

# LIVING WITH NIETZSCHE

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# LIVING WITH NIETZSCHE

*What the Great “Immoralist”  
Has to Teach Us*

Robert C. Solomon

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Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper

For my wonderful Überfrau,

Kathleen

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## CREDITS

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I have borrowed freely from a number of my prior publications, all of which have been thoroughly juggled around and heavily revised and none of which is simply reprinted here. Among them:

- “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Morality,” in Solomon, ed., *Nietzsche*, New York: Doubleday, 1973
- “A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche’s Ethics,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, and in *Nietzsche’s Affirmative Philosophy*, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986
- “Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals: 100 Years.*” *International Studies in Philosophy* (Special Nietzsche issue, 1989)
- “Nietzsche, Postmodernism, Resentment” in C. Koelb, ed., *The Postmodern Nietzsche* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 1990)
- “Nietzsche and Nehamas’s Nietzsche,” *International Studies in Philosophy* (Nietzsche issue) vol. xxi, no. 2 (Summer, 1989)
- “One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment: Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals*” in R. Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995
- “Nietzsche *Ad Hominem*, Perspectivism, Personality and *Ressentiment*” in Magnus, Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- “Nietzsche and the Emotions” J. Golomb, ed., *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998)
- “Nietzschean Virtues” in A. O’Hear, ed., *German Philosophy Since Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- What Nietzsche Really Said* (with Kathleen Higgins), New York: Random House, 1999
- “Nietzsche’s Virtues” in R. Schacht, *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000
- “Nietzsche as Existentialist: The Practical Paradoxes of Self-Making,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2002)
- “Nietzsche on Fatalism and Free Will,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2 Spring 2002.

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# LIVING WITH NIETZSCHE

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# INTRODUCTION

## *Living with Nietzsche*

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It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged—but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. We have to learn to think differently—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

How can we go on living with Nietzsche? The mere mention of his name evokes a ferocious emotional reaction, not only in the university (where he threatens to become a cliché), but on the street, in movies both comic and somber (*Blazing Saddles*, *The Doors*), in board- and dorm rooms as well as seminar rooms. If “Nietzsche” has come to signify the pop-postmodern pretensions of a superficial education, Nietzsche is also associated with an adolescent fascination with the dark, the deep, the forbidden. He serves as an excuse to talk about—if not to practice—the immoral, the blasphemous, the sacrilegious. He is an unabashed elitist, writing for “the few,” contemptuous of “the herd” (everyone else). And here, of course, lies the problem. Some of what Nietzsche says—or at least those passages that are most commonly quoted<sup>1</sup>—suggests an obsession with power, a delight in cruelty, an attitude that seems cavalier if not ridiculing regarding suffering, both in oneself and in others. He has thus become a role model for the perverse, the rebellious, and on occasion the sadistic and the murderous.<sup>2</sup> But that is not the Nietzsche who will occupy us here.

The Nietzsche who will be the subject of this book is also a role model, but a role model of a very different type. To put it simply but misleadingly, he is an exemplary model and our guide to a better way to live and a “rich inner life” (although I will suggest that Nietzsche would find this exact phrase unintelligible<sup>4</sup>). One strand of Nietzsche’s thought is unabashedly elitist, how to produce and encourage “higher men,” perhaps even including his infamous *Übermensch*. In some of his more polemical works, this is the basis of his attack on a morality that he views as nothing less than a

systematic effort to shackle and weaken those who excel. But most of Nietzsche's readers are neither "higher" nor necessarily men much less potential *Übermenschen*, and in this book I want to take them seriously (without feeding the fantasy that they might be "higher" or potential *Übermenschen*). Nietzsche writes not just to "the few" but to the many, now millions of students and others who would learn something of what he has to say, not just for their intellectual enjoyment but in order to learn how to live a better life. And Nietzsche does have such lessons to teach us, all of us.

In particular, Nietzsche is an example and a guide to a "rich inner life," like his spiritual co-conspirator in Copenhagen Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard celebrated a life of "passionate inwardness," a life distinguished not by dramatic public appearances (except, perhaps, in print) but by its rich passions, "deep" emotions, exquisite taste, and a sense of personal elegance and excellence. This includes a powerful conception of personal virtue such that Nietzsche's philosophy resembles that of Socrates and the ancient Stoics, who also focussed their attention on that "health of the soul" that was more or less independent of external forces and fortune and something quite distinct from external displays and heroic action. (Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as Conan the Barbarian-type action figure or Homeric hero should thus come under serious suspicion.) But where the Stoics (but not so much Socrates) identified virtue and the health of the soul with a sort of peace of mind (*ataraxia*), Nietzsche rather stresses energy, vibrance, enthusiasm, and engagement with the world. (This is where the "power" business enters in.) A virtuous life is a creative life, a life of energetic enthusiasm and exquisite good taste.

Nietzsche, as I read him, is a model for a very different sort of life than is celebrated as "success" today. It is an outwardly simple and unglamorous life but a life of rich passion and ecstatic enthusiasm, expressed first of all in the privacy of one's notes and writing, a life of exquisite taste, cultivated through listening, looking, and the exercise of elegance in even the simplest things in life. Since our modern world so celebrates the very opposite, "celebrity," fame and public display, vulgarity, and mass culture, many of Nietzsche's efforts are directed toward a defense of "high culture." This often makes him seem like a snob, an elitist, a man with nothing but contempt for "the common man," the democratic citizen, and the "leveling" effects of contemporary politics.<sup>5</sup> But however obnoxious such elitist and dismissive views might be in the political realm, in terms of the great artistic, intellectual, and spiritual achievements of humanity, it really is just the rare genius who counts. The rest of us are—just audience, or wannabes, of considerable importance to ourselves, perhaps, but of little importance in the larger scheme of things. Nevertheless, Nietzsche has a great deal to teach us too.

