent, rather than vision. While such a revaluation might be understood facetiously that as his eyesight was bad, he had perhaps to develop his sense of smell instead. Yet, Nietzsche clearly says that his genius is in his nose.

But actually, the true reason is that Nietzsche's despising vision comes from his distinction between the world that could be seen and the one that could be heard. The former is related to the surface of universe, which originates from Schopenhauer's division between will and representation as world. The world to which he can listen is obviously related to will. Certainly the will, according to Nietzsche, is the creation of the original life of universe. On one hand, Nietzsche despises vision,<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, he highlights the sense of smell and hearing. In addition to this, another possibility is the aristocratic inclination of Nietzsche. For this reason, Nietzsche and Plato are surprisingly similar. Thilly<sup>13</sup> even described the latter as follows: "His character was noble; he was an aristocrat by birth and temperament, an uncompromising

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<sup>11</sup> It is similar in Chinese culture as in R.H. Van Gulik's *The Lore of the Chinese Lute*, Tokyo, Sophia University, 1969, pp. 46-47. 'Playing the lute purifies one's nature by banishing low passions, therefore it is a sort of meditation, a means for communicating directly with Tao. Its rarefied notes reproduce the 'sounds of emptiness', and so the music of the lute tunes the soul of the player in harmony with Tao', and 'Seen from the more materialistic angle, playing the *ch'in* was a means for purifying the body, thus bestowing upon the former freedom from sickness and longevity.' 'Samuel' records that David played music to drive away the ghost of Saul, Holy Bible (KJV), 1 Samuel 16, Hong Kong Bible Society, p. 450.

<sup>12</sup> Here Dr. & Prof. James Luchte offers quite challenging comments which I cannot answer temporarily, so I just leave it here for future to respond possibly, 'If he despises vision, where does that leave Apollo's light and the sun? I think this point is questionable. I think that vision, hearing, and smell must come into harmony, become attuned.'

<sup>13</sup> Here Prof. & Dr. James Luchte offers me a valuable reference as he comments, 'A different reference could be Georges Brandes, the first reader and teacher of Nietzsche's philosophy, who wrote an essay on Nietzsche "On Aristocratic Radicalism".'

idealist, hostile to everything base and vulgar.”<sup>14</sup> That is also the reason why Nietzsche admits Heraclitus. In his early notes, he once said such kind of people live in their own solar system.

In short, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tranquility functions as the essential word through the whole text. Such a topic or perspective in Nietzsche researches is not quite common, especially from Western perspectives as I have noticed. While, as an Eastern scholar, I do not certainly beget this perspective from the womb of Buddhism, rather, Daoism, although comparative studies on tranquilities between Nietzsche and Daoism<sup>15</sup> is yet to be continued hopefully, in the forthcoming future as I suppose.

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<sup>14</sup> Frank Thilly. *A History of Philosophy*. Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1926, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Fortunately, there have already been many quality comparative studies between Nietzsche and Asian thoughts, as we can see from this collection, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, edited by Graham Parkes, Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1996. And, Mr. Chen Guying did some original work in comparison between Nietzsche and Zhuangzi. In possibly relative field, I noticed he had held that, ‘While Nietzsche’s attitude toward life involves an active engagement with the world, Zhuang Zi tends to be more escapist and quietistic.’ please see Chen Guying, *Zhuang Zi and Nietzsche: Plays of Perspectives*, translated by James D. Sellmann (*Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, p. 121.)



## Part II: Nietzsche in History

### Every Name in History: The Cosmopolitan Kindergarten

David Kilpatrick

What brings us together, the meaning, purpose or theme of this symposium, the justification for our assembly, the call for our gathering is perhaps paradoxical. “Nietzsche in History” as a session in a series on “Nietzsche Today” is caught in the tension between the poles of the past and present. Many questions are begged with such a call. Why Nietzsche now? Which Nietzsche now? How might Nietzsche be relevant at this time in relation to his past and/or our past/s? Nietzsche of course may be in peril of being confined to history, becoming an artifact in a history of ideas, listed among thinkers and catalogued, his thoughts classified and historicized. How should we proceed or, more to the point, how must we proceed – for if there is no urgency, no necessity, why bother – to answer this call or these calls?

Who should we blame for the preposition planted in the proposition, the provocation of our gathering? The *in* in our invitation summons to my mind the lines written by Nietzsche from Torino on 6 January 1889, three days after his collapse in the Piazza Carlo Alberto, to Jacob Burckhardt: “at root every name in history is I”<sup>1</sup> or, in another translation, “at bottom I am every name in history”.<sup>2</sup> Such an inn won’t provide rest for a weary traveler but uproots and dislocates, an invitation to an unhomey concern. How will we answer such a summons? And how do we think through this problem of one who ecstatically identifies with every name in

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<sup>1</sup> SL, 90.

<sup>2</sup> PN, 686.

history? Should such sentiment be dismissed as a symptom of psychological sickness? Can such a statement mean anything more than mere madness?

Our now, our historical present, the news this week, this month bring certain associations to mind. How are we to reconcile or come to terms with if not understand how a plane bound from Barcelona for Düsseldorf, Germanwings Flight 9525, is intentionally crashed into the French Alps by Andreas Lubitz, writing his name on the long list of madmen in history by killing himself and 149 people who trusted him to fly them to their destination safely. “He was passionate about the Alps – obsessed even” said Dieter Wagner, a co-member of the flying club in Montabaur with Lubitz.<sup>3</sup> Without the reassurance of theological or ideological motivation, the staging of such a disaster leaves the world to ponder yet another German nihilist suicidal mass-murderer. We thought we had seen enough last century. But Nietzsche’s identification with such nihilism must be rejected, whether it be associated with Lubitz or Hitler. Nietzsche cannot say no to such association with nihilistic acts as disparate as Flight 9525 and the Shoah/ השואה. But his readers are obliged to do so. This morning’s news also told of swastikas at SUNY-Purchase and tensions with Hasidics in Rockland. Given his erroneous associations with nihilism, anti-Semitism and National Socialism, we have yet to move beyond the world-historical crises with which many associate Nietzsche.

So when we talk about “Nietzsche in History,” we cannot simply erase that Nietzsche, the false, fraudulent or misunderstood Nietzsche. We must continue to come to terms with the misappropriation of Nietzsche while being sensitive to watchful of being guilty of such an error ourselves. Nietzsche surely has a troubled history or a problematic relationship to history, how his history is told. The syphilitic lunatic and the megalomaniacal ideologue of racial supremacy

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<sup>3</sup> Silverstein. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/andreas-lubitz-obsessed-alps-friend-article-1.2165370>

are both identifiers with which Nietzsche's thoughts are still too often dismissed and we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge such misrepresentations. We must do so if we are to listen to his sacred YES and to hear how this untimely thinker speaks to our time.

There is, of course, no shortage in Nietzsche's corpus of prolonged meditations on history and the historical as well as his place in history. The first fifteen sections of *The Birth of Tragedy* an "elaborate historical example"<sup>4</sup> before he relocates his ancient concern with what the mythopoetics of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* might mean for a modern Germany in his 1872 book-length debut. At the risk of cherry-picking (an inevitable hazard for any textual engagement with one who dared write such often contradictory provocations – Walter Kaufmann tries to convince Nietzsche's audience that *The Birth of Tragedy* ought to end with the history of the first fifteen sections and excuse if not ignore the application of this history to modernity in the remaining ten sections, as if embarrassed by the use of history), with a glance over my shoulder to keep in mind how history views and reviews Nietzsche, I'd like to undergo a preliminary teasing out of some textual threads that show how Nietzsche plays with history and historiography.

Nietzsche of course warns, in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" of the dangers of an excess of history or an excessive relationship to the historical, protesting "*the historical education of modern man*" and demanding in that essay that "man should above all learn to live and should employ history only in *the service of the life he has learned to live*".<sup>5</sup> Concerned as that essay is with his contemporary German culture and pedagogy, we can nonetheless understand and relate to history as an oppressive presence that stifles creativity and

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<sup>4</sup> BW, 99.

<sup>5</sup> UM, 116.

innovation in the name of tradition. The Book has been written and must be obeyed. And the academic discipline of history that perceives itself as a social science, rejecting partisanship and utility under the fictive presumption of preserving objective truths. Since Hayden White's *Metahistory* (which includes a chapter on Nietzsche), there has been, somewhat reassuringly, a "linguistic turn" among some historians daring radical historiography, but such ludic endeavors have yet to infiltrate our Common Core, despite the shift from teaching history to social studies or from Great Men to socioeconomic movements. Perhaps still under the spell of the Alexandrine, the urgent need to (re-)learn to live remains. We still have yet to construct a more ideal curriculum for the contemporary kindergarten that promotes an affirmative worldview that is faithful to the Earth.

But Nietzsche doesn't promote amnesia as the antidote for the modern condition. In "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life" he identifies three historiographical methodologies, the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. Monumental history inspires and provokes, inspiring with the possibility of greatness even if it threatens to humble the weak with a saturated sense of reverence, lapsing into the antiquarian. "Only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns."<sup>6</sup> For all the talk of promoting critical thinking in today's pedagogical debates, such a partisan approach to former times is often discouraged as an ethnocentric trap, the cool objectivity that dismisses narrative history as written by the victorious as the expense of the vanquished isn't critical in the sense Nietzsche promotes here. And we would do well to heed his caution when he adds that these methodologies are plants that require a certain soil. "Much mischief is caused through the thoughtless transplantation of these plants,"

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<sup>6</sup> UM, 72.

he warns, “the critic without need, the antiquary without piety, the man who recognizes greatness but cannot himself do great things, are such plants, estranged from their mother soil and degenerated into weeds.”<sup>7</sup> Can we avoid being guilty of mischief, if we lack need, piety and greatness in our attempt to think through this call to consider Nietzsche in history?

Nietzsche’s thought (if not doctrine) of Eternal Recurrence is hinted at in this 1873 essay, when he considers an “absolute veracity” with monumental history:

That which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth: so that whenever the stars stand in a certain relation to one another a Stoic again joins with an Epicurean to murder Caesar, and when they stand in another relation Columbus will again discover American. Only if, when the fifth act of the earth’s drama ended, the whole play every time began again from the beginning, if it was certain that the same complex of motives, the same *deus ex machina*, the same catastrophe were repeated at definite intervals, could the man of power venture to desire monumental history in full icon-like *veracity*, that is to say with every individual peculiarity depicted in precise detail: but that will no doubt happen only when the astronomers have again become astrologers.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Without such veracity, the monumental exhibits effects at the expense of causes, Nietzsche argues.

What have we seen this past week in Leicester as England reburied Richard III? Historical revisionists have used the occasion to disparage Shakespeare's mythmaking as Tudorophilia, reconstituting the figure of the last English monarch to die in battle as not-such-a-bad-guy-after-all. The effect, Richard III's corpse, has been divorced in British discourse from the cause, the axe of Wyllyam Gardynyr that puts an end to Richard's reign. The commoner would marry Helen Tudor, the illegitimate grand-daughter of Owen Tudor and Catherine de Valois. If Wyllyam did not swing his axe at the head of Richard, trapped on his horse at Bosworth, he would never have married Helen Tudor, the illegitimate daughter of Jasper Tudor, himself a product of the secret marriage between Owen Tudor and the Queen Consort of England, Catherine de Valois. Wyllyam Gardynyr's son Richard married Lady Margaret Anne de Grey, the grand-daughter of Owen and Catherine's daughter Tacina. Wyllyam Gardynyr, the cause of Richard III's death was omitted from the discourse surrounding the reburial with full royal ceremony this week, but I've been acutely aware of what my 15<sup>th</sup>-great-grandfather<sup>8</sup> did on 22 August 1485 at Bosworth, as it is one of millions and millions of permutations in time that bring me here now. This is some of what I've seen this past week as I look to Leicester with monumental but personal veracity.

If I am to know myself, what made me? What does this history mean for my life now? England is trying to put an awful lot to rest with Richard III's bones but I refuse this reconciliation through ceremonial commemoration and rather remain partisan, claiming a part.

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, if ancestry.com is to be believed.

Nietzsche indulges in genealogy not only at the cultural level in his history of morality but also on the personal level (with a hint of calendric astrology) in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>9</sup> Considering his ancestry, he confesses “it is not difficult for me to be a ‘good European’.”<sup>10</sup> Even if, or especially if, I find myself at war with myself in historic conflicts, I am this conflict, made up of all the chances, inextricably linked with each and every decision made in time. To reject any or wish they had not been made for whatever reason is to will my own negation.

This is what Nietzsche relates more powerfully in the form of a fable or a riddle nine years later than his *Untimely Meditations* in *The Gay Science*. After his madman proclaims the death of God, in section 341 Nietzsche proposes a spirit who warns 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 immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you – all in the same succession and sequence.

Would you curse such a spirit that bears such news as a demon or praise it as a god? Would you reject or affirm such a metaphysics (the last, as Heidegger says)? How can you enjoy anything if such pleasure is predicated on the horrors of Flight 9525, 9/11, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Waterloo, Bosworth, Jesus’ Crucifixion, Thermopylae and Troy?

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<sup>9</sup> BW, 681-682.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 681.

“Existence can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon” Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy*,<sup>11</sup> and this historical aesthetics mandates the greatest stress as the ultimate ethics: live now and build such a future as to look on this play through time with delight, not despair.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche proclaims such an aestheticized historicism is:

the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably da capo – not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle.<sup>12</sup>

How can we affirm the reprehensible? How can we justify existence without such an aesthetics?

Kant attempts a similar justification with his “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” employing a similar language of aesthetics, albeit with radically dissimilar foundations and ends.

We can scarcely help feeling a certain distaste on observing [human] activities as enacted in the great world-drama, for we find that, despite the apparent wisdom of individual actions here and there, everything as a whole is made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness. The result

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<sup>11</sup> BW, 60.

<sup>12</sup> BW, 258.



is that we do not know what sort of opinion we should form of our species, which is so proud of its supposed superiority.

Kant's way out of this empirical crisis is to posit "*a universal history of the world in accordance with a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind,*" finding hope and redeeming not only folly and misfortune but catastrophe as bumps along the road in nature's predestined path for humanity.<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche of course eschews such teleology much less eschatology, and he better embodies the spirit of Diogenes the Cynic with his homeless identification as a citizen of the world, κοσμοπολίτης. Whereas Kant preaches the civil servant's sense of responsibility, or where Hegel posits a mythology of the historical,<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche warns, through the voice of Zarathustra, of the "New Idol," the State. We would do well to heed the warning he offers with these words in the section where he identifies this New Idol: "Behold the superfluous! They steal the works of the inventors and the treasures of the sages for themselves; 'education' they call their theft – and everything turns to sickness and misfortune for them"<sup>15</sup>

The greatest stress, the weight of history, is a critical concern for education, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra proclaims in the chapter "On the Land of Education" when he proclaims "I am driven out of fatherlands and mother lands. Thus I now love only my children's land, yet undiscovered."<sup>16</sup> Looking towards the future requires justification of the ancestral, the historical,

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<sup>13</sup> Kant, 25.

<sup>14</sup> PN, 40.

<sup>15</sup> PN, 162.

<sup>16</sup> PN, 233.

for “In my children I want to make up for being the child of my fathers – and to all the future, for this today.”<sup>17</sup>

When Nietzsche considers himself a “good European” as a consequence of his ancestry in *Ecce Homo*, he rejects the nationalisms propped up on the post-monarchical republics of the 19th century in the spirit of a romanticized folkloric past. Well before *Ecce Homo* (written in 1888), in *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878), Nietzsche prophetically announces the eventual abolition of nations through intermarriage and argues “one should declare oneself without embarrassment as a *good European* and work actively for the amalgamation of nations.”<sup>18</sup> Such work doesn’t simply involve the practical pleasures of procreation, though such Dionysian desires and sensations should not be repressed or denied, but also involves an active cosmopolitics, as Balibar and Douzani propose.

As we consider the role of history in education today, we must be sensitive to the indifference of colonization and imperialism but must not be trapped in time as if we are at the end of history without moving towards the cosmopolitan kindergarten Nietzsche imagines as a future that affirms history without prejudice and learns to say YES to life.

What then are we to make of Nietzsche in history, this voice that claims to be all names in history? Burkhardt, to whom he wrote the remark, had said seven-years prior, “fundamentally of course you are always teaching history.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps those words echoed in Nietzsche’s letter from Torino. They echo to this day, as we recognize Nietzsche in history and history in Nietzsche. That is fundamentally what Nietzsche is doing with his texts and what we are doing when we engage them, moving towards our children’s land as we embrace all names in history.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> PN, 61-62

<sup>19</sup> qtd. Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 331.

By doing so, we realize history now and for our children's future, that they may dare to play someday in a cosmopolitan kindergarten that says of this great world-historical drama, "encore, encore"!

## ***Libido Dominandi: Nietzsche and Sallust***

**By Nicholas Birns**

Why Nietzsche and Sallust? Why such an unlikely pairing of the nineteenth-century German astonishment and the first century BC Latin chronicler? They are not even antagonists. Nietzsche and St. Paul, or Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, or even Nietzsche and Leibniz, yes, there is the stuff of contest, of opposition. But of Nietzsche and Sallust, what is the relation? How could a world-defying iconoclast have anything in common with a historian who dutifully recorded events to us now long ago?

Yet, as those who know, know, Nietzsche lauded Sallust to the skies, saying that the first century BC Roman historian may be one of the few writers he actually admires. A close look at the text of *Twilight of the Idols* is warranted here:

My taste, which may be the opposite of a tolerant taste, is in this case too far from saying Yes indiscriminately; it does like to say Yes; rather even No; but best of all nothing. That applies to whole cultures, it applies to books — also to places and landscapes. At bottom it is a very small number of ancient books that counts in my life; the most famous are not among them. My sense of style, was awakened when I came into contact with Sallust. I have not forgotten the surprise of my honored teacher, Corssen, when he had to give his worst Latin pupil the best grade: I had finished with one stroke, compact, sever, with as much substance as possible, a cold sarcasm against “beautiful words” and “beautiful sentiments” — here I found myself. And even in my Zarathustra one will recognize a very serious ambition for a Roman style, for the *aere perennius* in style.

Nietzsche says he is not voraciously curious, not open to everything the opposite of the famous credo of a slightly earlier Latin writer than Sallust, the African-born playwright Terence, who famously said, *humani nil a me alienum puto*. Nothing human is alien to him; Nietzsche makes clear that much that is human is. As a reader, Nietzsche freely takes on the danger of what Voltaire satirized in *Candide* in the character of Pococurante—somebody who dismisses most of extant literature because it is not good enough for him, and avoids many standard authors not out of ignorance or boorishness but out of icy, snide disdain. Nietzsche will not compromise for the sake of inclusiveness, but lets the actual dictates of his judgment call to him.

All this is true. In other words Nietzsche is not just lying or being pretentious here. But he is unquestionably being theatrical, mugging it up. He is using his genuine admiration for Sallust to shake up and shock others. This begins with his first reading of the historian, which at the time while he was in secondary school at Schulpforta studying under Wilhelm Corssen—who was a great advocate for Nietzsche, yet knew his extraordinary pupil preferred Greek to Latin, vaulted Nietzsche's own style into a sphere his teacher might not have expected. Sallust's style, "Gedrängt, streng," wound as tight as possible among words as can be, gave Nietzsche's own Latin a pulse, an intent: removed it from student mediocrity, from the burden of just trying to be correct. Sallust gave Nietzsche's Latin, so he says an edge.

One wonders, though, if the crusade against the "Schöne Wort" which ambiguously backdated to his Schulpforta adolescence is quite so certifiably *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. This seems rather an attribute of the later Nietzsche, the post-Wagner post *Zweites Reich* Nietzsche, the Nietzsche who deliberately rebelled against inflation and grandiosity, who saw the dreams he had earlier invested in, as in David Allison's words, "a risible spectacle of mysticism and self-indulgence." The retrojection of this back into the Schulpforta era—when, however much this

disdain for grandiosity may have been a native tendency, it was surely accelerated after his break with Wagner and his disillusionment with the Empire—attempts to make temperamental the temporal.

This sources the fundamental paradox of Nietzsche's interest in Sallust: that his praise is for his exacting, severe, epigrammatic style, and this affinity is in line with Nietzsche's late praise of French epigrammatists such as La Rochefoucauld. Nietzsche knows that this claim is partially rhetorical, and done in particular to score German complacency and chauvinism. By lauding the opposite of the Wagnerian, Nietzsche makes clear his present distance from Wagner, but no reader can take his asseveration of Gallicism or Latinity or logic or concision straight, as he remains sprawling, bombastic, ambitious, and world-shaking—although in his own more ironic and subversive way. In this regard, the Sallust affinity borders on being a trope. And, even more paradoxically, Sallust is a historian, and this is just what he is not—he may be a philosopher, a philologist, a poet, a prophet, but not a historian.

That Nietzsche is not a historian has something to do with that the training of a classical philologist emphasizes not just philology, but poetry and philosophy, over history. History was separate spherules to be dealt with through separate scholarly techniques and, though historical knowledge was assumed as part of a philologist's arsenal, it was not especially paraded as a part of his intellectual stock-in-trade. Moreover, in any idolatry the classics historians get short shrift. Philosophers can speak to the human condition; poets to general states of feeling, but, as Aristotle stated, history can only be about what it is about. In addition, the way the classical historian corpus was left to us makes it ill-starred for the use which later Western tradition wanted for it. If one historian had chronicled the stirring triumphs of Marathon and Salamis, where the West defied the East, in a patriotic style redolent of that which Livy gave the

Romans—yet the chronicler of these events was Herodotus, whose considerable sympathy with the Persian, Egyptians, and other non-Greeks queered the potential Eurocentric pitch. Thucydides had the Greek-centeredness and Athenian patriotism later tradition would have loved, but the story he chose to tell was of the folly of Athens and its catastrophic decline. Other Greek histories were later, derivative, and not inspirational. Roman historians had the disadvantage of writing about Rome, which, because it inaugurated a European political tradition, which, as writers from Edward Gibbon to Giorgio Agamben have realized, we are still within, could not serve as a gratifying other on which Western tradition can be founded. Moreover, much of Livy was lost, and the remainder went into too much detail to be convenient. The ancient historians have thus mostly occupied a second tier in practices of *paideia*; in freshman humanities courses, the ‘Greeks; that we are supposed to see as ‘important to us all’ are Plato and Sophocles, Aristotle and Aeschylus, but infrequently a historian.

The one exception to this—and only in Germany—is the one historian with whom, otherwise, Nietzsche might have felt a great affinity. Tacitus’s style was skeptical and severe, his values adamant but only in ironic juxtaposition to those he excoriated. If Tacitus had written only *The Annals* and *The Histories* Nietzsche might have turned to him for an example. But Tacitus also wrote *Germania*, recently described by Christopher Krebs as “the most dangerous book.” Here Tacitus lauded the ancient German peoples to the skies, intending solely for an ironic contrast to the Romans he disliked, much like Nietzsche’s own later championship of the French versus the Germans he disliked. But modern Germans took Tacitus seriously and saw Tacitus’s book as the *Ursprung* of German *Herrschaft*, the teething-time of the master race. Nietzsche could not use Tacitus.

Conversely, Sallust's two subjects—the rebellion of Jugurtha and the conspiracy of Catiline—had the advantage of not involving the Germans but of also being pre-Imperial, and Sallust himself wrote before the Roman Republic had fully congealed into Empire--unlike Tacitus, Suetonius, and even Livy himself. Moreover Sallust would have been congenial to Nietzsche because he was early and wrote about the early, something Nietzsche, who preferred Aeschylus and Sophocles to Euripides, the pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle, would have liked. As a reader I have long desired to make Nietzsche in my own image, to render him into a connoisseur of the *Bas-Empire*; a Huysmansian delectator of the decadent, but Friedrich Nietzsche cannot be bent that way: early he ventures, and early he is.

Sallust himself on a much more material level, encountered some of the same ambiguities Nietzsche did in his exploration of himself and his constitutive paradoxes. At the beginning of the *Conspiracy of Catiline*, Sallust tells us that what distinguishes humanity is its mental exertions; that the body's strength is but a tool wielded by the mind, and that the mind uses the body to gain a worthwhile celebrity and recognition in light of the community's regard. Sallust confesses that he wished this for himself politically; but this was not to be the case. Thus he repaired to history, not to use history to settle old scores or win the struggles on the page he could not in the arena of life, but to attempt, disinterestedly, to exercise his mental agility to cause great works. He aspired to write the while of Roman history but only in detached episodes: more like, to use the musical analogy, tone poems than movements in a symphony. And, with his determination to be meticulous, accurate, and stylistically ingenious, it was inevitable that, turning to history comparatively late in his short, fifty-year lifespan, he only completed these two panels.



Both concentrated pieces that remain are about single individuals who are outsiders. One is Jugurtha, an African Berber king, the illegitimate grandson of Rome's great Punic War-era African client Masinissa, who turned against Rome with venom and fury. The other is the conspiracy of Catiline, the opportunistic, distressed-aristocrat-turned-schemer who attempted to seize power by means of trickery and demagoguery in mid-first century BC Rome.

In both books, Sallust's sympathies are on the side of the established Roman order. He had good reason to be: he was a (minor) member of Julius Caesar's political tendency, and when he writes about Gaius Marius, Caesar's great political patron, in *Jugurtha* he is lauding his patron's patron. Similarly, the Catiline conspiracy occurred while Sallust was still trying to make a political career, and he, like all Romans of eminence, was dead-set against it; the drama in Sallust's narrative is the different responses and reactions to Catiline of those great Romans (Caesar, Cato, Cicero) who are all unanimously against Catiline. Indeed, if present-day terms can be applied to so long ago, Catiline was seen as a "left-wing" figure by the Roman establishment and so to be spurned. When I was in college, an elderly professor would come to every talk sponsored by the institution's center for the humanities, and, in the question and answer period, label some tendency he did not like as "Catilinarian," pronounced in five syllables, CAT-lin-ARE-e-an. Any phenomenon queer, feminist, deconstructive, Marxist, or indeed, I suspected, anything at all non-time-honored like breakfast tacos or salad as a main course, would be in this old sage's eyes "Catilinarian." Sallust's own description of the conspirator, while less easy to extrapolate, is not far off: a left-wing schemer whose rise is a bad omen for a society whose integrity is on the wane.

And yet, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Jugurtha and Catiline are unquestionably the protagonists of their books; they have the energy, the *éclat*, the magnitude, and the charisma,

what Sallust, assessing the now-dead Catiline, calls his ‘fierceness of spirit’. . Moreover, both protagonists seek in the political arena what Sallust once did, and which he now seeks in the historical one: the exercise of *libido dominandi*, or will-to-dominate. They are using their minds to compel bodies to action. This in turn is much like Nietzsche’s own will-to-power, as found in *Zarathustra*, which Laurence Lampert describes as that which is the goal of “the highest of beings.” *Zarathustra*, as a countercultural anti-prophet, is doing on the much more abstract level what Jugurtha and Catiline, Sallust’s villains, were doing: trying to found a new order by upending the old, and trying to seize the moment for a new style of mental leadership. Sallust, indeed, even in overt terms, is anti-aristocratic, moving the populist Marius over his aristocratic rival Sulla; thus Nietzsche’s love for Sallust puts him in the odd position of being bedfellows with a populist, far from both the natural and social aristocracy Nietzsche rightly glimpsed in La Rochefoucauld, a stylist he lauds for similar reasons. The condition of both Sallust and Nietzsche cannot be harnessed in one definition but spills over into self-contradiction and self-exposure—all relayed in a lucid, epigrammatic style that may pinpoint, but cannot reduce, the complexity it describes. Nietzsche, while respecting Sallust’s historical orientation, takes the historian away from history itself, lauds his mental agility and intellectual sprightliness because it guides the spirit towards the ability to “exercise power over time and liberate it from the past “ as Paul Loeb so aptly notes is urged in *Zarathustra*. Like Nietzsche, Sallust sees his society at a point of crisis, where, as Sallust laments, avarice is replacing ambition, and desire to genuine glory fades in favor of mere accumulation of funds.

The genealogy of Sallust’s *libido dominandi* and Nietzsche’s will-to-power, though, is not disintermediate; as is well-known, Augustine’s’ appropriation, in *The City of God*, of Sallust’s will to dominate to anatomize the human tendency to strive through sin, the self-

propagating desire of the City of Man. Yet Augustine in dividing cities of man and God cleanly, did not see that cultural institutions such as the church could take on an inappropriate *libido dominandi*. Nor, due to their historical moments and thought-systems, did either Sallust or Augustine adequately discuss the idea of empire, and the more abstract questions of whether state mechanisms, and not just individuals, could malevolently embody the *Libido dominandi*. Nietzsche in his own day added to this congeries the idea of not just a state mechanism, but also a cultural hegemony—the self-gratified complacency of the German people after unification and Empire—embaying a collective libido dominandi. It is against this collective libido dominandi that he sets this own individual will, a mind actively exerting the body, closer to Sallust and, even in sinful guise, Augustine's, then what he saw about him as a mature adult—and not, we may trust, whatever his schoolboy clairvoyance or percipience, at Schulpforta.

Nietzsche looks in Sallust for an epistemology that sees what is in front of one's nose, but has the grace to accept its own embedding in paradox and self-exposure. At the close of his passage of Sallust in *Gotterdammerung*, Nietzsche speaks of Sallust as helping him approach an *aere perrenius* in style-. This reference to Horace who Nietzsche mentions immediately after his citation of Sallust, and whose style has long won accolades for modesty and straightforwardness similar to Sallust---even that which we, informed by a later idea of Romanitas might label catholicity. But it is catholicity beyond cultural consensus: one exercise by supreme individual will, and wrought out of words.

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# Nietzsche, Darwin, and the Greeks:

## On the Aesthetic Interpretation of Life

Michael Steinmann

### Abstract

For Nietzsche, Darwinism misses the artistic expressiveness of organic life. In opposition to Darwin's instrumental approach for which the only purpose of life is survival, Nietzsche suggests a form of teleology for which the beauty of a higher type of human being represents the true purpose of life. The essay shows that Nietzsche never gives up the idea, expressed most emphatically in his early work, that life can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. The essay lays out how such an aesthetic justification can be understood. It shows that Nietzsche's aesthetic *theory* is in its core the search for an aesthetic *experience* of life, because a higher type of human being can prove his existence only through the perspective on life that he is able to adopt. This leads to an aesthetic *exceptionalism* which makes it impossible for philosophy to define such an experience in general terms. The essay also shows that there is no cognitive, non-ambiguous criterion that allows for the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic, that is, moral points of view, especially with respect to the need for a justification of life.

### 1. Introduction

At the time Nietzsche lived, Darwin had already become an epitome. He stood for a certain idea of life, and Nietzsche usually referred to him not so much as an individual scientist but as a name representing this idea. Nietzsche most probably never read or studied Darwin's work himself. But "Darwin" had become a powerful symbol which summarized, in Nietzsche's view, what the entire late nineteenth century held to be true about life's inner character and purpose. In his criticism of modernity, Nietzsche could therefore position himself as "Anti-Darwin," as the strict opposite to all modern assumptions about human and biological life. This criticism of Darwin has often been discussed. What gets easily neglected is the fact that Nietzsche's engagement with Darwin can well be connected to the very beginnings of his work in which he was concerned with the tragic experience of life expressed by the ancient Greeks.

What was at stake in his criticism of Darwin was not just the modern understanding of life, but the philosophical understanding of life as whole, which for Nietzsche first became problematic in his reading of ancient tragedy. This makes it necessary to identify as broadly as possible the perspective from which he engaged the modern ideas. As the following will show, what allows us to link the discussion of Darwin to the reading of the ancient Greeks is his attempt at an aesthetic interpretation of life, which in turn sprang from his question how life can be justified. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche famously came forth with the bewildering idea of an “aesthetic justification of life.” Although he later ridiculed this idea as representing an “artists’ metaphysics”<sup>1</sup> (BT, “Attempt” 2)—an enthusiastic, speculative worldview emerging more from artistic imagination than from philosophical thought—he never gave up the idea that life, and especially human life, is in need of a justification which can only be found through the adoption of an aesthetic point of view.

Our attempt at tracing this theme across very different periods in Nietzsche’s work, and also across very different contexts of discussion, is no doubt risky and exposes us to all sorts of criticism. One might ask whether the interpretation of ancient Greek culture isn’t simply too different from his engagement with contemporary Darwinism to be linked to it in any meaningful way. Especially the idea of an aesthetic justification of life seems to be limited to his early work. A later passage in the *Gay Science*, for example, only states that “as an aesthetic phenomenon, existence is still *bearable* to us” (GS 108).<sup>2</sup> This sounds certainly very different from the early approach in the work on tragedy. Still, as we will see in the following the idea of a justification of life is never completely given up, even if it is expressed in different ways. What we are aiming

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<sup>1</sup> English translation: *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated and edited, with commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann. New York 1992.

<sup>2</sup> English translation: *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge 2001.

at, hence, is no philological reconstruction of the way in which the ideas have changed throughout the course of Nietzsche's work. Such reconstructions are no doubt useful and necessary but would lead to a very different paper. We rather want to suggest a broader perspective, which then hopefully allows us to draw connections that remain overlooked if one only focuses on particular contexts and themes. Through these connections, so we claim, one can better understand what drives Nietzsche's approach to the problem of life as a whole.

The main points of Nietzsche's anti-Darwinism are well known. Nietzsche opposes the ideas of a struggle for life, of the survival of the fittest, and of the formative role of the environment in the evolution of species. It is, however, not easy to see what exactly he criticizes in Darwinism, and why he criticizes it. What is the ultimate purpose of his posture as the "Anti-Darwin"? After all, Nietzsche shares many of Darwinism's basic assumptions. From early on, he welcomes Darwin's new conception of the human being, "the horrible consequence of Darwinism, which, by the way, I consider to be correct."<sup>3</sup> The human being, he agrees with Darwin, "is wholly a creature of nature" (*Naturwesen*; UO I, 7).<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche never gives up this idea. In his later work, it culminates in his formula of the "*homo natura*" (BGE 230).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of the Unfashionable Observations*. Translated, with an Afterword, by Richard T. Gray. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 11. Stanford 1999, 44; 1872/73, 19[132], KSA 7.461.

<sup>4</sup> English translation: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*. Translated, with an Afterword, by Richard T. Gray. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 2. Stanford 1995.

<sup>5</sup> English translation: *Beyond Good and Evil*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Cambridge 2002. For a more detailed discussion of Nietzsche's relation both to Darwin and the Darwinism of his time, see Aldo Venturelli, *Kunst, Wissenschaft und Geschichte bei Nietzsche*. *Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung* 47, Berlin/New York 2003. Werner Stegmaier, *Darwin, Darwinismus, Nietzsche*. *Zum Problem der Evolution*. *Nietzsche-Studien* 1987, 264-287, emphasizes Nietzsche's acceptance of the scientific principles of Darwinism (264). In Nietzsche's work, he states, these principles find their "deepest interpretation" (287). For Dirk Robert Johnson, *Nietzsche's Early Darwinism: the 'David Strauss' Essay of 1873*. *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001), 62-79, Nietzsche's discussion is "highly nuanced and multi-faceted" (63). Dieter Henke, *Nietzsches Darwinismuskritik aus der Sicht gegenwärtiger Evolutionsforschung*. *Nietzsche-Studien* 13 (1984), 189-210, mentions Nietzsche's positive impact on the further development of the theory of evolution. For a systematic account of the Darwinian elements in Nietzsche's philosophy, see also John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*. Oxford 2008, and Michael Skowron, *Nietzsches 'Anti-Darwinismus.'* *Nietzsche-Studien* 37 (2008), 160-194.