But insofar as Nietzsche is mainly concerned with passionate inwardness and a rich inner life, he is keenly attuned to its very real dangers. It is not easy to be a virtuous soul, to maintain exquisite taste, and to cultivate only the best passions. Especially in an age of vulgar egalitarianism and mass-

produced envy the dangers are not only all around us but, much more ominously, within us as well. Foremost among these are resentment and all sorts of “negative” or enervating emotions, precisely those that are most encouraged and cultivated by democracy and just those improvements in the human condition that are most often applauded as the great accomplishment of the modern world. I think that it would be both false and unfair to Nietzsche to think that he is really contemptuous of the ordinary citizen or rejects or disdains these improvements, but he is, like Kierkegaard, painfully aware of their costs. How does one cultivate a rich inner life surrounded by so many distractions and so much noise?

Thus it is no small irony that so much of the quasi-intellectual world—not only Hollywood but even some of the sleazier tabloids—seem to be in love with Nietzsche. Never, I think, has a modern Western philosopher (except for the Marx brothers, Karl, Friedrich, and Vladimir) had such an audience, such a following, such a fan club. And yet, Nietzsche insists that he is writing not for “the many” but for “the few.” Perhaps this is an expression more of pessimism than of elitism. Nietzsche realistically does not believe that most people have either the taste or the capacity for this “rich inner life,” and so like Jesus and Kierkegaard he becomes a “fisher of men,” looking for those who will respond to his strangely seductive invitation to follow him.

And that is what this book is about: coming to terms with Nietzsche personally, not as an abstract philosopher nor as an appreciative literary critic nor as a scholar but looking to him as a kind of role model. But this means *coming to terms with oneself*, for Nietzsche, like the Delphic oracle that instructed Socrates, is perplexing, a tantalizing if ambiguous prod to self-examination and self-criticism. That, of course, is not what the popular Nietzsche has come to represent, nor is that the Nietzsche who has been so thoroughly scrutinized, analyzed, deconstructed, and reconstructed by academics. But that is the Nietzsche who will be our companion here, so prepare yourself for a bumpy and sometimes uncomfortable ride.

## What Are We to Make of Nietzsche?

The worst readers of [Nietzsche's] aphorisms are the author's friends if they are intent on guessing back from the general to the particular instance to which the aphorism had its origin; for with that pot-peeking they reduce the author's whole effort to nothing; so that they deservedly gain, not a philosophic outlook or instruction, but—at best, or at worst—nothing more than the satisfaction of vulgar curiosity.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*

What are we to make of Nietzsche? That is still a lively question—indeed, much more lively than it ever was before. Thirty-five years ago, when I first began to study him, Nietzsche was a philosopher *non grata*, simply dismissed

in Anglo-American analytic philosophy as a madman with prophetic aspirations. His aphorisms, accordingly, were traced back to his madness, and all of the talk about “masters” and “power” was simply attributed to his supposed German chauvinism. In Germany, too, he was still scorned as a proto-Nazi and read as part of a past better forgotten. In this country, Walter Kaufmann’s pioneering work had succeeded in diffusing that charge, but the biography still loomed large and the philosophy was still explained in terms of Nietzsche’s personal idiosyncrasies.

Just when I entered graduate school, Arthur Danto managed to make Nietzsche into a philosopher, an analytic philosopher no less. His writings were read for what they claimed philosophically and not for revealing insights into Nietzsche’s biography. He could now be dissected as the equally witty and more obviously delightful David Hume had been dissected, savoring only the sinews of argument, cutting away the flesh of classical references, ignoring all question of style, ripping away the shapely skin, emptying the vessels in which the humors of contemporary debate and prejudice freely flowed. Nietzsche could be portrayed as an advocate of the then-current attack on the “correspondence” theory of truth, of some novel theses in “moral psychology.” Quotations could be massed together in favor of one “thesis” or another, arguments constructed. Insights could be gleaned that undercut the current debates, although the “current debates” always seemed to survive Nietzsche’s insights and go on for another decade or more. Nietzsche becomes just another excuse to argue about epistemology, perspectivism, the naturalistic fallacy, realism and antirealism, and the nature of truth.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Nietzsche became legitimate (just what he always wanted, but also what he feared most). He quickly became the favorite philosopher of undergraduate students, much to the horror of their senior mentors. Nietzsche called a spade a spade. He attacked authority, not only with indignation but also with relish and rudeness. He talked like a prophet but not like a preacher. He wrote short, easy-to-read paragraphs and mercifully short books. The details of Nietzsche’s life were no longer an issue, but neither was he read as a disembodied manufacturer of incomplete arguments. Who he was became not particularly important, and what he said was secondary to the enthusiasm he inspired. In direct contrast to the conscientious and ultimately tiresome *reasonableness* of most other philosophers, Nietzsche was inflammatory, hyperbolic, sarcastic, even “insane” (then a term of endearment, not a diagnosis). The students, accordingly, saw him as so much like them. And so they loved him, whether or not they understood him, and whether or not his invitation to self-examination was accepted in anything like the spirit in which it was issued.

Supply follows demand, even in philosophy, and Nietzsche became a standard figure in the philosophy curriculum, especially in courses on ethics. He was no longer lampooned as the elitist inventor of the “superman”



but taught as a serious philosopher who called into question the very basis of the morality that Kant and others merely took for granted and analyzed. He became not only mentionable but an essential figure in the history of philosophy, one of the “top ten” dead white males of philosophical historical importance, and he was rediscovered as the iconoclast who prefigured some of the most important philosophical movements of the twentieth century. But mainly, Nietzsche became known as a philosopher we could relate to and engage with, and thus the question what to make of him took on an unusually personal importance.