But Nietzsche also agrees with the idea of evolution. He never questions the basic idea that manifestations of life can be only understood by looking at the process or development through which they emerge. Although he occasionally ridicules Darwinians as “our ape-genealogists” (UO I, 7), his own genealogy of morals will describe the human being quite similarly as an animal that only slowly became domesticated by civilization. Nietzsche is evidently as much the child of the century of history and historicism as Darwin.<sup>6</sup> His point is therefore not to argue whether there is a natural evolution of the human being at all. It rather concerns the question how this evolution has to be interpreted, and what its goals and outcomes are.

This essay follows Nietzsche’s interpretation of life first with respect to the theory of natural selection, then in a broader, philosophical sense. Aesthetic criteria, we will see, provide the main arguments in his criticism of Darwinism. For Nietzsche, every biological theory has to be able to include the aesthetic expressiveness of organic life (2.1. and 2.2). He criticizes Darwin also for conceiving of evolution as a continuous process of improvement in which all surviving species are by definition better than the ones that do not exist anymore. But despite this criticism, Nietzsche’s understanding of life contains what can be called a teleology of his own; a teleology that sees the purpose of evolution in the appearance of beauty as it emerges in and through a higher type of human being. This Nietzschean teleology does obviously not rely on any objective, natural tendency in life according to which life would inevitably strive to reach a certain goal, but rather on the contingent occurrence of higher types which emerge from time to time as an exception to the average character of human beings. Despite their contingency, such higher types can be seen as the goal of human life (2.3.). If this is true, the question follows how

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<sup>6</sup> Darwin’s significance for the development of a truly historical view, not only with respect to nature but also in relation to human culture, is acknowledged several times in Nietzsche’s works (cf. GS, 357. See also 1885, 34[73], KSA 11.443).



one can identify the higher types. Nietzsche's answer can be summarized by saying that the higher type would also have a higher perspective on life and therefore be able to manifest *himself* as being different from those adopting another (moral, scientific, etc.) view of the world. This means that while in the beginning of this essay, following his criticism of the theory of evolution, Nietzsche's aesthetic interpretation of life can appear as yet another objective theory—for which life would be the *object* of inquiry—it will eventually reveal itself as *subjective*, insofar as it is based on the individual capacity to experience life in an aesthetic way. The higher type cannot be generally defined by philosophy but has to appear in an individual's (*another* individual's) look on the world (3.) The following section will further explain the aesthetic interpretation of life by showing how it can lead to a form of justification. Life is justified through the creation of a world as an aesthetic vision. However, it is not justified *by* human beings, that is, by any particular human judgment. Human beings rather have to experience their existence as one that *is being justified* together with the world to which they belong (4.). Finally, it will become clear that the subjective character of aesthetic justification leads to an aesthetic exceptionalism, insofar as the individual experience on which it is based remains by definition limited, particular, and unique. Nietzsche's aesthetic theory of life reveals itself ultimately as an expression of hope, as a meditation on the elusive possibility of making such a specifically aesthetic experience (5.). In the final chapter, we will raise the question why life needs justification at all, which will bring us to the, perhaps surprising, conclusion that aesthetic and moral worldviews are not as fundamentally different as they seem but rather share a common root (6.).

## 2. Nietzsche's aesthetic criticism of Darwinian ideas

### 2.1. The struggle for existence

Nietzsche's criticism of the idea according to which evolution is driven by a "struggle for existence" is not immediately clear. What seems more evident than the idea that life is a constant fight to stay alive, a fight against both the external conditions of nature and the other animals? It seems hard to deny this Darwinian intuition, not only because of its apparent plausibility but also because it seems to provide the only possible reason as to why certain species go extinct.<sup>7</sup> Extinction seems to result, more than anything else, from a lack of aptitude to react to the challenges posed by the environment or other animals. Indeed, Nietzsche does not want to exclude completely the possibility of a struggle for existence: "It does occur, but as the exception" (TI, "Expeditions" 14).<sup>8</sup> Life forms, from time to time, may have to fight for the survival of their species. What he opposes instead is the idea that the struggle for existence is the dominant condition of life and the sole and only motor of evolution; that all higher forms of life emerge "from the war of nature, from famine and death" as basic conditions to which they have to react.<sup>9</sup> Life, for Nietzsche, cannot be defined as a struggle simply to stay alive: "The general aspect of life is *not* hunger and distress, but rather, wealth, luxury, even absurd prodigality—where there is struggle it is a struggle for *power*..." (TI, "Expeditions" 14). The inner dynamic of life that generates and furthers the course of evolution exceeds what is needed to stay alive.

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<sup>7</sup> "As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. [...] Although some species may be now increasing, more or less rapidly, in numbers, all cannot do so, for the world would not hold them" (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (first edition, 1859), edited with an introduction by J.W. Burrow. London 1985, 117).

<sup>8</sup> English translation: *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Introduction by Michael Tanner. London 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 459.

Organisms have an inner force that they do not simply want to maintain but desire to increase, and that they sometimes wish, or even need, to *squander*.

Compared to this perspective, Darwin's view of organic life is essentially instrumental; for him, organic life is defined by the capacity to maintain its own existence. In every detail, its organization is tailored to fulfill the necessary, life-sustaining functions (i.e. the procurement of food, protection of territory, procreation, etc.). For Nietzsche instead, the inner tendency of life is decidedly anti-instrumental. Organic life is adventurous, risk-taking, and joyful. However, it is not at all clear how this intuition could be proven to have any more plausibility than Darwin's. Nietzsche states: "As regards the celebrated 'struggle for *life*,' it seems to me for the present to have been asserted rather than proved" (ibid.). But couldn't one say the exact same thing for his ideas of "wealth" and "prodigality": are they not also merely "asserted rather than proved"? Certainly there is evidence to sustain his claim. One can think of the elegance of a tiger or the beauty of exotic birds. There are phenomena of natural beauty which perhaps can never be explained from an instrumental point of view. However, it is not immediately clear how Nietzsche could ever validate his claim as a general alternative to Darwin's theory. What makes this point even more difficult is the fact that Darwin himself is far from attributing to every existing species the same instrumental capacity to master the challenges of life. For him, natural selection is characterized not only by "contingency"; it sometimes preserves formations that seem to go counter to the presumed utilitarian function of organic life.<sup>10</sup>

Taken immanently, insofar as only Nietzsche's work is concerned, his claims can be justified through the idea of the will to power.<sup>11</sup> Only a few points can be mentioned here. For

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<sup>10</sup> "Nor ought we to marvel if all the contrivances in nature be not, as far as we can judge, absolutely perfect; and if some of them be abhorrent to our ideas of fitness" (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 445).

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's compilation *The Will to Power* is not used in this essay. When possible, translations of Nietzsche's unpublished writings are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Edited

Nietzsche, what appears as a struggle for existence, as an interest in the pure maintenance of life, is in reality a struggle for power. Life is what it is only if it constantly tends to increase its power. Nothing organic simply *is*, but maintains itself only insofar as it wants to be more than it is. “I consider life itself instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for *power*” (AC 6).<sup>12</sup> On the organic level, growth and duration, dynamics and stability, are one and the same; they are both based on the desire to increase the potential of force. An organism wants to secure its duration, not because it needs to do so—objectively, there is no need for any living being to stay alive—but because *it feels strong enough to secure the conditions to stay alive*. It survives if it invests all its energy and passion in achieving what is necessary for life. All instrumental utility, hence, is the result of a primarily anti-instrumental drive.<sup>13</sup>

For this reason, the idea of will to power also stands against the traditional concept of self-preservation. Nietzsche’s criticism of this concept is well-known.<sup>14</sup> If self-preservation is seen as the dominating principle of life, life is reduced to a situation of permanent “distress” (*Nothlage*). This cannot be the case (cf. GS 349). Nietzsche does not miss the occasion to ridicule Darwin in this regard: “English Darwinism exudes something like the stuffy air of English overpopulation, like the small people’s smell of indigence and overcrowding” (*ibid.*). The focus on self-preservation makes life small and miserable because it implies that our main

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by Rüdiger Bittner, translated by Kate Sturge. Cambridge 2003. Where such translations are not available yet, quotations are taken from the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) and translated by the author.

<sup>12</sup> English translation: *Twilight/Anti-Christ*, translated by Hollingdale.

<sup>13</sup> The whole kingdom of life, Nietzsche states, is determined by an “unconditional” will to power (1885/ 86, 1[54], KSA 12.23). See also 1885, 35[60], KSA 11.538. The will to power is equivalent to “expansion of power” (1885/86, 2[108], KSA 12.114; Writings, 80. See also 1885/86, 2[157], KSA 12.142; Writings, 91f. / 1886 /87, 7[9], KSA 12.297 / 1887/88, 11[96], KSA 13.44; Writings, 217 / 1888, 14[82], KSA 13.262; Writings, 248. This means that the will to power is always the will for “an augmentation of power” (1888, 14[121], KSA 13.300f., Writings, 256; see also 1888, 15[120], KSA 13.120f.)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BGE 13. See Günter Abel, Nietzsche contra ‘Selbsterhaltung’. Steigerung der Macht und Ewige Wiederkehr. Nietzsche-Studien 10/11 (1981/1982), 367-384.

goal is to withstand the forces which deny us the right and possibility to exist. It prevents us from seeing the freedom and unforced joyfulness of life.<sup>15</sup>

If the will to power, however, has to be seen as an essentially unforced and anti-instrumental drive it can have no further explanation. The will for more (that is, more power) cannot be traced back to another will; it contains both its origin and its purpose in itself. For this reason, the will to power has to be seen as an aesthetic principle. Organisms, according to Nietzsche, exist in order to release or even squander their potential; their only purpose is to conduct life in a joyful, exuberant way. The wealth and luxury of life that were mentioned above can so be qualified as the interest of life to be lived in an aesthetically stimulating way, that is, as the interest of life to display its potential and have pleasure in such a display *as display* (and not, or at least not exclusively, as satisfaction of basic needs).

Obviously, this interpretation of the will to power needs more explanation than can be provided here. More evidence both from Nietzsche's published and unpublished works would be needed to support the claim that it is primarily an aesthetic notion (although some evidence will be given in the following).<sup>16</sup> But for the purpose of our essay, all we have to show is that Nietzsche cannot prove that his idea of life has any more right than Darwin's. This point remains unchanged even in light of the theory of the will to power, and it does so for obvious reasons: one cannot prove anything with the help of an aesthetic principle. Being able to say that "wealth" and "prodigality" are the main characteristics of organic life depends entirely on the way in which life is described, and life can obviously be described in various ways. Nietzsche was quite

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<sup>15</sup> For Nietzsche, modern culture, with all its pragmatism and its egalitarian convictions, is "plebeian." It owes this quality especially to the English attitude toward life, for which Darwin is one of the most typical examples (cf. BGE 14 and 253).

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger famously begins his study of Nietzsche's philosophy with a reference to the will to power as art (cf. Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche. Volumes One and Two, translated by D.F. Krell. San Francisco 1991). See also Babette E. Babich, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life. Albany 1993: "The second (active) expression of the Will to Power is from a superabundance of power and a need for creative expression" (196; see also 179, 183, 237).

aware of the status of his theory as a mere “interpretation” and “experiment”.<sup>17</sup> The idea of will to power can therefore never be seen as a biological theory that attacks Darwin’s theory on its own grounds. It is not another empirical theory, based on different data or on an alternative explanation of given data, but has the purpose of problematizing the goals and assumptions of biological theory itself. Nietzsche’s concern can be summarized through the question whether it is desirable to have a theory that denies aesthetic expressiveness a role in the interpretation of biological phenomena. Why does the biology of his time exclude the perspective of an aesthetic of life? Is the instrumental understanding according to which an organism is nothing more than a tool used to maintain its own existence the only possible account of life? Why should life not rather have *no* instrumental purpose at all?<sup>18</sup> The following points will shed further light on this concern.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2. The influence of the environment

Nietzsche’s ironic attitude towards English culture, towards the “stuffy air of English overpopulation” quoted above, leads to another criticism of Darwin. He denies that species are

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. BGE 22 and 36; 1992, 220f. and 237.

<sup>18</sup> In an important note, Nietzsche also refers to the ambivalence of any instrumental conception of life. The “utility” of an organ, he states, can be understood in different ways. If one organ, for example, is too strong, it might even prevent the duration of organic beings or at least hamper their further development. On the contrary, deficient organs might also serve as a stimulus for ongoing adaption. One can therefore not justly assume that the utility of an organ consists in the fulfillment of only one specific instrumental purpose. Survival and adaption might result from conditions that are initially *not* instrumental for them (cf. 1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12.304; Writings, 134f.).

<sup>19</sup>A critical and helpful overview of Nietzsche’s philosophical discussion of Darwin is given by Rafael Winkler, Nietzsche and l’*élan* technique: techniques, life, and the production of time. *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007), 73-90, and Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Trans-Human Condition*. London 1997, 90-108. Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, biology, and metaphor*. Cambridge 2002, describes the historical background of Nietzsche’s criticism of Darwin, which leads him to a rather negative conclusion: “Far from advancing a radical, coherent and effective critique of Darwin, Nietzsche simply reiterates the many errors and misunderstandings perpetrated by his contemporaries” (55); namely the “pre-Darwinian basic commitment to non-adaptive modes of evolutionary change”(27). But apart from the fact that such conclusions take Darwin’s theory as a stated truth, which seems methodologically naïve, they also miss the difference between biology and its philosophical interpretation in Nietzsche (or better: between biology as a science and the philosophical interpretation of the underlying conceptual decisions that it makes).

influenced by their environment (in the language of his time: by their “milieu”). “In reality,” he states in a little too assertive way, the environment is “absolutely indifferent”; species suffer no “modification through climate and nutrition” (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.316). In a weaker formulation he notes that “Darwin absurdly *overestimates* the influence of ‘external conditions’” (1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12.304; Writings, 135).

Again, it is hard to see how such claims could be proven or at least validated through a more empirical account of evolution. But like before, Nietzsche’s major concern does not lie in the biological facts but rather in the general assumptions that guide biological theory in its Darwinian form. Instead of limiting the essential function of organisms to a mere reaction to the environment, there is no reason why biology should not assume an internal force that originates without any outside influence. Nietzsche explains this force again in aesthetic terms, as a force “which shapes, creates form from within” that only “*utilises*” and “*exploits*” external conditions (1886/87, 7[25], KSA 12,304; Writings, 135). The force works “from within” as a self-expression of the organism radiating into the outside world. It is, however, crucial to understand this “from within” in the right way. The inner force can be no separate, mysterious power that exists within the organism independent from its appearance in the outside world. The analogy to artistic expression makes clear that the inner character of living organisms is a modeling force which translates itself into organic forms, or better: the inner character is nothing besides this translation of force into external forms, which then interact with the environment. Nietzsche, thus, does not need to explain organic life any different from Darwin. The only difference is that, according to him, organic life cannot be reduced exclusively to a reactive force but also has to be granted the potential to express an unsolicited inner drive. Why should biology *not* want to accept this dimension of aesthetic expressiveness in the interpretation of life? Why not accept a

dimension in which life is unforced, productive, and individual, just like artistic creation?<sup>20</sup> That is, why not accept a different, aesthetic interpretation of the very same phenomena?

The question of the external influence has for Nietzsche also another important function, which cannot be explained in detail here. Besides the aesthetic vision of life, the idea of an inner, modeling force also allows for a non-moral account of evolution. According to Nietzsche, Darwinism gives far too much weight to the “domestication” of the human being, that is, to the adaptation to a certain cultural environment. It assumes that there is a “deep, even fundamental” adaption (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.315) that transforms humans from a natural into a civilized being. But human beings either degenerate or suffer such transformations in a purely superficial way (ibid.). Their nature does not evolve into a more benevolent one but retains essentially the same, morally neutral or even strictly immoral tendencies. But again, this aspect cannot be further discussed.<sup>21</sup>

### **2.3. The Survival of the Fittest**

Nietzsche’s criticism of the idea that the fittest species survive parallels the way in which he criticizes the idea of a struggle for existence. Again, he does not deny the corresponding facts, namely the obvious fact that organisms have to be sufficiently fit in order to survive. He rather attacks the general assumptions underlying the idea. For Nietzsche, there is a hidden teleology in

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<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche refers to the creative, modelling force of the will to power throughout his notes (cf. 1885, 36[31], KSA 11.563; Writings, 26 / 1885/86, 2[76], KSA 12.96; Writings, 72 / 1886/87, 7[2], KSA 12.252f.; Writings, 129. Beauty, he states, is “the highest sign of power” (1886/87, 7[3], KSA 12.258). Despite Nietzsche’s claim according to which the will the power is the force that drives the formation of the organic world, its ultimate realization can only be understood in analogy to artistic creation (see also 1887/88, 11[363], KSA 13.160 and 1888, 14[117], KSA 13.293-95). With respect to the problem of truth, the will to power is equivalent to the “will to deception” (1886/87, 7[54], KSA 12.313; Writings, 138), that is, to the creation of a world in which appearance and illusion are embraced as such (see also 1887/88, 11[415], KSA 13.193f.).

<sup>21</sup>As we said before, Nietzsche’s criticism often concerns not Darwinism itself but contemporary attempts at using the Darwinian ideas for the interpretation of culture. One such attempt uses the idea of evolution for the genealogy of morals. The attempt is untenable in Nietzsche’s eyes, mainly because it generalizes a particular, modern form of morality. Cf. GM, Preface 7. English translation: Basic Writings, edited Kaufman. See also 1885/86, 2[161], KSA 12.143f./ 1885/86, 2[203], KSA 12.165f.; Writings, 98f.



the notion of the survival of the fittest. It presupposes that the species that continue to survive do so because of the increasing fitness they acquire in the course of evolution. Their persisting survival means that they “grow more perfect” (TI, “Expeditions” 14). Darwin’s theory of evolution, hence, is for him based on the assumption of an ongoing enhancement of organic abilities. It entails the typically modern idea of *progress*. In this respect, it can even be suspected to be a hidden continuation of the “disastrous belief in divine *Providence*” (1887, 10[7], KSA 12.457; Writings, 174), he notes occasionally.<sup>22</sup>

The point at which this presumed Darwinian teleology seems most problematic for Nietzsche is precisely the evolution of the human being. In fact, it has often been noted that Nietzsche is far more interested in weighing the consequences of Darwinism for the understanding of human life than in using it as a scientific method to explain the development of animals in general, let alone plants:

Mankind does *not* represent a development of the better or the stronger or the higher in the way that is believed today. ‘Progress’ is merely a modern idea, that is to say a false idea. The European of today is of far less value than the European of the Renaissance; onward development is not by *any* means, by any necessity the same thing as elevation, advance, strengthening. (AC 4)

Modern humans, according to Nietzsche, are not only far from having become more perfect over time, they even degenerate and regress in their physical and spiritual capacities. This diagnosis

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<sup>22</sup> On Nietzsche’s critical reflection of the modern condition, see Robert Pippin, Nietzsche’s alleged farewell: The premodern, modern, and postmodern Nietzsche. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, eds. B. Magnus/K.M. Higgins. Cambridge 1996, 252-278. As the following will show, the whole idea of an aesthetic justification only makes sense as a typically modern experience of the world.

stands indeed in opposition to Darwin's ideas. For Darwin, the "natural selection" driving the evolution of species works necessarily towards their enhancement:

It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.<sup>23</sup>

What survives is by definition better than what does not survive. The "good" species are preserved and made even better through the constant, "silent" test of natural selection. Darwin's conception is based on an inherent optimism: for him, only the continuous improvement of species explains the process of evolution. Species would not survive or develop further if it were not for the increased abilities they achieve. Even if he attributes no particular, normative value to such "better" organisms, and even if his conception remains without any explicit hint at an underlying natural teleology—there is no tendency toward greater perfection in nature as such, only in the process of selection—it still presupposes that the surviving species are in one way or another superior to those that became extinct.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, instead, disconnects evolution from improvement. Evolution, for him, contains the possibility both of enhancement and decadence; it does not necessarily go only in the first direction, especially not in the case of human beings. The survival of the fittest cannot be the only model that explains the development of organic life.

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<sup>23</sup> Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> See also the underlying idea of progress: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 459). On Darwin's "ambivalent" attitude toward evolution as progress, see Moore, *Nietzsche, biology, and metaphor*, 29. Ernst Mayr, *The Idea of Teleology*. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992), 117-135, describes evolution as "an optimization process" that has no "definite," that is, overall goal and therefore results "in an irregular zigzag movement" (132).

Biological theory has to accept the possibility that species might survive without reaching a fitter or more perfect state.<sup>25</sup>

Nietzsche's criticism, however, is more ambiguous than it seems. The ambiguity lies in the very idea of the "survival of the fittest," which can be read in a twofold way. On the one hand, it presupposes a general improvement of organic life. This aspect can well be criticized. On the other hand, the "fittest" organisms are simply those that have won the struggle for life, without any reference to an intrinsic enhancement of their organic capacities. Nietzsche himself refers to this possibility:

Species do *not* grow more perfect: the weaker dominate the strong again and again—the reason being they are the great majority, and they are also cleverer... Darwin forgot the mind (—that is English!): *the weak possess more mind...* [...] He who possesses strength divests himself of mind [...]. One will see that under mind I include foresight, patience, dissimulation, great self-control, and all that is mimicry. (TI, "Expeditions" 14)

Certain organic species survive not because of a process of improvement they have undergone, but because they outnumber and outwit other species. The weak, acting collectively, overcome the strong, exceptional creatures which by definition can only be few. The survival of the fittest can so mean the survival of those who are able to turn their deficiency and weakness into strength.

But not only this: Nietzsche at least indirectly admits that the weak have also enhanced their capabilities, insofar as they have become more intelligent or at least more "cunning." It is

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. 1888, 14[123], KSA 13.303f.; Writings, 258f. For similar discussions in the current theory of evolution, see Stephen Jay Gould, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*. New York 1996.

therefore hard to see in which sense he contradicts the Darwinian theory at all. Darwin could have said that the intellect is but a tool that was developed in the process of natural selection and allowed for a higher chance of survival; and current theories of evolution see the human brain in precisely this way.<sup>26</sup> The weak organisms have so in fact improved, at least in some regard, and the idea of natural selection functions for Nietzsche just as it does for Darwin, that is, as a model that explains survival through the capabilities of those who are more apt to survive. This way, Nietzsche's criticism seems to vanish up in the air.

The only way for Nietzsche to avoid this conclusion is to introduce a qualitative point of view. According to it, "mimicry," "foresight," and the like are not really signs of an improvement of organic life: spirit is a product of decadence that compensates a loss in genuine vitality. A species that became more intelligent than others is deficient, weaker, and less developed in its organic force, and it achieves only a secondary, defensive improvement of skills. But where does this qualitative difference come from? What distinguishes "weak" from "strong" in this exact sense? Can the difference be explained in biological, that is, empirical terms? The answer is clearly no. What Nietzsche envisions as a stronger species is also called a "higher type", and this "higher" quality can only be explained from an aesthetic point of view. In continuing a passage quoted above, he states:

In another sense there are cases of individual success constantly appearing in the most various parts of the earth and from the most various cultures in which a *higher type* does manifest itself: something which in relation to collective mankind is a sort of superman. Such chance occurrences of great success have always

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<sup>26</sup> For a recent example, see Michael C. Corballis, *The Recursive Mind: The Origins of Human Language, Thought, and Civilization*. Princeton 2011.

been possible and perhaps always will be possible. And even entire races, tribes, nations can under certain circumstances represent such a *lucky hit*. (AC 4)

Higher types cannot be explained, let alone be produced; their appearance in the history of mankind is random like the appearance of great works of art. Beings that are truly strong—“the richer and more complex forms” of life (1888, 14[133], KSA 13.317)—remain an exception that emerges from the general evolution of life without contributing to its overall improvement. They are the manifestation, the display of a happy, fortunate accomplishment that life is able to reach, if only from time to time. “The short duration of beauty, of genius, of Caesar, is *sui generis*; something like this cannot be inherited” (ibid.). Like the beauty of a work of art, the higher types do not belong to a chain of biological mechanisms but truly stand out; they are genuine and individual. And even if they might have a certain biological constitution which could then be further analyzed or even explained—Nietzsche at least suggests that this is possible—in being nothing but a “lucky hit” they eventually escape all classification and generalization. There is no other word, no other qualification for them than “beauty”. Without the possibility of an aesthetic of life it could not even be said what a “higher type” is. This means that Nietzsche, again, does not deny any of Darwin’s empirical findings. He rather introduces a different interpretation of these findings, based on a criterion that is left out in the narrative that describes evolution as a linear process of improvement. According to it, within the story of the general progress of organic life there is yet another story to be told, which is based on particular, disconnected events.

But strangely enough, with the idea of a “higher” type Nietzsche alludes to a teleology of his own, a teleology even stronger than Darwin’s one. For Nietzsche, there are degrees of quality

in life (which Darwin did not assume); life separates the “lucky hits” of beauty from the mass of ordinary forms. Obviously, this kind of teleology does not drive the evolution of life like a natural force; life does not protect or even favor beauty in its exceptional form. But insofar as Nietzsche deplores the absence of beauty, he states it implicitly as the goal of life. Nietzsche’s teleology is negative, pointing at the lack or even the failure of “lucky hits,” but precisely in this negative form life reveals the true, proper evolution it is supposed to undergo: the evolution that would repeat and reaffirm the possibility of beauty. The evolution of beauty is no progress in the modern, Darwinian sense but consists of isolated, irruptive events. There is no linearity, let alone a necessary striving for improvement that would cause the phenomenon of beauty to appear, and yet the “higher type” *has* to appear in life from time to time, if only for the reason that such types always remain possible, as quoted above. Nietzsche’s criticism of Darwin’s teleology does therefore not mean that life can have no goal at all. There is a teleology that is inherent and specific to Nietzsche’s aesthetic understanding on life. We will further show and explain it in the following remarks.

### **3. A Human Being That Justifies Being Human**

The most obvious question we have to answer here is: how is it possible at all to speak about a form of teleology in the context of Nietzsche’s thought? If we follow, for example, his discussion of the nihilistic tendencies in modern life, it seems clear that for him the idea of a purpose or goal of life is by no means tenable anymore. In the past, assuming such a goal required the “belief in God and an essentially moral order” of nature, a belief which modern culture slowly but definitely has lost (1886/87, 5[71], KSA 12.212; Writings, 117). On the other hand, the absence of a natural order does not mean that life has to be without any purpose or

meaning. As Nietzsche famously points out, nihilism, the belief in the meaninglessness of life, is still linked to the idea that there should be an objective meaning. It presupposes that if there is no God or overarching order, life can have no purpose at all. Nihilism, thus, is still as metaphysical as the belief in God.<sup>27</sup> What it fails to see is that there can be another source of meaning, a source that is not given to life from outside (through God or a pre-established order) but originates in life itself. “There is nothing in life that has value except the degree of power” (ibid., KSA 12.215; Writings, 119), Nietzsche states, which means that life can be given meaning and purpose according to the will to power that is invested and realized in it.<sup>28</sup>

Tracing meaning back to the will to power, however, raises another immediate question: is such meaning not entirely subjective, based on the perspectives and modeling forces that define the will to power? For Nietzsche, the will to power can be described as an individual impulse to interpretation. It understands and discloses the world in a radically individual way: “The *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing [...] be” (GM 3, 12). There is no seeing except for a particular eye, limited to its particular perspective on the world. “Perspectivism,” Nietzsche notes, “is only a complex form of specificity” (1888, 14[186], KSA 13.373). But if this is so, what is the status of any “value” that can be attributed to life, and what can be a “higher type”? Does the idea of such a type not amount to a rather idiosyncratic fantasy, hardly relevant for anyone besides the individual who indulges in it? It seems that if we are able to make sense of Nietzsche’s teleology at all, we have to define it in a very specific way. Our

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<sup>27</sup>Cf. 1885/86, 2[109], KSA 12.114; Writings, 80.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. 1888, 16[12], KSA 13.486; Writings, 274. The teleological elements in Nietzsche’s thought have often been noted. However, they are also often misunderstood as a general and objective condition of life, not as an idea and vision that is projected from out of life’s active force (cf. Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 107). Elaina P. Miller, *Nietzsche on Individuation and Purposiveness in Nature*, in: Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *A Companion to Nietzsche*. Oxford 2009, 58-75, rightly emphasizes the subjective, that is, perspectivistic character of all teleological assumptions in Nietzsche (cf. 68f.).

question is then whether there can be a goal of life that is neither strictly objective (which is not possible anymore) nor strictly subjective (which denies the possibility of any more general interpretation of life).

In order to answer this question, we have to shift our own perspective. So far, we followed the assumption that life has to be treated as an *object* that can be described as bearing certain characteristic traits. We followed Nietzsche's criticism of Darwin, which led us to believe that he replaced the biological theory of evolution with an aesthetic description of life. But in reality, Nietzsche's approach cannot lead to anything like a "theory" which simply describes or explains certain structures and facts. This is particularly so for the kind of teleology we are dealing with here. A Nietzschean teleology cannot be based on the assumption that life possesses any general, objective qualities. The goal of life that he envisions is rather a product of life itself, a perspective that emerges out of the very desires and intentions of organic life:

The problem I raise here is not what ought to succeed mankind in the sequence of species (—the human being is a *conclusion*—): but what type of human being one ought to *breed*, ought to *will*, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future. This more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as happy accident, as an exception, never as *willed*. He has rather been the most feared, he has hitherto been virtually *the* thing to be feared— and out of fear the reverse type has been willed, bred, *achieved*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal man—the Christian... (AC 3)



This passage evokes a number of ideas, including Nietzsche's idea of breeding which cannot be discussed in detail here.<sup>29</sup> For us, it is important to see how the idea of a more valuable type of human being is introduced. The higher type is valuable insofar as he is "willed." He is no natural, inherent goal of the human race but an outgrowth of its intentions; he incorporates what humans desire, wish, and strive to accomplish for themselves. The higher type represents the "future" of life, its orientation toward something it wants to become.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the higher type is "more worthy of life" not because all other types should be let die but because he offers a purpose for which human beings *can* live, a purpose given through life itself in its desire for a future and a goal. Human life creates its own teleology, and such teleology exists only insofar as it motivates and directs the conduct of life. If human beings ever ceased to will, they would also lose their goal.<sup>31</sup>

Still, it might seem that we haven't answered the other question that was raised before: how can such a teleology at the end *not* be merely subjective? We also have to ask how

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<sup>29</sup> In his later works such as the *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche apparently wants to overcome the randomness of higher types, just as he wants to secure the beginning of a new post-Christian age (cf. the "Law against Christianity" in this work). The idea of breeding appears then as the attempt to stir actively, and not merely to suffer, the course of evolution. Because of the vulnerability and rare occurrence of higher types they have to be protected against the envy and aggression of the mass. This entails no less than the problem of eugenics which can also not be followed here. The same holds for the ethical aspects of the idea of breeding, especially the notorious criticism of pity. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche famously states that one should help the weak perish (AC 2). Whether this means that their lives should actively be ended or that one should simply withdraw the consolation of Christianity from those who cannot live without it has to be left open here. With respect to the preparation of higher types, the idea of breeding often seems to be more an attempt at educating individuals than at their biological manipulation. However, even if this is true, Nietzsche does in fact use biological vocabulary to describe an effort that has very little to do with biology.

At least his *language* displays a certain brutality which cannot but make his *thought* appear ambiguous. For breeding as education cf. BGE 61. For more ambivalent formulations, compare TI, 'Improvers' 2-5, and 1888/89, 25[1], KSA 13.637f. For a detailed interpretation of this topic see Gerd Schank, "Rasse" und "Züchtung" bei Nietzsche. Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung 44, Berlin/New York 2000.

<sup>30</sup> On the notion of future in Nietzsche as "an unconditioned future, a moment for which there exists no antecedent cause," see Winkler, Nietzsche and l'élan technique, 83. "For Nietzsche, man is the temporal and futural animal par excellence" (Ansell Pearson, *Virid Life*, 14). The orientation towards the future of life, which is also manifest in the ideas of overcoming and the *Übermensch*, the overhuman, can be seen as a characteristic moment of Nietzsche's thought.

<sup>31</sup> Those who do not have a goal because they suffer a lack of will would be like the "last humans" (cf. Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Za) I, Introduction 5. English translation: Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for Everyone and Nobody. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Graham Parkes. Oxford 2005).

Nietzsche can prevent the higher type from becoming an ideological construct, the dangerous illusion of a higher class of human beings used precisely by those who want to dominate. To approach these questions, we can look at the way he describes the actual appearance of the higher type. The higher type is neither present nor imagined but “willed”; he appears as a form of life that has to be developed in a future that is yet to come. What individuals wish for as a higher type transcends them as result of a coming evolution for which they can only wait or prepare. In their openness toward the future their willing is directed to something other than their own, particular imagination. This becomes clear in a passage that mirrors and confirms the remarks quoted above:

But grant me from time to time—if there are divine goddesses in the realm beyond good and evil—grant me the sight, but one glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may still *believe in man!* / For this is how things are: the diminution and levelling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary. [...] Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe—together with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary—what is nihilism today if it is not *that?* – We are weary of man. (GM 1, 12)

Nietzsche's invocation of the gods, imploring them to allow him a glimpse of a higher type, gives a new, more serious tone to his reflections on the evolution of the human being, despite the rhetorical character of his lines. His prayer to the gods "beyond good and evil" comes out of a soul "weary" of modern life. It asks, in an attitude echoing Christian prayers, for the strengthening of his waning faith in the future of human beings. If we take this prayer seriously (and nothing seems to indicate that we shouldn't do so), then the higher type is nothing that can be forced to exist; no political or artistic effort would be enough to secure his appearance. In addition, the faith in the future of human beings is presented not as an individual attitude but as an orientation shared with a community of others, who in the text are vaguely addressed as "we." It requires a whole culture turning toward new and higher possibilities. Like a work of art, we can perhaps say, the higher type does not come out of nothing but appears within a certain time, speaks to a certain time, and needs the receptivity of others to be acknowledged in what he is. He needs certain conditions in order to thrive, and such conditions cannot be produced at will.

But there is yet another step. The human being who would justify "man," that is, human life in general, is described as "happy, mighty, and triumphant." The higher type knows about his superiority and thoroughly enjoys living it. For him, life is a series of victories. This means that what characterizes the higher type, as he is invoked in Nietzsche's prayer, is not so much his specific character as his ability to look differently on life, to explore perspectives that are otherwise obscured in a world more and more concerned with equalizing and securing the conditions of life. The higher type would give something to fear because he would be able to see beyond the limits that human beings have set. But what is the perspective he would be able to have? Despite his fearful appearance which would allow him to look "beyond good and evil," this perspective is again described in aesthetic terms. The higher type is "perfect" as a "lucky

hit”; he follows only his own, personal criteria and taste. He is “happy” and “triumphant” because of the beauty, the aesthetic spectacle, he both sees and through his seeing creates in the world.