## Nasty Nietzsche

To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, notes

Nietzsche, that “immoralist” and even “Antichrist,” has now become respectable. The mad dog foaming at the moustache, in a classic David Levine caricature, has been replaced, in most modern commentaries, by a quite respectable and house-trained lapdog, a defender of Good Things and an advocate of, among other things, self-reliance, intellectual courage and honesty, creativity, democracy, feminism, animal rights, naturalism, the scientific method, aesthetic appreciation, wit and irony, hermeneutics, pragmatism, humanism, and a good night’s sleep. Indeed, reading through the Nietzsche literature these days, one could come away with the impression that this Nietzsche fellow was a pretty fair philosopher, and a fine writer too, if only he were more organized, pursued his arguments more rigorously, and didn’t overstate his case so often. All of those exclamation points!

But this newfound respectability should be taken with a large lump of salt, and we should beware of what Conor Cruse O’Brien (writing against Walter Kaufmann) years ago called the “white-washing” of Nietzsche. Nietzsche does say some things that are vile and violent, not to mention “politically incorrect” by today’s squeamish standards. His matter-of-fact descriptions of the joys of cruelty in *Zarathustra* and the “barbarian” behavior of the “masters” in *On the Genealogy of Morals* make one’s skin crawl (which, of course, is their intended effect). His diatribes against pity and compassion, no matter how insightful, go overboard in a way that no decent human being (or overenthusiastic Nietzsche student) should be willing to allow. Indeed, Nietzsche took some pride in a review that declared his attempt “to abolish all decent feelings.”<sup>6</sup> But even if he was not a monster (and all personal evidence points to his being a wholly decent human being) he certainly wrote like an adolescent, his genius notwithstanding. If a phrase felt right, no matter how irresponsible, Nietzsche put it out there. When he was feeling very good about his ideas, he was nothing less than megalomaniac. And as one critic has complained to me, “How can you be

so charitable to a writer who was so *uncharitable* to everyone he wrote about?" (Not entirely true, but close enough.) When Nietzsche experienced "writer's high" (which was often), there was no apparent limit to his contempt, or to his enthusiasm, or to what he might say. Thus it is no surprise that conservative Yale philosopher Brand Blandshard once threw Nietzsche (one of his books, that is) across the room in a rage.

Blandshard's response was not unusual, of course. Those of us who love Nietzsche contend all of the time with those who know or attend to only the hyperbole and most outrageous statements, or are familiar only with the caricatures, plus an occasional line of text (out of context). I frequently encounter this when I give Nietzsche talks. It is as if Nietzsche were all vices, no virtues. And the usual argument that "Nietzsche may just be being ironic" has no effect, as the questioners' sense of irony (not quite to say his or her sense of humor) has been utterly disengaged. Just recently an unsympathetic Oxford philosopher declared all of Nietzsche's ideas "repulsive" and listed Nietzsche's primary doctrines as "the reclassification of revenge, anger, and lust as virtues, the rule of 'artist-tyrants,' the refinement of the human race by gloriously bloody wars, the extermination of millions of inferior people, the eradication of Christianity with its contemptible bias to the weak, and an ethic of 'might makes right.'" I wonder if he bothered to read enough Nietzsche.

I do not deny the more disturbing statements and implications of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nor do I want to "whitewash" his vices. And, to be sure, I do not want to use Nietzsche to encourage that coarse selfishness that now pervades so much of society and is so obviously affecting our more impressionable students. But I take very seriously what philosophers call "the principle of charity," and keeping this in mind I find that Nietzsche's very real virtues far outweigh his apparent vices (keeping in mind that Nietzsche often insisted that one's virtues are often one's vices too, and vice versa). Indeed, Nietzsche warns us himself: "It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged."<sup>8</sup>

I think the best and most philosophical account of Nietzsche's apparent nastiness, his consideration of and even dwelling on the most offensive aspects of human behavior, is captured in his stated belief that "the weights of all things must be determined anew" or in what in his last works he announces as "the revaluation of all values." If this is taken seriously, if philosophy really is the examination of the most basic values, then even cruelty and justice should be up for grabs. Is cruelty indeed the worst sin?<sup>9</sup> Is justice in fact the "first virtue of social institutions as truth is of systems of thought"?<sup>10</sup> Is lying really wrong?<sup>11</sup> Can the abandonment of one's family be excused (or even justified) by one's artistic accomplishments?<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche is not the only philosopher who has asked such questions, although he has pursued them with a vehemence that is unusual.

Indeed, virtually every philosopher since Descartes has tried to go back to a “first philosophy,” employing one or another version of methodological skepticism, to try to determine “the weights of all things . . . anew.” Philosophers have tried to “justify morality,” which means, presumably, that they hold any assumption about its validity in suspension until they come up with an adequate accounting of some kind. But, of course, as Nietzsche points out quite often, they typically suffer from a loss of nerve—or they were never serious in the first place. If one really wants to question everything, as modern philosophers have so often claimed to do, then one ought to weigh things anew. If doing so makes us squirm, then that is only a sign that we are taking the task seriously and that we are, perhaps, much more cautious and conservative creatures than many philosophers would have us believe.

There is also an *ad hominem* explanation of Nietzsche’s nastiness. Nietzsche’s more disturbing pronouncements come from a man (and before that a boy) who was personally overwhelmed with the cruelty of the world and with the tragedies that befall human beings. Even as a child, he had to cope (at the age of four) with the death of his father. And he was, by virtually all accounts (including his own), a hypersensitive, compassionate soul, making the cruelty and tragedy he witnessed and read about all the more intolerable. But unlike those he criticizes—Socrates, Schopenhauer, and followers of Christianity, to name but three—Nietzsche refused to turn away from or deny the awfulness of the world. Nor was he willing to give in to pessimism, the conclusion that “life is no good” (or, in the words of ancient Silenus, “Best not to have been born, next best to die soon.”) Thus a kind of dual optic defines Nietzsche’s philosophy from his earliest writings on, the recognition of the world’s awfulness on the one hand and the affirmation of life on the other. It is with this in mind that Nietzsche keeps hammering us with portraits of cruelty and injustice, to ensure our continued awareness and to provide the necessary condition for the life affirmation he wants to encourage.