This step completes Nietzsche’s argument. As we have seen, it started out as an aesthetic theory of life that could be seen as a modification of the existing form of evolutionary biology. As a theory, it describes and talks *about* life as an object. In the second step, Nietzsche showed that such a description is no merely theoretical attitude but a tendency that emerges in life itself: human desires and wishes make them long for the beauty of the higher type; the higher type appears as expression of their need for having a goal. Still, this only explained assumptions that are made *about* the higher type. In the final step we see that Nietzsche’s goal is the perspective *of* the higher type, the way in which *the higher type*—and not we or Nietzsche describing him—would be able to see life. Instead of an aesthetic *theory* of life the goal of Nietzsche’s reflections is an aesthetic *experience* of life. His theoretical stance would not be possible if it could not be grounded in, or at least related to, the perspective of *someone* who originally and without even wanting it, just as a “lucky hit,” is able to adopt such a point of view. Nietzsche’s teleology is based on the fact that such a higher point of view was and always will remain possible. Nothing guarantees its existence, but on the other hand, nothing necessarily prevents it from occurring in or growing out of the conditions of life.

This also allows for a final answer to the question whether Nietzsche can prevent the higher type from being a merely subjective, arbitrary product of human imagination, from being a mere illusion. The higher type, if ever there is one again, would prove his quality through the perspective he would be able to adopt. The higher type would look *at us*, describe *us*, and the way this would happen would then be indicative of the character that he has. Philosophy cannot

create or even lead to such a type of human being, but can at best prepare us for the case that he might come. It can prepare for the higher type who would come to challenge and judge his contemporaries. We can therefore summarize the idea of a higher type as Nietzsche's longing for another, higher subject's look on us.

What remains to be explained in the passage quoted above is the problem of justification. Justification is linked to the experience of beauty; the higher types that justify the human being do so because of the beauty that life acquires through them. But what exactly is the role of aesthetic criteria in all this, how does beauty relate to life in order to allow precisely for its *justification*? These questions have to be answered in the following. In order to do so, we have to shift our focus away from the particular idea of a higher type and ask in a more general sense for the relation between art, life, and human experience.

#### **4. Aesthetic Justification**

In order to understand Nietzsche's idea of justification, we have to go back to his early work on *The Birth of the Tragedy*, one of whose most astonishing claims entails the concept of an aesthetic justification of life. The assertion that "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* existence and the world are eternally *justified*," is stated several times throughout the book.<sup>32</sup> This statement needs to be read carefully: art (or aesthetic experience in the larger sense) is not one possibility among others that make life interesting, stimulating, and deep; it is the only possibility. And it makes life not only interesting and desirable but truly *justifies* the existence of the human being and the world. Art provides the goal and value that life otherwise lacks. In doing so, it replaces the traditional idea of a divine order inscribed in nature and life. Any order, from now on, necessarily appears as the result of an artistic illusion. Nietzsche famously

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<sup>32</sup> BT 5, as well as BT 24 and BT, Attempt 5.

criticized his early work in later times as indulging in an “artists’ metaphysics” which then appeared to him “arbitrary, idle, fantastic” (BT, “Attempt” 5). But this criticism does not imply that the main philosophical ideas of his early approach are to be dismissed. As we will see, they align quite well with the later ideas about life that we have treated so far. The questions we can start from in order to explain the idea of an aesthetic justification of life are the following: *how* is existence justified this way, and *for whom*?

First, we have to consider the question of “how.” In *The Birth of Tragedy*, art appears as a remedy for the deep and unbearable pain that comes inseparably with human existence. The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, knew that human life in its inner character is too terrible to be lived.<sup>33</sup> Human life is essentially pain; pain not only in the physical sense but more important, and more deeply affecting, in a metaphysical sense. In the face of nature no single, individual being is supposed to exist. Nature destroys and dissolves individual life and all assumptions of significance and relevance that are made about it. Individual human life is essentially a contradiction that has to revoke and cancel itself.<sup>34</sup> This way, art not only has a place and function *in life*—the function to embellish, entertain, and stimulate human experience—but reconciles human beings with the very fact of living.

It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods [...]. Out of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollonian impulse toward beauty, just as roses break forth out of thorny bushes. (BT 3)

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. BT 3.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. BT 5, and also BT 24.

Art does not have a specific pragmatic purpose within a given world but creates and unfolds a sphere of illusion that can be accepted *as a world*, as a totality of liveable conditions and goals. If anything, it creates the pre-condition for having purposes. Art determines the whole culture of a people as a web of mythical narratives through which it defines itself.<sup>35</sup> One might object that art (true art at least) never has a pragmatic purpose anyway. But if art is seen as a specific activity or as a specific part of life, distinguished from other activities or parts—science, political action, everyday life, etc.—then within society as a whole even art can have a specific purpose: it can be used to embellish, entertain, and stimulate, as we said before. For Nietzsche, art is not limited to any particular aspect of life but guides and supports Greek culture as a whole. Art equals life, and in such a fundamental and totalizing sense it is indeed possible to say that art has no pragmatic purpose whatsoever, because there can be no pragmatic purpose outside of life.

This allows us to see how the justification of life is achieved. The pain of existence is justified not in an economic way—in the sense of a *quid pro quo* in which aesthetic pleasure is supposed to counter-balance pain—nor in a moral way in which the painful experience of human life is given a higher purpose and value. Existence is rather justified because within the realm of illusion human beings are able to *live*. As a narrative of the world, art creates the vision of a “divine order of joy” in which the conduct of life is both desirable and meaningful, even in light of the suffering that it entails. For Nietzsche’s Greeks, suffering is a part of beauty itself, of the beautiful spectacle that is enacted as *the world*.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, for the economic or moral

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<sup>35</sup> For the connection between myth and culture, cf. BT 23.

<sup>36</sup> It has been asked how “we actually can see real suffering as beautiful,” and whether the idea of an “aestheticized suffering” isn’t a pure illusion (Daniel Came, *The Aesthetic Justification of Existence*, in: *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson. Oxford 2009), 41-57, here: 51). Against such questions one has to be aware that Nietzsche never thinks that suffering *itself* could be changed in whatsoever way. It only appears as part of a world whose overall quality is beauty (cf. GM 3, 28).

sense of justification suffering and beauty are separated because suffering is the price that first needs to be paid before any gratifying experience can be made.

To explain this further we can refer to Nietzsche's later works, where a more pragmatic understanding of the fictions that are necessary for life seems to prevail. However, even conditions that at first seem more or less pragmatic are in fact still conceived in a purely aesthetic way:

The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments [...] are the most indispensable to us; that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical [...], man could not live—that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. (BGE 4)

The role of fictions described in these words remains utterly vague; how they are supposed to “preserve the species” and “promote life” is never said. The main point for Nietzsche is that the assumption of logical fictions allows for the world to be thoroughly intelligible. The purpose of fictions is to *create* a fictitious world or better: to be able to continue believing in fictions. Not *what* humans believe but *that* they believe is relevant for their attitude toward life.<sup>37</sup>

From a more formal point of view, what allows art to create a world is the ability to capture human experience under the aspect of unity. In his famous remarks in the *Second Unfashionable Observation*, Nietzsche refers to “the *shaping power (plastische Kraft)* of a

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<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche's notion of fiction, hence, is dialectical: the world of appearance is for humans the true world because they cannot live without it. Appearance has to be taken as truth, and vice versa. See Walter Schulz, *Funktion und Ort der Kunst in Nietzsches Philosophie. Nietzsche-Studien* 12 (1983), 1-31, here: 30.



human being, a person, a people, a culture” (UO II, 1). This “shaping power” has the power to integrate even unwanted and painful events into one coherent narrative:

Such a nature knows how to forget whatever does not subdue it; these things no longer exist. Its horizon is closed and complete, and nothing is capable of reminding it that beyond this horizon there are human beings, passions, doctrines, goals. And this is a universal law: every living thing can become healthy, strong, and fruitful only within a defined horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself and too selfish, in turn, to enclose its own perspective within an alien horizon, then it will feebly waste away or hasten to its timely end. (ibid.)

Here again, Nietzsche’s description follows the paradigm of the artwork. A world is always a specific world, created by a specific, irreplaceable narrative. Like a work of art has to leave out what makes no sense within its composition, the mythical narrative has to focus exclusively on the inner coherence it can achieve. With this ability to capture life as a unity, art almost achieves a therapeutic purpose: to unify means to disregard all aberrations and adverse events, to re-focus on oneself, and to heal. On the other hand, despite the physiological language, there is nothing strictly “natural” in this therapeutic activity: every degree of unity that can be achieved is the result of artistic creativity; cultures or persons do not simply possess a certain coherence of life but have to build it always anew. The horizon they live in needs constantly to be *drawn*.

To sum up, we can say that art justifies human existence by preventing the world from fading away. Beauty and the “order of joy,” the two characteristics that are crucial for *The Birth of Tragedy*, are the result of art’s ability to create or at least restore the vision and unity that are

necessary for the experience of a world, and to withstand the impact of the negative by integrating it into the coherence and overall sway of its narrative.

This leads us to the second question: justification “for whom?” *The Birth of Tragedy* can help us to provide an answer, precisely with its famous “artists’ metaphysic” that involves a Schopenhauerian “primal unity” (*Ur-Eines*), an original oneness out of which emerges the aesthetic vision of the world (BT 5). This unity includes human beings as part of the emerging world:

We may assume that we are merely images for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art [...] —while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it. (ibid.)

Following these lines, art not only has the purpose of making life acceptable and restoring the world which otherwise would fade away, it also lets individual human life be an element of the illusion that it unfolds. Art is created without a human creator and without the direct intention to create a world of aesthetic appeal. It allows human beings to find and experience themselves as part of the emerging world. Nietzsche evidently follows here the romantic idea of the genius who creates unconsciously, out of a natural disposition.<sup>38</sup> One can therefore never say that human beings *want* to maintain their life through art. In the perspective of *The Birth of Tragedy* one rather has to say that life and nature want to protect human existence through the encompassing

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. BT 5. On a more fundamental level, Nietzsche notes that it would be an “absurd question” to ask ‘who wants power.’ All willing entities emerge out of the organization of the will to power and cannot predate it (1888, 14[80], KSA 13.260; Writings, 247). What an individual affirms as valuable (or willable) corresponds to his pre-given degree of power. For a similar argument, cf. BGE 34. For the traditional idea of genius, see section 46 of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*: “Genius is an innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”

vision of a mythical world. Art not only has no pragmatic purpose (first condition), it also exceeds what could be called a “human” capability by emerging out of natural impulses that are not at the individuals’ disposal (second condition).

The same constellation can be seen in the appearance of the higher type. The higher type is no vision that human beings create in order to give a goal and purpose to their life but rather the exceptional event of something that allows for finding such a goal, for restoring faith in a future of life. The higher type *happens* to human life, just as the aesthetic vision of a world happens to human beings and provides them with something that can be desired and willed. Despite the vocabulary of will and creation, Nietzsche in fact never envisioned human beings as producing their own goals in the sense of an intentional process of creation. In aesthetic experience, the image of the world condensates in a way that is more similar to dream than thought.<sup>39</sup> One cannot *want* to have an aesthetic experience, as one could not even say what this is without already being overwhelmed by an experience of extraordinary beauty. To put this formally: the aesthetic vision appears in the form of experience, not of judgment; it originates from the object that is seen (fantasized, imagined, envisioned, etc.), not from a subjective intention. Analogously, the willing of a goal is more a passion than an act; human beings have to find themselves both as having the passion to will and as being exposed to an object that triggers their will.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, the question “for whom” the world is justified can be answered by saying that the world is justified not for a human subject that is isolated from the world it justifies. The world, in

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. BT 1.

<sup>40</sup> Zarathustra’s “On the Thousand Goals and One” speaks of a similar experience for which the values that are held dear in a people represent what was necessary for them to overcome the hardships they endured. This means that values are not the result of a conscious creation but incorporate and express an experience that is made, primarily with respect to oneself and one’s own reactions and force (cf. Z I, Thousand). A later remark confirms that values and evaluations are forced upon humans by life itself (TI, “Morality” 5).

other words, is not justified *before* the subject. To justify means rather to accept oneself together with all existence, to accept an existence that includes oneself as an inseparable part:

I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as *what is beautiful in them: — thus I will be one those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love from now on!*

I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse, I do not even want to accuse the accusers. (GS 276)

This passage from a later work, *The Gay Science*, puts aesthetic justification into a more stoic perspective: beauty, here, comes out of necessity. The transformation of the world into a realm of joy is described as a more individual, even more solitary attitude than in the early works where Nietzsche followed the paradigm of ancient Greece in assuming that the entire culture would contribute to creating a world. The structure of the argument, however, remains the same: the loving attitude toward the world is not based on particular reasons but embraces the world as a whole.<sup>41</sup> It “makes beautiful” what is precisely not beautiful, and not only this: it beautifies what is ugly *because it is ugly*, because even the ugly is seen as a necessary part of the beauty of the world. Paradoxically, this includes even the rejection of the ugly (“the accusers”): in order to embrace the world lovingly as it is one also has to include the attitudes that are directed *against* it. In itself, the world is horrible and utterly unjustifiable. If we justify it, we do so not because this condition could be changed in whatsoever way, but because we are overwhelmed by an artistic vision. To justify the world from an artistic point of view means to be aware that nothing

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<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche in fact never gives up the idea that art, and only art, can provide a justification of life, even once he has renounced the collective aspirations of his early work. “In art, man takes delight in himself as perfection,” one of the later works states (TI, Expeditions 9). “Art, and nothing than art, is the great enabler of life, the great seducer of life, the great stimulant of life” (1888, 17[3], KSA 13.521; art is “salvation” (1888, 14[17], KSA 13.226; see also 1888, 17[3], KSA 13.521) and a “counter-movement” against the nihilistic rejection of life (1888, 14[117], KSA 13.293; see also 14[119], KSA 13.296 and 14[170], KSA 13.356).

can be justified at all and that the only remaining way is to conceive of one's whole existence as part of a work of art.<sup>42</sup> The justification of the world is either absolute or no justification at all. This means that in order to justify life as art the individual must not distinguish himself from it. Life is justified "for me" if I find *myself* justified, even if I want to condemn and reject the world. "Justification" is no judgment either, let alone a moral one, but an experience. It presupposes that no separation is made between the justifying subject and the object that is justified. Even my rejection of the world is embraced as a part that belongs inseparably to it.<sup>43</sup>

## 5. Aesthetic Exceptionalism

To conclude, one last implication of Nietzsche's idea of justification has to be shown. The fact that the aesthetic justification of life in the later works appears in a more individual, solitary way does not come by chance. After all, what does it mean to justify existence through an experience of art? Aesthetic experience is by definition singular and transient. "Art is a state of exception," Nietzsche states; it is a state of mind much closer to an illness than to a regular mental disposition (1888, 14[170], KSA 13.356). We can call the reference to art as an extraordinary experience Nietzsche's aesthetic exceptionalism. This exceptionalism was already visible in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which emphasized not only how limited and transient the period was in which tragedy flourished in ancient Greece. The work made also abundantly clear that there was only one savior who was able to renew and restore the German culture, Richard Wagner. This already showed that the idea of an aesthetic *understanding* of life, insofar as it culminates in an aesthetic *experience*, is necessarily bound to a particular point of view. No

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester 1990, 224: "If existence can only be justified aesthetically, then ethical goals have no significance." See also Came, *The Aesthetic Justification of Existence*, 47, on the absence of criteria that justify life objectively.

<sup>43</sup> On this paradoxical structure, cf. Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 47.

general theory of the aesthetic value of life can be meaningful aside from an individual's actual capability to look aesthetically on life. But if this is so, then the wish for a higher type of human is necessarily conceived in a situation of deficiency and lack. The higher type is always only a possibility, an object of hope. The philosopher who describes the need for an aesthetic justification does not possess the means to achieve it all by himself, because philosophy, taken as such, *is no* aesthetic perspective on the world. The philosopher describes a perspective which cannot be his own, at least not insofar as he philosophizes. Philosophical theory, thus, is for Nietzsche transformed from a reflective attitude into the search for a specific, singular experience. It becomes a practice either of memory or hope; harboring the desire for a fusion of life and art that can only exist in exceptional and uncontrollable ways.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that no general theory of aesthetic experience is possible besides the actual, individual, and therefore exceptional experience of an aesthetic point of view explains many aspects in Nietzsche's work. Obviously, we should be aware not to exaggerate the exceptionality of aesthetic views or describe them as being completely inaccessible to any philosophical account. At the end, aesthetic experience *does exist*, and as such it can be made the point of departure for a philosophical analysis. However, such analysis always has to lead back to a specific experience that can be made. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, there could have been no

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<sup>44</sup> Nehamas' interpretation of Nietzsche famously came to the same conclusion. For the ideal that Nietzsche describes, no general definition can be given: "But just as there is no single type of great artist or artwork, there also is no type of life that is in itself to be commended or damned. Nietzsche cannot therefore have a general view of conduct that can apply to everyone and also be specific and interesting" (Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge 1985, 229). However, it is wrong to assume that the only way Nietzsche could reach "a perfect instance of his ideal character" (232) would be to make himself the example of this ideal. Although Nietzsche might have indeed "created himself" in his writings (233), such self-creation is not the only goal of the efforts he made. Nehamas' interpretation is wrong, first, in understanding perspectivism from a purely epistemological point of view. Nietzsche's concern lies not so much in the problem how knowledge is achieved (this problem is trivial), than in the actual process of experience. Perspectives have to be *lived*, and in being lived they can also be shared. Second, Nehamas is wrong in assuming that Nietzsche conceives of the world "as if it were a literary text" (3). Not only would it be much more appropriate to take music as artistic analogy for the understanding of Nietzsche's thought. More important is the fact that the literary model implies a solipsistic perspective on the world, because each text has only one author. Nietzsche, however, looks for an aesthetic experience that would allow for the creation of a community. He looks, in other words, for an experience other than his own.

reconstruction of the meaning of Greek tragedy without the experience that Wagner's music allowed Nietzsche to make—an experience which is indeed described as a very personal one.<sup>45</sup> The whole conception of the work relies on the possibility of sharing and repeating the ecstasy Nietzsche felt in listening to *Tristan and Isolde*. If this ecstasy is to be made the model for the understanding of all art, the reader has to be persuaded and lured into sharing the author's experience. *The Birth of Tragedy* is therefore in many parts less descriptive than persuasive; its exhortative style tries to invoke a new community of listeners. (This also means, by the way, that the presumed experience of Greek tragedy is first and foremost a very modern one. Critics did not fail to notice that.)<sup>46</sup>

However, in saying that it is well possible to have, and perhaps even share, an aesthetic experience, we presuppose that it is clear how such an experience feels. The idea of aesthetic experience is used as if it were a matter of fact. But this can hardly be the case, especially if the experience carries the exceptional character we described here. To see where things become in fact more complicated than they might seem, we only have to ask how one would know that one's worldview is indeed a happy, artistic illusion. Is there a difference between an aesthetic illusion as it emerges, for example, from the tragic worldview of the Greeks and an illusion that stems from the moral abnegation of life? At the end, both *are* illusions! And not only are both illusions, they also share the experience of the horrors and the negativity of life that is counter-balanced by their vision of the world. In fact, the only difference between them is, again, aesthetic. Those who are able to embrace the tragic character of life see pain as a stimulus for the

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<sup>45</sup> It requires, for example, a “truly aesthetic spectator” to “confirm” Nietzsche's particular experience of Wagner's musical drama (cf. BT 24). From a different, but closely related point of view one can say: “Nietzsche principally offers us not his values—though he claims them to be higher than our own—but his method of making values. He offers us himself as an example—perhaps the first ever—of how one may make one's values in knowledge of how values have been made (and so what they've really been for)” (Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 115).