The other objection to Nietzsche that I encounter so often—and I admit to being bothered intermittently by it myself—is what might best be called Nietzsche’s narcissism. Rüdiger Safransky tells us that the young Nietzsche wrote no fewer than eight autobiographical essays by the time he was eighteen, and, of course, there is a sense in which *all* of Nietzsche’s works are to a considerable extent autobiographical, an attempt to put his troubled life in order. His last book, *Ecce Homo*, is thus just the finale of a lifelong pursuit of self-constitution, not to mention self-congratulation. But this, too, has ample explanation in terms of Nietzsche’s life and aspirations. First, quite naturally, there is the loss of his father to cope with, and, soon afterward, the loss of his childhood home. But more to the point there is Nietzsche’s pervasive notion of a “divided self”—for instance, the passionate self that emerges so evidently in his works and the painfully reserved self that he wore out in public, even with his friends (who in grade school called

him “the little pastor”). So, too, there was the resentful, vindictive, contemptuous self that so often appears in his writing and the more forgiving, less judgmental self that makes its appearance from time to time and defines some of Nietzsche’s finest ideas and aspirations. It is one of the tasks of Nietzsche’s philosophy—philosophy as self-transformation—to harmonize or in any case reconcile these conflicting selves, *e pluribus unum*. Even in such a late work as *Twilight of the Idols*, this ideal of “self-creation” out of a conflict of sub-selves is held up for our admiration, particularly in the example of Goethe. But that, of course, is what Nietzsche also demands of himself—and of us.

With this in mind, we might take a quick look at Nietzsche’s last work, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s explicit and outrageous autobiography—sort of. He does go back over his written corpus and performs a kind of vivisection and diagnosis of his own books, but he also entitles his early chapters “Why I Am So Clever,” “Why I Am So Wise,” and “Why I Write Such Good Books.” It is often charged that this is Nietzsche’s megalomaniac narcissism gone out of control, or, as many commentators have insisted, it is evidence that Nietzsche’s mental health had already passed the point of no return. But given the fairly obvious observation that most authors, writing their autobiographies, make it very clear that the point of their writing is to explain to us why they are so clever, why they are so wise, and why they write such good books, one can more charitably recognize that Nietzsche, who is never a stranger to smart-ass literary parodies, is simply saying what most authors don’t *dare* to say, and in doing so both undermining the very pretentiousness of saying so and making a case for his own eccentric but now unified genius.

## Nietzsche’s Virtues

You who are virtuous still want to be paid! . . . And now you are angry with me because I teach that there is no reward and paymaster? And, verily, I do not even teach that virtue is its own reward.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

So, with all due respect to those who cannot help but be offended by some or much of what Nietzsche says, this is a book about Nietzsche’s virtues and, accordingly, the virtues he represents for us. By “Nietzsche’s virtues” I intend a dual meaning. First, there are Nietzsche’s many virtues as an author—his style, his boldness, his enthusiasm, his many insights, his impact (forgetting, for the moment, about the dangerous *misinterpretations* and their influence), his dramatic challenge to the manner (and the somber sobriety) in which serious philosophy is usually written. Second, there are those virtues that Nietzsche extolled, many of which he also exemplified as an author. It is this latter set of virtues that will eventually become the focus of this book, but it is the former set of virtues, and the nature of Nietzsche’s very personal philosophy, with which I want to begin. To put

my overall interpretation right up front, I take Nietzsche (like Plato) to be primarily in the business of self-transformation, or soul-transformation, if you prefer. This refers both to his own self-transformation through his thinking and his writing and, more important for us, to *our* self-transformation, as his readers. The former may be interesting to us as gossip and autobiography, but it is the latter that keeps us reading, writhing, and wrestling with Nietzsche every step of the way.

The two sets of virtues—Nietzsche’s virtues as an author and virtues that Nietzsche extolled—are not the same. Authors often fail to live up to their stated ideals (and virtuous people sometimes fail to appreciate and understand their own virtues). But the connection between living the virtues and writing about them is intricate and intimate, especially in Nietzsche’s case. He insisted that the philosopher must be an “example,” and so a good portion of this book is devoted to understanding both this connection and the concrete virtues that Nietzsche wrote about in his works, not out of detached interest but in order to persuade us to adopt and pursue them.

In other words, I read Nietzsche as a *moral* philosopher, in the strongest sense of that term. His was no “ethical theory” (not even a “virtue theory”), but a protracted and exquisitely eloquent soapbox harangue. All the rest—the business about “truth,” the fantasy of the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche’s exquisite literary style, his attack on Christianity—is supporting material. What Nietzsche tried to defend and urge upon us might be characterized as nothing more specific than to *love life*, but against the backdrop of Nietzsche’s perception of global suffering and the teachings of “otherworldly” relief, this vague imperative takes on palpable urgency. Those looking to Nietzsche for moral principles, however, or, for that matter, even for a simple statement condemning murder, cruelty, adultery, or theft, are bound to be disappointed. That does not mean, need I say, that he approved of such acts. But that wasn’t the point of his philosophizing. He wasn’t writing for murderers, sadists, and the like, but for those (like him) who had been *overly* tamed and domesticated, who were riddled with guilt and desperate for some happy vision of life (or the afterlife) despite the sad state of the world.

Nietzsche’s cardinal virtue is that he will not deny that cruel reality or human tragedy but rather see past our suffering to the miracle of life itself. If it sometimes seems as if he also embraces cruelty and tragedy, I take that to be a symptom of either Nietzsche’s occasional desperation or his more frequent euphoria, in which the need to affirm life *despite* suffering gets conflated with the supposed need to affirm life and all of its suffering. But I think these occasional expressions of global acceptance constitute a weakness in Nietzsche’s thinking and are not (I think) to be taken all that seriously. Furthermore, life affirmation is an apt response to both pessimism and despair, as well as a natural expression of nonspecific enthusiasm, but it is not a substitute for nor is it particularly conducive to concrete ethics. Again, one should not expect from Nietzsche an explanation of why murder

and cruelty are wrong.<sup>13</sup> This may be considered by traditional ethicists to be a weakness or a vice, but Nietzsche's broader vision of what ethics is, reminiscent of Aristotle if not of Kant, might well be considered a virtue. Instead of telling us what is wrong and why, suppose we were to think of ethics as first of all reminding us how to live and live well, and to do this while facing up to all the misfortunes and absurdities of life.

## How Should We Read Nietzsche?

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

The question is often asked by both students and serious scholars: How should we read Nietzsche? In this book, I suggest that we read him from an existential point of view, as a provocative writer who means to transform the way we view our lives (as he attempts to transform his own). In other words, we should take Nietzsche *personally*. Of course, Nietzsche is also a prophet, a social critic, a speculative anthropologist, a philologist, an ideologue, a demagogue, a loudly complaining patient, a physician, a pathologist, a man who loves to play with language, a cranky moralist who rants against his own dispositions, and, for those who are so inclined, a philosopher who is suggestive regarding a number of current issues regarding realism and antirealism and cognitivism and noncognitivism in ethics. To read Nietzsche in any of these alternative ways is or can be distinctively *impersonal*. And surely he can be considered impersonally, as a curious object of study, as a target of gossip, as a pure "writer" quite apart from whatever it is he is trying to say, as a prophet or a critic or a philosopher whose theses must be judged true or false, but I will take up such perspectives only in order to further and clarify my existential quest, which is to explore Nietzsche's profound effects (for good or ill) on his readers, namely *us*, and more specifically (for those of you who would rather opt out), *me*.

In the past hundred years, as Stephen Aschheim has shown in admirable detail, Nietzsche has been claimed by hundreds of groups and movements, not to mention the thousands of scholars and tens of thousands of students who have made him their own. Most of them, no doubt, get Nietzsche wrong. But as Nietzsche would have been the first to acknowledge, there is and can be no *true* Nietzsche, no one way of getting Nietzsche *right*. And the existential approach I take here is by no means to be taken as a substitution for serious analysis and scholarship, for close textual and intimate biographical study. But in the crush of recent work on Nietzsche, the existential point of view has too often been simply dismissed.

In contrariness to much of the contemporary Nietzsche commentary and literature, I do not find in Nietzsche all that much of great value regarding

the Big Questions of philosophy—truth, free will, the status of moral judgments, and so on. Nietzsche often mentions and occasionally discusses such issues, but mainly to express his annoyance with them. He is not a philosopher of abstract ideas but rather of the dazzling personal insight, the provocative comment. He does not reveal the eternal verities but he does powerfully affect his readers, goading them to see themselves in new and different ways. Here, I think, is how it works: one reads through Nietzsche's energetic but thick prose, preferably in small bits at a time, and one is prompted (particularly by other philosophers) to ponder the Big Questions of philosophy—truth, free will, etc.—but what one fondly remembers and more quietly dwells on are the little jolts and reflections—a brief comment on the true motivation of pity, an aphorism about education, a sly suggestion of hypocrisy. To be perfectly frank, if one were to read Nietzsche for his treatment of the Big Questions of philosophy alone, I do not think (the professional aspirations of philosophical commentators aside) that there is all that much to be found, compared to, say, Kant or Bertrand Russell or Wittgenstein or even Jean-Paul Sartre. And this includes even those Big Ideas with which Nietzsche is most often identified—the will to power, “eternal recurrence,” and the infamous *Übermensch*.

Thus in this book I make no real attempt to “rationally reconstruct” Nietzsche or present him as he might be resurrected as a respectable philosopher, as an ethical theorist, as someone with radical insights as to the nature of truth, justice, and the philosophical way. I am more interested in the impact that Nietzsche continues to have on his readers. Does this mean that every one of us can simply pick and choose and create his or her own Nietzsche? Well, not exactly, but better that than soulless and “dispassionate” search for the ‘true’ Nietzsche.<sup>14</sup> We should try to understand “what Nietzsche really said,” but always with an ear to the question what does Nietzsche have to say to us. This is a living dialogue, not an autopsy. Thus the guiding thought in my writing this book is not so much “what did Nietzsche *really* say?” or even “what should we make of Nietzsche?” but rather “*what would Nietzsche make of us?*”

One objection, of course, is that Nietzsche was not writing “for us” at all. He was addressing those “few” who had the potential to be “higher men.” But I take cue not from Nietzsche's unabashed elitism, which to be sure is one of the leitmotifs of his work, but from the reactions of all of those student readers, who are inspired to make something of themselves on the basis of their reading Nietzsche. So I think that an overemphasis on this particular theme celebrating such “higher men” betrays as much about the megalomania of the commentator as it does about Nietzsche. We should keep in mind that Nietzsche is writing under the nineteenth century spell of the “cult of genius,” that he wanted very much to think of himself as one of its exemplars, and that he was writing in defense of “high culture” which he thought threatened by the vulgar taste of the masses. I do not

dispute Nietzsche's empirical claim, that some people are much more talented and noble than others, nor do I disagree with his condemnation of morality insofar as it is deleterious, directly or indirectly, to the development of such people. But I think Nietzsche's inspiration has a much broader appeal and a much broader application, as evidenced by its effects on many more ordinary temperaments who do not, even in their wildest flights of self-deception, fancy themselves geniuses. For them, too, I think it is a provocative question: what would Nietzsche make of us?

### What Would Nietzsche Make of Us? (An "Existential" Approach)

If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

There are many books available that "clarify" and "straighten out" Nietzsche for students and the general public, and I leave to my learned colleagues who constitute what Kathy Higgins has aptly dubbed "the Nietzsche Police" to round up and properly criticize the many continuing misunderstandings and misappropriations of Nietzsche's doctrines, thoughts, and words. And I leave it to sensitive writers like Rüdiger Safranski, Leslie Chamberlain, and, especially, the wonderfully empathetic fictionalizing of Irvin Yalom (*When Nietzsche Wept*) to allow us the intimacy with Nietzsche and the knowledge of the details of his sad and lonely life that one cannot easily glean from his manic and polemical published works.<sup>15</sup> But I am an existentialist philosopher, not a biographer.<sup>16</sup> I have other fish to fry.