<sup>46</sup> See Rudolf Fietz, *Medienphilosophie: Musik, Sprache und Schrift bei Friedrich Nietzsche*. Würzburg 1992, 59, for Nietzsche's specifically modern perspective on ancient tragedy.

creation of beauty, not as a reason to resort to a vision of the world which would allow them to minimize or even eradicate suffering. But such a distinction remains difficult to make because it is based on an inner experience of life for which no non-ambiguous criterion exists. Whether the “beauty” that is experienced is the quality of a purely aesthetic point of view or the beauty that results from a moral falsification of the world cannot be said without knowing the meaning of each particular case. Just as each work of art is unique, so is each aesthetic experience. An artistic vision of the world, based on its content alone, can be indistinguishable from a moral or religious view, and yet follow a purely aesthetic intent. At least there is nothing in Nietzsche’s work that would allow us to exclude this as a possibility.

The reason for this ambiguity is obvious: Nietzsche uses the idea of aesthetic experience in a twofold way, as experience that involves specific works of art or is at least based on some kind of artistic activity, *and* as an experience of life in its essential vitality. On such a fundamental level as the latter, all experience is aesthetic. To see this point, it is useful to turn to a passage from his later works. While for *The Birth of Tragedy* aesthetic and moral views represent two entirely different cultures, and two entirely different ways of living—the tragic and the Socratic one—the later works at times also emphasize their common root and see them as two different interpretations of the same experience of life:

Dionysius versus the ‘Crucified One’: there you have the opposition. It’s *not* a distinction regarding their martyrdom—just that this martyrdom has a different meaning. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, conditions torment destruction, the will to annihilation... / One divines that the problem here is that of the meaning of sufferings: whether a Christian meaning, a tragic



meaning... In the former case it's held to be the path to a blissful existence; in the latter, *existence* is held to be *blissful enough* to justify even monstrous suffering. (1888, 14[89], KSA 13. 266; Writings, 249f.)

For both worldviews the ordeals are necessarily the same, as well as the desire for a blissful life. The only difference lies in the way in which they interpret the relation between suffering and happiness; whether they see happiness as a consequence of suffering or concomitant to it. But in practice, do such subtleties really matter? Isn't it most important that one's suffering can be experienced as bliss, in whatsoever way? Given the general theory of the will to power according to which *all* life is interpretation no other points of view than artistic ones exist, even if not for all of them the world appears in an explicitly aesthetic way. It is therefore possible to say that the only difference lies between *explicitly* and *implicitly* artistic points of view, that is, between points of view that rejoice in the creativity of one's perspective on the world and points of view that require a moral purpose for every negative event and are so unknowingly, and perhaps even unwillingly, artistic.

But the situation is even more complicated than that. Not only is the distinction between explicitly and implicitly aesthetic experiences in itself aesthetic—because it depends entirely on the way meaning is expressed and understood—it is ultimately inaccessible even to those who make the respective experiences. The origin of both worldviews—*aesthetic* and *moral*—has to remain veiled. On the one hand, the tragic soul must not create an aesthetic world out of a certain purpose, that is, out of the purpose to overcome the unbearable negativity of life. The creation has to happen involuntarily, and the negativity has to be overcome simply because a more beautiful vision of life has emerged. On the other hand, the moral soul who resorts to the vision

of a better world must also not know that its vision is a mere illusion because otherwise it would not be able to believe in it. Hence, for both the tragic and the moral souls it is necessary *not* to ask for the origin of their vision. There can be no cognitive capacity that controls the production of fictions, at least not in a non-ambiguous sense. This means that even if one can distinguish the different views conceptually one cannot freely *choose* to have either an aesthetic or a moral point of view.

The example provided by *The Birth of Tragedy* illustrates this point. Socrates, Nietzsche explains, brings the end of tragedy about by interpreting the play not as an aesthetic vision but as a combination of actions whose purpose is to represent reality. His way of dealing with fictions is explicitly “inartistic” (*unkünstlerisch*) and destroys the specific receptivity that an aesthetic play requires in order to reach its effect.<sup>47</sup> The aesthetic vision, however, cannot defend itself because in order to defend itself it would have to fight the moral worldview on its own grounds; that is, it would have to be able to conduct a *moral* argument. Tragedy is destroyed by the way Socrates looks at it, and there is no way to prevent this destruction. The distinction between the two worldviews is not accessible from within, and to claim the full right of both views requires a third and separated point of view which is accessible only from a reflective stance.<sup>48</sup>

Again, it needs to be emphasized that despite all ambiguities aesthetic experience does exist for Nietzsche. Even if it has to happen involuntarily, and perhaps most often has to remain misunderstood, at least some experiences can become transparent and then serve as models for the understanding of other experiences that occur. That fact that Nietzsche’s theory is based on an aesthetic exceptionalism means first and foremost that no general conclusions should be

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<sup>47</sup> BT 12. Cf. also BT 14.

<sup>48</sup> In Nietzsche’s later works, a physiological explanation prevails that distinguishes worldviews based on whether they represent an “ascending” or “descending” form of life (TI, “Morality” 3-5). The problem, however, remains the same: one can describe these forms of life from a third point of view, but there is no criterion to distinguish them from within.

drawn which would determine such experience to occur *necessarily* in a certain way, that is, to be either always accessible or always inaccessible. Philosophy, for Nietzsche, is not only a practice of memory and hope, as we said before, but also a practice of listening, of savoring carefully what each singular experience means. Nietzsche draws the ultimate conclusion of his aesthetic empiricism by making clear that experience is a form of individualism, a thinking based on singular qualities and events.

## 6. Why Does Life Need a Justification at All?

The last remarks showed how close the artistic and moral worldviews really are, not only in their common aesthetic character but also in their shared relation to suffering. This allows us to mention one last important aspect in Nietzsche's thought. To do so we can start from the question why human beings ask for a justification of life. That life can actually call for a justification became sufficiently clear in our previous remarks. In the face of nature, human life is both painful and futile; nature constantly revokes any value given to it. It is not clear, however, why Nietzsche thinks that the *only* reaction to this condition is the justification of suffering. Could humans not also react in a different way? As we saw, Nietzsche's idea of justification cannot be understood in a traditional sense where suffering is given a higher—natural, moral, theological, etc.—purpose. The aesthetic justification entails nothing more than life's unlimited creativity, that is, nothing more than the painful process of life itself. And yet, whether Nietzsche is aware of this point or not, the concept of justification is by definition *moral*. Human beings need to be able to say that life is essentially *good*, not bad. Otherwise, what could "justification" mean? But if there is in fact a need to qualify life as good, then Nietzsche's idea of human existence, surprisingly enough, is based on some version of a moral anthropology.

As astonishing as it might seem, Nietzsche never denies this point. One only has to take all relevant passages seriously and, as far as possible, literally. The essay *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, can well be read as an account of a moral anthropology. Only a few passages can be quoted here:

For with the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous [...] but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*. (GM 1, 6)<sup>49</sup>

The process mentioned here, which is also called the “internalization” (*Verinnerlichung*) of human life (GM 2, 16),<sup>50</sup> is by no means the final goal of human evolution. Nietzsche obviously denies rationality the merit of being the ultimate realization of human potential. The human being rather “gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, [...] as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise” (GM 2, 16). But wherever this “bridge” may lead, it is clear that it starts from the capacity to develop an inner attitude toward life, that is, to reflect in one way or the other on oneself. And not only to reflect but to give actively an orientation to life: “Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it; he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering” (GM 3, 28). This means that asking for justification, strictly speaking, is not merely a “capacity” of human life, it is rather a necessity without which such a reflective, inwards-directed being could not exist.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. GM 1, 7: “Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spirit that the impotent have introduced into it.”

<sup>50</sup> See also the famous formula “to breed an animal *with the right to make promises*” (GM 2, 1).

From this point of view, we see again that artistic and moral worldviews have many traits in common. If it is true to say that according to the theory of will to power there is no life that is not artistic, then it is also true to say that according to Nietzsche's anthropology there is no human attitude that is not moral. Art grows out of the same disposition as morality; both stem from the fact that life urges us to ask for justification. But this conclusion should not be astonishing at all. As we saw, there is no non-ambiguous criterion that distinguishes the different worldviews, neither from outside nor from within. The only available criterion is aesthetic and refers to the way in which a specific interpretation of life is achieved—how personal, daring, or deep it can be. It is, after all, only a difference in the *interpretation of life* that distinguishes the worldviews, and not a separation between different types of human beings, as Nietzsche's physiological language often suggests. Obviously, differences in human nature do exist and not every individual can live up to every kind of interpretation. The interpretations of life are limited in the way all experiences are. But still, if every interpretation is a creative way of dealing with the challenges of human existence, then why should a moral interpretation not also be a “promise” of something else, like all other interpretations that humans give?<sup>51</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

At the end, we can come back to the point we started from, to Darwin. We now see that Nietzsche follows indeed the idea of evolution, only by conceiving of it in a more radical sense.

If life is the result of an evolutionary process, there is no reason why the course of its

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<sup>51</sup> It has been noted that the aesthetic justification cannot operate in the same way than a philosophical justification, by giving a reason for human suffering. Otherwise, it would not be different from Socratic rationalism (Randall Havas, Socratism and the question of aesthetic justification, in: Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, David Conway (eds.), Nietzsche, philosophy and the arts. Cambridge 1998, 92-127, here: 117). But although aesthetic justification does not actually *give* a reason—instead, it simply shows the beauty of a world—it still *responds* to a deep-felt need, and insofar gives at least an implicit reason.

development should not be open. Life works either for or against itself, but there is no neutral point at which it simply remains as it is.<sup>52</sup> Human beings can lose their artistic ability to create a world that can provide a justification for their life, and by doing so they can lose what is most genuine to them. Evolution, therefore, can take various directions; in a sense, evolution itself evolves. But precisely because life is no pre-determined and linear physical process, it has also the capacity to bear the fruit of a higher type. Every theory of life has to take exceptional perspectives into account, in the sense of particular and uncontrollable points of view emerging in and out of life itself. No theory of life should exclude the possibility of an aesthetic experience of life. On the other hand, every theory that does include such an experience also has to take into account that aesthetic experience comes in many guises, sometimes under the guise of its own opposite, the moral view on life. Philosophy, for Nietzsche, has to go all the way from theory to experience if it wants to capture the inner potential of life, and it has to acknowledge that for the particular aesthetic experience it relies on no non-ambiguous criterion exists. What counts as genuine experience cannot be said in general terms. Compared to Darwin, this also means that although Nietzsche embraces naturalism in conceiving of human life, and in this sense emphatically aligns with Darwin, his version of the history of nature still looks very “human.” Instead of a deterministic process stirred merely by the anonymous forces of natural selection, he looks at the creativity and aesthetic expressiveness of life, both in a general and human sense. A purely naturalistic point of view means for him to neutralize and disregard the individual and uncontrollable desire for artistic experience.

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<sup>52</sup> Some of Nietzsche’s formulations can be read this way: “The confidence in life is gone; life itself has become a problem. May it never be believed that one has thereby necessarily become a gloomy person, a moping owl! Even love to life is still possible, only one loves differently ... It is the love to a woman that causes us doubts...” (Nietzsche Contra Wagner [NW], Epilogue 1; translation M.S.). For similar formulations on life as a “problem”, see 1973, 29[154], KSA 7.696; Unpublished Writings, 259 (“life as problem”) / 1884, 26[156], KSA 11.190 (the “problem of the organic”) / 1885, 34[240], KSA 11.500 (book title: “*Das Problem ‘Mensch’*”) / BGE 36 (procreation and nourishment as “problem”) / BGE 244 (“the whole problem of ‘man’”).

In addition, what also distinguishes his understanding of life from Darwin's, and makes it likewise look more "human," is the fact that for Nietzsche human beings cannot *not* have a relation to their life, especially to their suffering. They experience life as bearing the need for a justification. Humans have to see life as invested with a goal, as allowing for an inherent teleology, even if it is only a negative one that mourns the absence of the aesthetic perspective on life that a higher type of human can achieve. Conceived in a purely physical and non-aesthetic sense, evolutionary biology remains a misunderstanding for humans; it suggests that life could be experienced as the mere fact of being alive. This way, humans would overlook that their first experience of life is suffering, and that they are in need of a perspective that gives suffering a meaning, if only an aesthetic one.

# The Seed of All Thought: Nietzsche's "The Uses and Disadvantages of History For Life"

**Barry Stephenson**

**Abstract:** In this essay I trace continuities in Nietzsche's thought, demonstrating that several of the key ideas associated with the mature Nietzsche are found in seed form in the early essay, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," one of the *Untimely Meditations*, written in the winter of 1873. A developmental approach to Nietzsche's work sets limits on postmodern approaches to reading Nietzsche. In his essay, Nietzsche argues that historiography must be evaluated on the basis of whether it serves life. I suggest that this criterion is the early version of what the late Nietzsche will describe as the imperative to "become what one is."

If this book [Genealogy of Morals] is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, 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 not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate (GM, Preface, § 8).

*Continuities.* If one takes the above epigraph seriously, plunging at random into Nietzsche's corpus is the wrong move indeed. Nietzsche's aphoristic style and not always clear organization seem to support a reading that dives in and out of his various works. But Nietzsche does claim continuity to his thought and work, suggesting that to understand him we ought to read him as he wished to be read, from beginning to end. My concern here then is with the early Nietzsche, specifically the second of his four *Untimely Meditations*, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (HL). Written almost two years after *The Birth of Tragedy*, HL is a far less



journalistic piece than the first “untimely meditation” on David Strauss, and develops an issue that Nietzsche had been intensely wrestling with at the time, namely, the “question of whether historical knowledge is a good or bad thing.”<sup>1</sup>

My aim is to demonstrate continuities in Nietzsche’s corpus. The central concerns and ideas commonly associated with Nietzsche’s mature thought—the death of God, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, the *übermensch*, the revaluation of values—these are each present in HL in seed form. A demonstration of the continuities between HL and Nietzsche’s later thought aids our understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche’s later works; moreover, a demonstration of these continuities refutes postmodern approaches to reading Nietzsche. A second, related aim is to zero-in on the seemingly simple phrase in the title of Nietzsche’s essay, ‘for Life.’ The evaluative criterion Nietzsche offers for judging historical studies in HL is the degree to which the historian “serves life,” and this evaluative standard becomes a leitmotif running through Nietzsche’s works. It is not, however, at all obvious what Nietzsche means by “for life.” I shall argue that Nietzsche’s demand in HL that history serve life prefigures and is continuous with Nietzsche’s imperative in his later works (such as the *Gay Science* and *Ecce Homo*) that “One Becomes What One Is.”

*History and Identity*. Nietzsche’s meditation on the *Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* is concerned with our relationship to the past. Nietzsche is clearly on the attack in this essay, and his target is historicism, the pride and quintessence of nineteenth-century German intellectual life and thought. Historical studies in Nietzsche’s day were rooted in a zeal for the discovery of truth (equated with what “really” happened), coupled with a strong distaste for subjectivity. A central

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<sup>1</sup> Young, Julian. *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 175.

claim of historicism was that the nature or essence of an individual, a nation, or a culture should be embodied in—or identified with—its history; hence the view that the identity of cultural phenomena can only be revealed through a careful, detailed historical contextualization. In HL, Nietzsche argues against this historicist tradition of locating a sense of individual and cultural identity in the gaze into the mirror of the past. Anchoring ourselves in the past does not provide us with a foundation for a healthy life; on the contrary, Nietzsche wants to argue, the purely historical glance robs us of a life-affirming relationship to the world. “We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life: for it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate—a phenomenon we are forced to acknowledge, painful though it may be, in the face of striking symptoms of our age” (HL, Foreword). For Nietzsche, the search for a life-enhancing identity is not a question of submitting to the enclosing horizon of history, but rather of transcending this historical horizon by creating horizons of one’s own. Nietzsche thus distinguishes three attitudes (or “senses”) toward the past—the *historical*, the *unhistorical*, and the *suprahistorical*—along with three modes of conducting historical study—the *monumental*, the *antiquarian*, and the *critical*. A judicious balance between these attitudes and modes will set one in the proper relation to history, and history will thereby serve life, rather than strangulate it.