Here is what I have in mind. (No doubt some of you have heard it before.) Nietzsche has this famous doctrine, which he calls "eternal recurrence," the thought that whatever happens, whatever we do, whatever we suffer, has and will repeat itself (in the same sequence) an innumerable number of times. Despite the few passages and short shrift Nietzsche gives to this thesis, an enormous amount of ink has been bubbled and shot out of computer printers on its meaning. As a literal hypothesis, I am rather willing to dismiss the thesis out of hand as a combination of outdated physics and faulty mathematics. As a serious ethical proposal, say, along the lines of Kant's "Categorical Imperative," I think the thesis is without substance. But Nietzsche presents eternal recurrence neither as physics or metaphysics nor as an ethical decision-making procedure but as a "test" of our attitudes toward life. Even there, I have doubts about whether the thesis stands up to hardheaded scrutiny. There is much to be said and debated about the idea of a life repeated in exactly the same way (with no memory of past repetitions), for instance, and the scope and nature of the "moments" to be affirmed. I find little reason to lean toward one or another



interpretation on the basis of the bare-bones sketches in Nietzsche's texts. But for me, at least, and for many of my students, there is no debating the powerful impact that Nietzsche's "thought" can have.

I first read and heard about the doctrine of eternal recurrence while auditing Frithjof Bergmann's "Philosophy in Literature" course at the University of Michigan several decades ago. I was then an unhappy first-year medical student. I had just joined the new Students for a Democratic Society, and it was just after the assassination of JFK. Bergmann was lecturing on Nietzsche and his idea of eternal recurrence, and hearing about Nietzsche's idea in that whirlwind of personal and political emotions changed my life. It provoked me into steeling myself with the philosophical resolve to take a close look at my life and my unhappiness and confusion and my larger role in the world. I tried to apply what I then clearly conceived to be the personal "test" of the idea of recurrence, what Bernd Magnus, in an early work, calls "Nietzsche's existential imperative."<sup>17</sup> After class, I left the medical school and entered into the life of philosophy, a decision I have never regretted.

Now, it might be the case that my life has been based on a misunderstanding of Nietzsche, a somewhat cruel suggestion but, nevertheless, one to which my response would certainly be, "Does it really matter?" I do not know exactly what Nietzsche had in mind, nor is there any real evidence apart from the scant dramatic references in a few of his books. As so often (and I take this as a basic principle in reading Nietzsche), I think his enthusiasm far outstripped his willingness to think his idea through. Not that I do not take him seriously. On the contrary. But I think his seriousness is to be located in the life-affirming and life-transforming impact of the idea, this unexplicated "thought," and not in any systematic conception of philosophy.

I tend to doubt that Nietzsche had anything very precise in mind by "eternal recurrence." I certainly doubt that he ever conceived of the idea as a device to end unhappy medical school careers, and his general insistence on the "affirmation of life" is much too vague to count as much of a thesis. I have no doubt that what mainly concerned him was making sense of and "affirming" his own illness-plagued, lonely, and unhappy life. (In *Ecce Homo*, he proclaims, with equal parts desperation and enthusiasm, "How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?" and later in the book, "That one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary . . . but to love it.")<sup>18</sup> And though Nietzsche sometimes makes prideful (and rather absurd) claims to the effect that he doesn't *want* his books to be read and that his books are for "the very few" (even while he was complaining to friends that his books were not selling), it is pretty clear that he was excited because he hoped that his readers would be transformed as he was, through the intensive self-scrutiny that his books provoke and the "going under" that his character Zarathustra urges upon us. In my case, he certainly succeeded.

This may be just a not very interesting tidbit of my own autobiography. It is not by any means an argument about what Nietzsche really intended when he promoted the thought of eternal recurrence. Nevertheless, I believe that the reason why Nietzsche fascinates so many of us—sophisticated scholars as well as novice students—is because he invites (and demands) such personal scrutiny in a way that other great philosophers—Kant, Hegel, even Plato—do not. Whether or not Nietzsche might be construed as offering *moral advice*, a suggestion that has been roundly criticized by such prominent scholars as Bernd Magnus and Alexander Nehamas, this is certainly the *effect* of what he gives us.

I do not want to make Nietzsche into some “sublime philosophical Ann Landers,”<sup>19</sup> to quote one of Magnus’s more delightfully sarcastic lines. But it is my contention that Nietzsche’s works are filled with such advice, not along the lines of “don’t lie” and “change your underwear daily,” perhaps, but he does offer us many little lessons and suggestions about such Ann Landers-ish matters as love, friendship, diet, and weightier matters such as war, cruelty, the desire to punish, and our delight in gossip. A quick glance at *Daybreak* or *Human, All Too Human*, for instance, reveals hundreds of such straightforward “unpretentious truths” as “The best means of coming to the aid of people who suffer greatly from embarrassment and of calming them down is to single them out for praise.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps that is why he praised himself so extravagantly.

But mainly and in general, Nietzsche encourages self-scrutiny.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not this counts as “moral advice,” it surely puts Nietzsche on the list of the great existential moralists, from Socrates to Sartre, whose purpose was above all to change not only “the mind” but also the consciousness and character of their readers. Socrates, to be sure, did not give “moral advice” either, in that vulgar sense—and for protracted philosophical reasons. But his whole philosophy, too, is aimed at provoking self-examination and “self-undergoing,” to “know thyself” and, ultimately, to “become who you are,” even if, to modern eyes, Plato’s dialogues are for the most part scholarly fodder, tropes and syllogisms to be dissected rather than a provocative engagement with the reader who wants to find out, above all, *how to live*.

## Thinking through Nietzsche

*In what do you believe?* In this, that the weights of all things must be determined anew.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

In the following chapters, I try to deal with a number of issues that bear on the question, “What would Nietzsche make of us?” To give any sort of educated answer to this question, it is necessary, of course, to say quite a bit about what Nietzsche said—and did not say. In particular, I want to undermine the widespread idea that “what Nietzsche would make of us” is something truly nasty, wholly selfish and self-absorbed, cruel in our

thoughts if not also in our actions. With this in mind, I want to spend a substantial amount of time considering the pros and cons of Nietzsche's campaign against morality (or, more accurately, Judeo-Christian morality) and his moral psychology, particularly his concept of resentment (or *ressentiment*) as the basis for morality. I want to argue that Nietzsche is not "immoral" or "antimoral" but rather in favor of a very different (and quite "affirmative") conception of ethics.

By contrast, I will be spending very little time discussing Nietzsche's well-known and often outrageous attacks on Christianity as such, from his pronouncement that "God is dead" to the punching criticisms of *The Antichrist*. I can only dimly imagine Nietzsche's rage and sense of betrayal—his feeling of being *lied* to—when he discovered that his devout childhood piety was based on falsehoods and fantasies. But I do think that he does not reject all of religion, or better, spirituality, and a sense of deep devotion remains with him and is one of "Nietzsche's passions." That I do want to discuss.

I think that the phenomenon of resentment, while the subject of one of Nietzsche's greatest insights, was also one of the most painful for him—and for us. Nietzsche, plagued by persistent illness and bolstered by his early reading of Schopenhauer's pessimism, was keenly aware of both the pervasiveness of suffering in human life and the strong tendency to resentment against those whom we blame for our frustrations (or, simply, for being happier, more powerful, or more privileged than we are). He fought, not often successfully, to overcome his own resentment, and his various pleas to "affirm life" and "love fate" are more often tinged with desperation than with genuine joy. Thus Nietzsche saw that a connection between a thinker and his or her thoughts was on the one hand inescapable and on the other quite loose. Philosophy can represent rationalization or even denial as well as self-realization. When we readers perceive in ourselves as well as in Nietzsche the poison of resentment we realize how much ideas can be affected by personal feelings. Thus the importance of one of Nietzsche's most valuable tools, the *ad hominem* argument. *Ad hominem* arguments are usually considered fallacies in mainstream philosophy, but Nietzsche uses them well. He attacks people, not just ideas. And in shaming many of the great figures of philosophy he effectively embarrasses us as well.

In the first chapter, I want to discuss Nietzsche's use of *ad hominem* arguments. I will also address the much discussed issue of Nietzsche's "perspectivism," not as an epistemological thesis or a dubious theory of truth but as a way of appreciating differences in morality and understanding the psychological underpinnings of those differences. In subsequent chapters I want to do away with the common view of Nietzsche as a largely "negative" philosopher, out to destroy the ideas and ideals of others without leaving us with anything in their place. It is only then that I will take up directly the "What would Nietzsche make of us?" theme by outlining and then discussing "Nietzsche's virtues," that is, those admirable features of the Nietzschean individual that he more or less consistently recommends to us (cul-

minating, some might suggest, in his vision of the *Übermensch*). Finally, I question the existentialist perspective as such and ask whether, in terms of Nietzsche's own writings, it is an appropriate way of approaching him, whether Nietzsche is or can be properly considered an "existentialist." My answer, as one might expect, is "yes," but in defending this I arrive at an interesting way of rethinking existentialism and its most celebrated themes.

# Chapter I

## NIETZSCHE AD HOMINEM

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That a psychologist without equal speaks from my writings, is perhaps the first insight reached by a good reader—a reader as I deserve him.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

### Philosophy ad Hominem: Exemplary Virtues (and Vices)

Nietzsche repeatedly insisted on his importance first and foremost as a *psychologist*,<sup>1</sup> but this has not always been taken as seriously as it ought to be, especially by philosophers. Philosophers tend to insist on the truth of a belief, but psychologists are more interested in why one believes what one believes. “The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection. . . . The Question is to what extent it is life-preserving.”<sup>2</sup> Philosophical doctrines also carry with them a strong sense of universality and necessity, while psychological analyses remain inevitably bound to the particular contingencies of a personality or a people. But Nietzsche was suspicious of claims to universality and necessity, and he almost always preferred the witty or dazzling or even offensive psychological insight to the grand philosophical thesis.

Writing about Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche tells us, like a malicious tabloid journalist, “In origin, Socrates belonged to the lowest class: Socrates was plebs . . . he was ugly.”<sup>3</sup> With reference to Kant, he noted, “The instinct which errs without fail, *anti-nature* as instinct, German decadence as philosophy—that is Kant!”<sup>4</sup> On the “shabby” origins of morality as such he suggested, “The slave revolt in morality begins, when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.”<sup>5</sup> And on German philosophy, he complains, “How much beer there is in the German intelligence!”<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche saw himself and praised himself as a *diagnostician*, and his philosophy consists to a very large extent of speculative diagnoses, concerning the virtues and vices of those whom he read and read about, whose influence determined the temper of the times. His central strategy, accordingly, was the use of the ad hominem argument, a rhetorical technique often

dismissed as a “fallacy,” an attack on the motives and emotions of his antagonists rather than a refutation of their ideas as such. (“We know, we can still see for ourselves, how ugly [Socrates] was. But ugliness, in itself an objection, is among the Greeks almost a refutation.”)<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche is often treated as one of those hermetic thinkers whose universe wholly consisted of his isolated self and his grandiose ideas about “modernity” and “culture” and “humanity” as such. But though Nietzsche’s intellectual loneliness and overreaching ambition are obvious, what is even more obvious is that he was not much prone to critical self-scrutiny, even if he wrote not infrequently about himself and, on occasion, threw in a confession or a caveat for good measure. He did not usually write in grand generalizations, even if he had a philosopher’s enthusiasm for abstract ideas, for example, his overblown theory of “the will to power” and his fanciful thesis of “eternal recurrence.” When Nietzsche did present such abstract theses, it was rather as a psychological test, not a metaphysical thesis. Although he was no “humanist” in the usual sense, he delighted in understanding and writing about *people*. His most brilliant and biting comments, observations, and essays involve a keen insight and understanding of people, whether as groups, types, or individuals.