The historical sense is an awareness of the past as a formative influence on identity and culture. The historical is necessary for life; if we failed to remember the past we would be paralyzed and would have to constantly relearn the simplest of tasks and endlessly revisit painful mistakes. But Nietzsche sees “an excess of history” as problematic; preoccupation with historical research limits creative potential and the ability to make decisions. What is needed is the “ability to forget,” which is what Nietzsche means by the “unhistorical.” If we could not forget the past,

we would be forever incapacitated to deal with present circumstances. We need to learn “to forget at the right time” and to “remember at the right time.” Nietzsche emphasizes that both “the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people, and of a culture” (§1). The suprahistorical, as I argue below, is an early version of the will to power, an attempt to mediate the historical and unhistorical senses.

The three kinds (or modes) of historical study that Nietzsche delineates are the *monumental*, the *antiquarian* and the *critical*. Monumental history is basically concerned with the heroes of the past, the great figures who stand out and above their contemporaries and thus provide us with inspiration and the comfort and exhilaration of looking at greatness incarnate. The danger here is that the demand for truth is often sacrificed, and monumental history risks becoming “free poetic invention.” Antiquarian history “preserves and reveres” the past (§2). The past, owing to its age and grandeur, is worthy of our respect, even veneration. But antiquarian history, which tends toward the unhistorical, loses objectivity. Critical history approaches objective study, but with an eye to critiquing and condemning the stupidities, injustices, and errors of the past. Insofar as critical history tend to identify with the historical sense, an over valuation of its importance blocks the creative use of the past for the purpose of life in the present. Nietzsche speaks of the “genuine historian,” whose task is to judiciously balance the historical with the unhistorical and the three modes of doing history.

Nietzsche, contrary to some opinion, does not argue that the past is unimportant. Indeed, Nietzsche wants to impress upon us that the past is of the utmost importance. In *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche argues that, “Direct self-observation is not sufficient for us to know ourselves: we require history, for the past continues to float in us in a hundred waves” (HH II, §223). But this is not proof for Gianni Vattimo’s claim that Nietzsche “rediscovered” the value of

historicism in his later writings. Vattimo argues that in *Human All Too Human* (and other sections in Nietzsche's mature writings) Nietzsche inverses his use of the image of Heraclitus' ever flowing river as found in HL. In HL "Nietzsche uses the image of the river... to show the paralyzing effect of the excess of historical knowledge upon man's creativity." In *Human All To Human*, continues Vattimo, Nietzsche "says that, because of the essentially historical constitution of our being, if we want to plunge into its most peculiar and personal essence, we have to accept that we can never plunge into the same river twice. To know ourselves... [means] to become conscious of the potentially infinite past which constitutes our individuality."<sup>2</sup> But Vattimo fails to realize that with Nietzsche, it is not a question of one or the other but rather of *both-and*.

The dialectical style of Nietzsche's thought necessitates taking a variety of (at times) potentially contradictory perspectives. Thus we can read in *Gay Science* (written after *Human All Too Human*) that, "Whatever in nature and in history is of my own kind, speaks to me, spurs me on, and comforts me, the rest I do not hear or forget right away. We are always only in our own company" (GS §166). Similarly, in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes, "All historians speak of things which have never existed except in imagination" (D §307). Such statements can hardly be confused with the assumptions of classical historicism; nor do they fit with the idea of a "rediscovery" of historicism, unless we assume that after "rediscovering" history, in HH Nietzsche then (again) promptly forgets it. We would do better to emphasize a dialectical imperative at work, by which I do not mean a three-step thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but

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<sup>2</sup> Vattimo, Gianni. "Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics." In *Nietzsche As Affirmative Thinker*, 60-69, edited by Yirmiahu Yovel. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1986, p. 64.

rather Nietzsche's relentless questioning of all assumptions, along with his refusal to side with one pole of a set of contraries; tension is what gives Nietzsche's thought its torque.<sup>3</sup>

When condemning the historical sense from the vantage point of the unhistorical or the suprahistorical, Nietzsche does so in the belief that only the past can liberate us from the past. Why? Because an undomesticated history can show us how past individuals transcended their own horizons. Thus in any good history there is always an element of construction that does not oppose truth, but is its condition.

*Will to Power.* The phrase "will to power" is first used by Nietzsche in notes of the late 1870s,<sup>4</sup> but the notion is lurking in Nietzsche's discussion of the "suprahistorical" in HL. The suprahistorical sense is for Nietzsche something close to the recognition of a universal truth, namely, that history is nothing but the flux and flow of meaningless, random, and valueless events. As Nietzsche mercilessly puts it, the "suprahistorical man" is one "who does not envisage salvation in the process but for whom the world is finished in every single moment and its end attained. What could ten new years teach that the past could not teach?" (HL §1). History may seemingly teach us that there exists incredible variety across cultures and across time; but this variety belies a truth—that existence is everywhere the same, in so far as the variety of styles and approaches to life demonstrates there is no intrinsic meaning or significance.

Nietzsche's will to power has often been conceived as a basic psychological drive, part of the attempt to locate tensions and dualities in a single, fundamental psychological factor. Perhaps

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<sup>3</sup> This is a point made by Walter Kaufmann. "Nietzsche is, like Plato, not a system-thinker but a problem thinker... the most striking character of 'dialectical' thinking from Socrates to Hegel and Nietzsche... is a search for hidden presuppositions rather than a quest for solution... typically, the problem is not solved but 'outgrown'" (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, p.82). Similarly, Peter Berkowitz writes of the "conflict or contest of extremes in the very foundation of Nietzsche's thought" (*The Ethics of an Immoralist*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p.262).

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 179.

the notion has been given more attention that it deserves, given its place in Nietzsche's corpus as a whole, coupled with Nietzsche's abandonment of *The Will to Power*, once he recognized the idea as being rooted in the "will to a system," an impulse that Nietzsche ultimately rejects. It is possible, however, to conceive the notion of a "will to power" as a response to the nauseating wisdom that accompanies the suprahistorical sense. George Grant notes that in "his twenties Nietzsche saw the crisis with which the conception of time as history presented men. The great writings of his maturity were his attempt to overcome it." The nature of Nietzsche's crisis concludes Grant, is that "we cannot live in a horizon when we know it to be one."<sup>5</sup> But neither can we live without horizons: "a living thing can become healthy, strong, and fertile only when bounded by a horizon" (HL §1). This tension is the burden that Nietzsche bore throughout his adult life, and it goes some way to helping us understand the seeming contradictions that fill Nietzsche's work. Perhaps what we value most in Nietzsche is not his resolution of tensions and contradictions but his uncompromising and unrelenting struggle with them. Faced with the knowledge that all is flux, that there is no pattern or meaning in history, and that the horizons of each historical period are not part of an evolutionary development but the products of human will and creation, the genuine historian will creatively use the past for the needs of the present. The historical sense, writes Nietzsche, "lives in a profound antagonism towards the eternalizing powers of art and religion, for it hates forgetting." From the vantage point of the suprahistorical we see the nauseating meaninglessness in the flux of history; this vision reveals to us the necessity of eternalizing powers. The suprahistorical ultimately "lead[s] the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, toward art and religion" (HL §10). Nietzsche would later define "will to power" in precisely such

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<sup>5</sup> George Grant. *Time as History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, pp.40-41.

terms: “To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power” (WP §617). Nietzsche’s genuine historian is a type who practices the supreme will to power.

*Death of God.* In the parable of the madman in the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche speaks of the death of God as the loss of horizons:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried; “I will tell you. We have killed him--you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?” (GS §125).

In HL, Nietzsche associates the loss of horizons with the historical sense and the practice of critical history. The historical sense and critical history, given that they shine the light of objectivity on the shady doings of monumental and antiquarian history, are partners in the death of God.

For Nietzsche, the hypertrophy of the historical sense in his day was a contributing factor to the rise of decadence and nihilism. In one of the more prophetic passages of HL, Nietzsche claims that

If the doctrine of sovereign Becoming, of the fluidity of all... species, of the lack of cardinal distinction between man and animal... are hurled into the people for another generation... then nobody should be surprised when... brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers... will appear on the arena of the future (HL §9).

This is a view Nietzsche never relinquishes; in *Daybreak* he makes the bold claim that “the great wars of the present age are the effects of the study of history” (D §180). The “historically cultivated man,” says Nietzsche, “... [is] swimming and drowning in a sea of becoming” (HL §9). To the historical sense, all is becoming, there is no being, and hence there is no God, for whatever God is, he is surely Being.

Implicit in Nietzsche’s notion of the death of God is that there is no longer a standard for life’s governance. Such a conclusion does not, however, lead Nietzsche to a radical relativism. Nietzsche’s controversial move in HL is to claim that historians need to balance the historical with the unhistorical, the latter defined as “the art and power of forgetting and of enclosing oneself within a bounded horizon” (HL §10). One is tempted to say that genuine historian’s task is something akin to resurrecting God. But not any horizon will do; not any God will do. Nietzsche’s evaluative standard is that this new horizon must serve life, and this end demands certain goods and values as effective means.

*Eternal Recurrence.* Whatever else Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal recurrence entails, it can surely be understood as a kind of thought experiment, to be judged by its effects.

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 known 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” (GS §341).



Nietzsche then asks how we would respond to such a demon. Would we gnash our teeth, or would we let the thought take possession of us, and in doing so, let it change us? Do the whispers of this demon promote life? Does it free us from resentment and a suffocating, nihilistic pessimism? Nietzsche's answer is a resounding 'Yes.'

The notion of eternal recurrence is found in HL in the context of Nietzsche's discussion of "monumental" history and the "suprahistorical" sense. The value of "the monumentalistic conception of the past [is that one] learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and thus may be possible again." But "that which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellations of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth" (HL §2). This is, of course, a different use of eternal recurrence than that found in Nietzsche's parable of the demon. Imagining oneself actually as Caesar or Napoleon demands a precise recurrence of conditions and events, something that will never happen. Thus, argues Nietzsche, monumental history works by "making what is dissimilar look similar; it will always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations so as to exhibit the effects monumentally, that is to say as something exemplary and worthy of imitation" (HL §2). Still, this passage shows that Nietzsche was playing with the idea of the eternal recurrence of events early in his career, and he would define his own version of it over against the Pythagorean understanding.

Turning to Nietzsche's comments on the suprahistorical, we detect a much closer parallel to his later usage of eternal recurrence:

We may use the word “suprahistorical” because the viewer from this vantage point could no longer feel any temptation to go on living or to take part in history... If you ask your acquaintances if they would like to relive the past ten or twenty years, you will easily discover which of them is prepared for this suprahistorical standpoint... What could ten more years teach that the past ten were unable to teach? (HL §1).

The suprahistorical standpoint, in which all is flux, and the demon’s suggestion of eternal recurrence, in which everything is played over again in meticulous detail, are similar insofar as they are tests of one’s power. Both notions could be viewed as generative of nihilism. But Nietzsche sees the suprahistorical vantage point and the notion of eternal recurrence as conditions that must be overcome through the exertion of one’s will.

Beyond similarity of function, the eternal recurrence is clearly a later version of the suprahistorical. In HL, Nietzsche firmly rejects the notion that history involves the unfolding of a teleological process, and he looks forward to the day when “one will prudently refrain from all constructions of the world-process.” The idea of eternal recurrence also undercuts the notion that humanity is heading somewhere. Indeed, Nietzsche wants us to turn our eyes away from the mass of humanity toward the great individual. Such individuals “do not carry forward any kind of process... [rather] one giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time” (HL §10). A life of eternal recurrence is nothing less than a desert of time.

*The Revaluation.* In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche speaks of the model philosopher as “applying the knife vivisectionally to the very virtues of their time” (BGE §212). A similar image is found in *Human All Too Human* when Nietzsche claims that humanity can no longer be

spared the gruesome sight of the psychological dissecting table and its knives and forceps (HH §10). Nietzsche is not concerned with rationalizing existing ethics; he wants to investigate the origin and nature of morality as such. Nietzsche's "revaluation of values," argues Kaufmann, "does not mean a table of virtues, nor an attempt to give us such a table... the revaluation means a war against accepted valuations, not the creations of new ones."<sup>6</sup> This "war" was well underway in HL. Speaking of the practice of critical history, Nietzsche argues that "every past is worthy to be condemned" (HL §3). Critical history attacks, without mercy, the violence, errors, and accidents of the past. Though Nietzsche champions in HL the genuine historian as one who creatively uses history for the purposes of the present, he or she abandons neither the critical study of history, nor the condemnation of those values that do not serve life.

*Übermensch*. Nietzsche's writings are filled with a variety of ideal types: the philosopher of the future, the free spirit, the übermensch, Zarathustra. The genuine historian of HL is a forerunner of these later types. I have said that Nietzsche exposes his readers to the tension of not being able to live in a horizon when we are conscious of a horizon, and yet not being able to live without a horizon. Each of Nietzsche's ideal types struggles with this crisis. In *Zarathustra* this crisis is formulated in images of ropes, bridges, and an abyss: "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping" (Z §4).

This imagery is further developed in the story of the tight-rope-walker who falls to his death (Z §6). To walk the rope strung over the abyss, there must be tension in the rope. Such tension is thoroughly embedded in the concepts presented in HL. Nietzsche calls for a judicious balance between the three modes of history (monumental, antiquarian, and critical) and between

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<sup>6</sup> Kaufmann, pp. 110-111.

the three historical senses (historical, unhistorical, and suprahistorical). To reject or limit any of these modes and attitudes is to kill the necessary tension required in using history for life. The theme of human excellence is never far from Nietzsche's pen. In HL Nietzsche urges, "ask yourself why you, the individual exist... try for once to justify your existence... by setting before yourself an aim, a goal, a 'to this end', an exalted and noble 'to this end'. Perish in pursuit of this and only this..." (HL §9). Nietzsche never wavers from urging his readers to a higher state of being, to strive after "exalted" and "noble" ends. Nietzsche, in his third meditation on Schopenhauer, states "your true self does not lie deeply concealed within you but immeasurably high above you (SE §1). In HL, Nietzsche claims the "goal of humanity cannot lie in the end, but only in its highest specimens" (HL §9). Such remarks are important for understanding the development of Nietzsche's conception of the *übermensch* as a higher form of humanity.<sup>7</sup>

*For Life.* The standard of evaluation introduced in HL is that history serve life:

Is life to dominate knowledge and science, or is knowledge to dominate life? Which of these two forces is higher and more decisive? There can be no doubt: life is the higher, dominating force, for knowledge which annihilated life would have annihilated itself with it (HL §10).

This same standard is found repeatedly in Nietzsche's work. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche notes that

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<sup>7</sup> Leslie Thiele has argued the "underlying theme of all four [*Untimely Meditations*] is the desirability of creating a heroic culture... [a life] spent creating and maintaining culture, which is defined as the favorable environment for the propagation and maintenance of great men" (*Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 14).

Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for a certain type of life.” The judgments a particular philosophy produces may be false, but “the falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment.... The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating (BGE §3-4).

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes

every healthy morality [is] dominated by an instinct of life; some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of ‘shalt’ and ‘shalt not’... *Anti-natural* morality--that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and reached--turns, conversely, against the instincts of life: it is condemnation of these instincts. Life has come to an end where the ‘kingdom of God’ begins” (TI V, §4).

That history, philosophy, and morality serve life is crucial to Nietzsche’s ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. History, philosophy, and morality are each means to an end. When taken as an end in themselves, as standards for judging ideas and action, there is an inversion of means and ends. Thus Nietzsche offers a means-end distinction on the basis of which we can rank goods, values, and virtues. The idea implicit in HL is that if there is one goal that all other goods serve, then that goal can be taken as an evaluative standard. Nietzsche does not prove this notion, but he does take it as an underlying assumption on which to base his arguments: things become good or bad in relation to whether they serve life.

Of course this formulation begs the question, what does Nietzsche mean by “for life”? At first glance, the attempt to answer this question leads to an answer of simple survival: “Knowledge presupposes life and thus has in the preservation of life the same interest as any creature has in its own continued existence” (HL §10). This statement could lead one to conclude that staying alive is preferable to justice, honesty, integrity and the pursuit of truth. But Nietzsche does not endorse nor try to prove such a conclusion. By taking “life” as an evaluative standard, Nietzsche invokes a endlessly ambiguous notion, setting himself a problem that would be explored and returned to time and again in his later works.

To better understand what Nietzsche has in mind by “for life” we would do well to distinguish between flourishing and excellence on the one hand, and simple existence and survival on the other. Nietzsche holds that there exists a fundamental psychological/spiritual drive to actualize one’s power, though for most individuals this drive is usurped by the drive to conform. This actualizing of one’s power is often spoken of by Nietzsche in terms of ‘becoming who you are.’ “What does your conscience say?—‘You shall become the person you are’” (GS §270).<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche derived this motto from Pindar, and it fills his later works. That which serves life can be taken as that which serves self-becoming. And the drive to actualize one’s potential may conflict with the drive to survive. Self-preservation is only one aspect of the will to power<sup>9</sup> and it may be overridden by higher demands.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> According to Walter Kaufmann, “Perhaps there is no more basic sentence of Nietzsche’s philosophy in all his writings than this sentence” (p.149).

<sup>9</sup> “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength--life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results” (BGE 13).

<sup>10</sup> “The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, or a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation” (GS 349).

Peter Berkowitz notes that Nietzsche's thought is "constituted by a pervasive and unresolved tension between his fundamental assumption that morality is made or willed by human beings and his unyielding conviction that there is a knowable and binding rank order of desires, souls and forms of life."<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's conception of the will to power is similarly rooted in a foundational tension: if all knowledge and understanding of the world are the product of the will to power, then so too is Nietzsche's will to power a creation of his will to power, a logical predicament that admits to an assertion being a fiction. Such tensions in Nietzsche's thought are readily apparent in HL. Nietzsche is clearly aware that all historical study involves subjectivity, yet he grounds his critique of the historical sense in the naturalistic notion that history must serve life. Nature and convention in Nietzsche's thought form a potential difference that generates energy, heat and current. In HL Nietzsche ultimately sides with a naturalistic grounding of his critique of historicism. History "for life" may ultimately be a nebulous and utterly subjective creation of Nietzsche's own will to power; but that is not how Nietzsche understands it—Nietzsche is not content with such a lazy way out of the contradictions inherent in his thought. For Nietzsche knowledge and truth are both made up and discovered. Insofar as they are discovered, we can say that there exists a set of human needs—physiological, psychological, and metaphysical—the absence of which leads to a degeneration and decline of life. Beauty, for example, may not be in the eye of the beholder, differing vastly from one individual to another, but rather a function of human interest. The task Nietzsche sets for himself in HL is that of elaborating and defining the set of human needs and goods that will ultimately serve life; that is, Nietzsche sets for himself the task of living inside of the tensions and contractions between subjective willing and objective knowing. The problem Nietzsche identifies in HL (the tension in historical study between historicism and subjectivism) is also the solution to the problem, since

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<sup>11</sup> Berkowitz, p. 262.

Nietzsche understands the tension as constitutive of human being in the world. The “suprahistorical” position, coupled with the “critical,” constitutes Nietzsche’s attempt to mediate the contradictions of two seemingly opposed options. *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* renders palpable Nietzsche’s struggle to navigate between the notions of an objective historical truth (however short we may come in realizing it) and a subjective play of appearances, rooted in an evaluative standard of serving “life.”

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## Nietzsche and La Rochefoucauld:

### The Art of Concise and Polemical Writing

Yunus Tuncel

#### Abstract

The influence of French writers of aphorism on Nietzsche is present explicitly and implicitly in his works, especially starting with *Human, All Too Human*. It was during his university years in the mid to late 1860s when Nietzsche started reading the French aphorists including LaRouchefoucauld, La Bruyere, Vauvenargues, and Chamfort; according to Donnellan he discovered them when he was reading Schopenhauer. A few years later Nietzsche, his friend Paul Ree, and others immersed themselves in reading aphorisms at Meysenbug's house in Sorrento during Nietzsche's stay there from October 1876 to May 1877 (confirm dates). In this short paper, I will explore specifically LaRochefoucauld and his influence on Nietzsche's writing in the following areas: the nature of aphoristic genre, poetic techniques such as pun, polemics, and sarcasm, and insightfulness or psychological observation, to use Nietzsche's phrase. From *Human, All Too Human* (1877) until *Twilight of Idols* (1888) Nietzsche wrote and published more than 2000 aphorisms, as he perfected the art of pithy expression, many of which are full of insights and deserve special attention and careful exegesis. This paper will present ideas on reading these aphorisms, as informed by La Rochefoucauld's techniques and literary style.

*As the stamp of great minds is to suggest much in few words, so, contrariwise, little minds have the gift of talking a great deal and saying nothing.*

La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims* 142

Nietzsche spent six months in Sorrento, Italy, from October 1876 to May 1877 at the house of Malwida von Meysenbug where a group of free spirits—this is what they considered themselves to be—spent time reading, discussing, and writing. In addition to the hostess, Meysenbug, and Nietzsche, Nietzsche’s friend Paul Ree, and Albert Brenner also attended. Their readings included many French writers, including La Rochefoucauld, and Nietzsche starts writing his first book of aphorisms, *Human, All Too Human*, in this time period, a book written for free spirits. The significant place of La Rochefoucauld in Nietzsche’s style is not only due to his significance in French letters, but also because he was one of the first modern aphorists Nietzsche closely read and studied. Nietzsche recognizes LaRochefoucauld’s place in history in the first aphorisms of Chapter 2 of *Human, All Too Human*, as he refers to him and other French writers as “masters of psychical examination” (HAH, Aphorism 36, 32) and does not refrain from mentioning his friend, Paul Ree, among the company of masters, though not by his name. In what follows below, I will investigate LaRochefoucauld’s influence on Nietzsche’s aphoristic style—a bigger project would have included other aphorists such as La Bruyere, Vauvenargues, Chamfort, Lichtenberg, and Schopenhauer—and explore their relationship in the following aspects of this art of concise writing: psychological observation (or “psychical examination”); literary devices used such as puns, anaphora, alliteration, and accumulation, and polemic.

## **I. Psychological Observations**

Aphoristic literature offers many insights about the human condition. Relying on this experience and insightfulness, the aphorist experiments with language and pushes its limits beyond what is effable. The list of human conditions is endless; in my research and teaching I

usually focus on insights on human emotion among the aphorists. For this paper, I have chosen self-love and pity.

La Rochefoucauld's book opens with his reflections on self-love, *amour-propre*, a phrase that is difficult to translate into English. Although it does have the connotation of love of one's own self, it also connotes being proper in the same of having esteem or pride. In the first edition of his book published in 1665, La Rochefoucauld writes a lengthy aphorism on self-love, more than two pages, as he reveals its hidden layers; the English edition that is often used is based on the edition from 1678. In this edition La Rochefoucauld exposes this underlying "self-centeredness" or narcissism in all things that are human, which usually lies hidden (Aphorisms 2, 3, 4, 41, 81 et al) and ties with such things as self-interest. Even in acts of altruism and sacrifice, La Rochefoucauld detects self-love; the altruist, for instance, pretends not to have any interest. But for La Rochefoucauld this is only a pretense. "Self-love is subtler than the subtlest man of the world." (Aphorism 4). Even pretension of modesty and humility, common among the pious, is a sign of self-love and self-interest. "Self-interest speaks all manner of tongues and plays all manner of parts, even that of disinterestedness." (Aphorism 39).

The idea that we are almost always interested and altruism is only a posture of the weak to exercise power in an indirect way is a common theme in Nietzsche. In the last few aphorisms of *Daybreak* Book III, Nietzsche exposes the workings of altruism and the assumptions of "unegoistic action." For one thing, there is no such thing as "unegoistic" for Nietzsche. Altruism is either a misunderstanding of 'love' or care, or an absence of love: "*Cause of 'altruism'.*—Men have on the whole spoken of love with such emphasis and so idolized it *because they have had little of it* and have never been allowed to eat their fill of this food:..." (D, Aphorism 147). Even love itself is not bereft of the lover's interest, which manifests itself in different forms. While

being ready to die for the beloved, the lover often ensnares the beloved within the scheme of control. Nietzsche observes this aspect of love in Aphorism 14 of *The Gay Science*. "...indeed, that this love has furnished the concept of love as the opposite of egoism while it actually may be the most ingenuous expression of egoism." I cannot discuss it at length here, but Aphorism 21 of GS is Nietzsche's exposition of altruism and its problems.

Another issue I would like to discuss is pity. There are not many maxims La Rochefoucauld wrote on pity. One that I found is Maxim 264 where he writes: "Pity is often feeling our own sufferings in those of others, a shrewd precaution against misfortunes that may befall us..." He does, however, speak of pity in his self-portrait, which piqued Nietzsche's interest. There La Rochefoucauld asserts that pity should have no place in a noble soul, because it weakens the heart (*Maxims* 28). Here are the other points he makes there: a) he is not touched by pity; b) he would show compassion<sup>1</sup> and comfort people in affliction; c) pity can counteract misery and the stupidity it brings with it; d) one can show pity, but should not have it oneself (I think he means not harbor it for longer than needed). Nietzsche's reflection on pity starts, in or around HAH Aphorism 50-- there is only one aphorism on the subject just before this one, namely Aphorism 46--with a response to this passage from La Rochefoucauld and pity and the related feelings<sup>2</sup> become central to Zarathustra's teaching. Nietzsche accepts La Rochefoucauld's conclusions on pity, but digs deeper and departs from his remarks on the stupidity of people (this may be an aristocratic bias on La Rochefoucauld's part). Nietzsche adds that those who invoke pity want to inflict suffering on others. What they possess is "the power to hurt;" in this way they feel superior. "In this feeling of superiority of which the manifestation of pity makes him

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<sup>1</sup> French, like English has two related words, pity and compassion, with their roots in Latin.

<sup>2</sup> The term Nietzsche uses for pity and related feelings is *Mitleid*. This word has been translated as 'pity', 'compassion' or 'sympathy,' which can be misleading to the English reader who does not know German. *Mitleiden*, in the verb form, means to suffer with; ultimately, Nietzsche is examining and questioning the way we relate to our own and others' sufferings.

conscious, the unfortunate man gains a sort of pleasure...The thirst for pity is thus a thirst for self-enjoyment, and that at the expense of one's fellow men..." (Nietzsche 39) These passages are not only Nietzsche's first insightful observations on pity, but also the beginnings of his philosophy of power. Let's read a little further from the same aphorism to see how he departs from La Rochefoucauld: "...it displays man in the whole ruthlessness of his own dear self: but not precisely in his 'stupidity', as La Rochefoucauld thinks..." Human beings are ruthless as much as they are social and will make their ruthlessness felt at the first opportunity they have; it is their power scheme. To call this stupidity is naïve and misses other layers in human relations. And finally Nietzsche asks in the spirit of a good psychological observer: "But will there be many honest men prepared to admit that causing pain gives pleasure?"

## **II. Literary Devices**

Like poets and other masters of the word, aphorists use a variety of literary techniques. I can only discuss a few of them here in the works of LaRochefoucauld and Nietzsche. In order to show how these literary techniques work and how LaRochefoucauld use them in similar, or sometimes different, ways, sometimes I have to include the original texts. Clearly, we need to keep in mind that French and German belong to different linguistic groups under the overarching Indo-European language family and have their own limitations and powers of expression. The following are the literary techniques I included in this paper: contrast, analogy, expression of the extraordinary, expression of the adjacent, movement among adjacent states, and the hyperbolic expression.

*Contrast.* Contrast of extremes or what will not be usually thought as opposites is presented in a variety of ways. Opposites are sometimes channeled into a single concept as in M 185: “Evil has its heroes as well as good.” Here the evil and the good are directed into the idea of ‘hero.’ This channeling of opposites may not always be clear as in “Hypocrisy is a tribute vice pays virtue.” (Maxims 218); this is not to suggest that clarity is a goal for the aphorist. Nonetheless, we are to make some sense of what is written. Here is the original: “L’hypocrisie est un hommage que le vice rend a la vertu.” (*Maxims* 56) A literal translation of this maxim would run like this: “Hypocrisy is an homage that vice renders virtue.” Through hypocrisy LaRocheffoucauld shows the paradoxical relationship between the opposites of vice and virtue. Sometimes the contrast is indirect: “Everybody complains of his memory, but nobody of his judgment.” (Maxim 89). Although memory and judgment are not opposites, the opposition lies in our relationship to them; in this maxim there is also an opposition between ‘everybody’ and ‘nobody.’

Nietzsche’ use of contrast is not dissimilar to that of LaRocheffoucauld. Let’s start with a direct contrast: “*Love and hatred.* – Love and hatred are not blind but dazzled by the fire they themselves bear with them.” (HAH 566). Two opposing qualities of love and hatred are brought together under the same theme of fire. Another maxim brings forth two oppositions in relation to truth: “*Enemies of truth.* – Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.” (HAH 483) We have two inter-lacing oppositions here, conviction vs. truth and truth vs. lie.

*Analogy.* Common to many philosophical texts, analogy is used in many aphorisms of LaRocheffoucauld and Nietzsche, but authors use analogies in their unique ways. Here is one from La Rocheffoucauld: “Simple grace is to the body what common sense is to the mind.” (Maxim 67). One sense I make of this maxim is that you either have it or not; neither grace nor common

sense is something that one develops but rather something that one has. I see why ‘common sense’ is associated with the mind, but I do not see why grace is with the body. I brought this maxim here, but it is one of those maxims I need to reflect on further. Nonetheless, it is a good example for analogy.

*Expression of the extraordinary.* Saying the unusual and the extraordinary is not a characteristic of the aphorist only, but the aphorist does it in a compact way. The impact on the reader can vary from shock to surprise or a pessimistic mood. This is exactly what the aphorist would like to induce in the reader. Here is one from La Rochefoucauld: “At times we are as different from ourselves as we are from others.” (Maxim 135) What is ordinary is that we see ourselves as one being and always the same; this is how everyday life functions, especially in our age. To say that we see our own selves differently would be labeled as a mental disorder, but it is true; it is *extraordinary* and true.

*Expression of the adjacent.* La Rochefoucauld demonstrates not only the contrasting states of character but also those that are adjacent, those that somehow overlap with one another. One example for this is in Maxim 281 where he shows the adjacent relationship between pride and envy: “Pride, which makes us so envious, also helps to keep envy within bounds.” (74). Pride works in both directions in relation to envy because of their proximity; on the one hand, it is our pride that makes us envious of other things, goods or goals; our pride says you can attain them. On the other hand, it is also our pride that sets a limit to what we can achieve. Our pride does not want loss and defeat; therefore, it will set a limit to what we seek propelled by potential envy. But pride already preempts any attempt on the part of envy before it even pops up its head. It is not as clear-cut as I present as to which feelings are adjacent to each other and which ones are not. For one thing, their proximity can be determined in many different ways. For Nietzsche,



for instance, the feelings of revenge—specifically, mediated revenge—, reactivity, and *ressentiment* are associated feelings (GM I).

*Movement (or direction) between adjacent states and traits of character.* Here it is not so much the causality of character that is at stake as the mobile relationship between character traits. In other words, what character trait may lead to what? This is expressed in Maxim 490: “Love often leads on to ambition, but seldom does one return from ambition to love.” The direction the character moves is from love to ambition.

*Exaggeration or the hyperbole.* Certain points are inflated for effect and for rhetorical persuasion. This can be seen in many aphorisms where such phrases as ‘all’, ‘everyone,’ ‘nothing,’ ‘no one,’ ‘seldom,’ or ‘always’ are used or where comparatives or superlatives appear. Many of what is expressed does not apply to everyone, but nonetheless their insightfulness cannot be easily denied. In a series of maxims from 143 to 150 on praising—this technique is often called accumulation—La Rochefoucauld exposes this human trait; here is one of them: “We seldom praise except to get praise back.” (Maxim 146). What is your immediate reaction to this one? How true? Or, how false? In any case, it can be true for some in certain situations, but not for everyone and in every case. The hyperbole is needed to get the reader’s attention, to provoke the reader and thereby to produce a strong response. It is not an invitation to take sides, but rather to thinking about one’s own self and human affairs in general.

### **III. Polemical**

*Rebelliousness.* A tendency to oppose common opinions and canonical ideas runs through La Rochefoucauld’s text as he exposes why and how they are problematic. We see this, for

instance, in his reflections on a variety of feelings that many consider acceptable such as pity (A 264) and jealousy (A 503) and his critique of the supremacy of the mind over the heart, an insightful, but not a systematic, critique of modern rationalism in its apex. Nietzsche's persistent critique of Christianity and European value-system of the modern age is a proof of his rebellious spirit. Clearly, there is a vast gap between the two spirits, which can be explained based on who they are and their historic context. La Rochefcaould is close to the beginning of the modern age; he is not a thinker with a hammer who fashions himself to be a legislator or a value-creator. He was an aristocrat, a soldier caught up in the internal strife of his country, who had things to say about human nature and society. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is positioned, with a unique philosophy, at the end of the modern age to announce its end, as the proclamation "God is dead" signifies, and to prophesize the rise of a new age. This is one reason why La Rochefoucauld's polemic is not addressed against any specific figures of history, but Nietzsche's is. You can hardly find any name in the writings of the former, whereas there is almost no one of historic significance whom Nietzsche does not attack in his books.

*Skepticism.* Skepticism, a school of philosophy that emerged in ancient Greece, was of no use for the excessively religious medieval age, but was revived during the Renaissance. One already finds skeptic trends in literature before LaRochefoucauld, as in Montaigne, for instance. What we find in these writers is not skepticism as is manifest in philosophy in a specifically methodological form, but rather a skeptic attitude towards all things that are accepted by people simply because they are part of a tradition. An inquisitive approach to all things human can be detected in La Rochefoucauld's text. For instance, Maxim 113 is skeptical of the institution of marriage; many other maxims take a skeptic attitude towards love. Nietzsche takes skepticism to a higher level; let's keep in mind that La Rochefoucauld, despite his free-spiritedness, was

constrained, for better or worse, by his code of nobility. Nothing of this sort applies to Nietzsche; at young age he threw away his major constraining force, which was his Lutheranism. Despite La Rochefoucauld's relentless critical reflections on the human condition and the shallowness and pettiness of human character, one will not find one criticism of religion or monarchy. One may rightly attribute this to his times, the pre-Enlightenment age. On the other hand, there is almost nothing Nietzsche left untouched, in his critique, from art and religion to philosophy and science. The problems that La Rochefoucauld displays in his maxims have their connection—I would not say cause—in these areas of human experience. To put it concretely, if pity is problematic and prevalent, it is because Christianity promoted it as a value. La Rochefoucauld does not show this connection, but Nietzsche does. Examples can be multiplied, but I think my point should be clear.

### **Epilogue**

La Rochefoucauld and other writers of his time period started a new experimental genre in modern literature in which one can work on one's own self by way of self-reflection and pithy expression. On the one hand, the process of writing on the level of high style is not an easy task—Joubert presumably wrote aphorisms every day, perfecting what he wrote; on the other hand, aphoristic literature provides pathways for readers and writers at different levels for their own psychological observations and self-overcomings. It is through an aphoristic experimentation starting with HAH that Nietzsche overcame his own pessimism and romanticism and created his unique works in literature and philosophy. The aphoristic works of La Rochefoucauld, Nietzsche and others remain to be examples for anyone who embark on the path of psychological observations.

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