Nietzsche wondered what made people “tick,” and he rightly suspected that what they thought and said about themselves and their ideals was almost always misleading, mistaken, or just plain fraudulent. But nowhere is self-deception and hypocrisy more rife than in those aspects of life in which ordinary people as well as philosophers and theologians tend to make grand pronouncements about such lofty subjects as God, human freedom, and morality. Nietzsche’s ad hominem arguments did not so much refute the doctrines of religion and morality as undermine them by exposing the sometimes pathetic motives and emotions that motivated them. (For example, he wrote, “The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato on is pathologically conditioned.”)<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche observed the people around him and read the great thinkers of the past. He reflected and speculated about the concealed motives and emotions that moved people to pontificate about “morals” and dogmatically defend sometimes incoherent beliefs in God, in divine justice, and in Heaven and Hell. He wanted to explain such perverse self-denying practices as asceticism and such seemingly “disinterested” enterprises as bookish scholarship. He wanted to understand what he called “the will to truth,” and he wanted to get down to the true nature of such suspicious sentiments as pity, piety, and much of what goes by the name of “love.” Above all, he wanted to trace out the vicissitudes of that insidious and typically self-righteous set of emotions that give rise to what we call “morality,” notably *ressentiment* and its far-reaching moral prejudices and principles.

Nietzsche’s thesis, now famous, was that what we call “morality” in fact originated in and now continues to be generated by a particularly “slavish” and “life-denying” set of values. Humility, for example, is such a value. It

is the denial of pride, the refusal to acknowledge one's own talents, achievements, virtues. Thus the self-declared "pagan" philosopher David Hume chastized humility as a "monkish" virtue, and Aristotle, a genuine pagan, criticized it as a vice. Slavish values tend to deny joy and celebrate seriousness, decry risk and danger and emphasize security. They encourage cautious reflection and reject or demean passion and "instinct." In short, they "say 'no' to life."

This "slave morality," however, does not think of itself as a particular psychological perspective, one way of looking at and living in the world. It rather presents itself as an "objective," essential and universal prescription, even a precondition for human life. Morality, while pretending to be based on the most noble of motives, even "pure practical reason" alone, in fact turns out to be motivated primarily by insecurity and resentment, even revenge. By uncovering such devious motives and emotions in others, Nietzsche tried and often succeeded in casting suspicion on their ideas and values. And by praising others (usually after they had been dead for centuries) he pointed the way to alternative ideas and values whose motivation is not so suspect or subterranean. Unfortunately, Nietzsche's vitriolic style does not always make it evident whether it is suspicion or praise that is intended, whether he is condemning or admiring the genius of slave morality or when he is stating his pointedly ambiguous prejudices concerning Jesus or Socrates ("Above the founder of Christianity, Socrates is distinguished by the gay kind of seriousness and that *wisdom full of pranks* which constitute the best state of the soul of man. Moreover, he had the greater intelligence" and "Socrates was the buffoon who got himself taken seriously").<sup>9</sup> So, too, even when he seems to be advancing a moral thesis of his own, it is typically by way of a question or an allegory rather than an assertion.

In this chapter, I want to look at Nietzsche both as perpetrator and as victim of *ad hominem* arguments. His works are full of such arguments, and, in turn, his critics and detractors have often used such arguments against him. (Allan Bloom writes, "Nietzsche . . . thought that writing a poem could be as primary an erotic act as sexual intercourse.")<sup>10</sup> I want to focus our attention on his psychological, sometimes very personal turn in philosophy. It is through this insistence that the personal cannot be taken out of philosophy that I want to look at Nietzsche's inimitable style and his thesis of "perspectivism," the view that *all* doctrines and opinions are only partial and limited by a particular point of view. (On philosophy and philosophers: "If one would explain how the abstrusest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really came about, it is always well (and wise) to ask first: at what morality does all this (does *he*) aim?" On Kant's "theological instinct": "One more word against Kant as *moralist*. A virtue must be our own invention, our most necessary self-expression and self-defense: any other kind of virtue is merely a danger. . . . 'Virtue,' 'duty,' the 'good in itself,' the good which is impersonal and universally valid—chimeras and expressions of decline, of the final exhaustion of life. . . . The fundamental laws of self-

preservation and growth demand the opposite—that everyone invent *his own* virtue, *his own* categorical imperative.”)<sup>11</sup> Then, in the next three chapters, I want to look more closely at Nietzsche’s justly famous ad hominem attack on “slave morality” and resentment, in order to appreciate just how complex and persuasive such arguments can be.

## Nietzsche’s Style and Nietzsche’s Philosophy

Lest I break with my style, which is affirmative and deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means, only involuntarily . . .

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, Notes

I mistrust all systematizers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Nietzsche is often accused of being “only destructive,” of criticizing but not affirming, of destroying but not building. The case can be made, and I will argue this in chapter 5, that Nietzsche’s many ad hominem arguments do “add up” to an affirmative philosophy. To be sure, Nietzsche’s philosophy is not a system in the Hegelian style, but it is a coherent point of view, a distinctive and often affirmative set of ideas.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche’s fragmentary and often aphoristic style makes his thought notoriously difficult to synthesize or summarize. Several of the grandest and best known of his ideas—eternal recurrence, the will to power, and the *Übermensch*—are for the most part to be found in his unpublished notes and his literary tour de force, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. But if we loosen our demand for a unified philosophy and look instead to Nietzsche’s ad hominem approach to a wide variety of issues, it becomes evident that he is indeed interested in some of the traditional issues that have challenged philosophers since ancient times: the nature of ethics and of morality and of religion, the genesis and structure of society, the locus of the self and its alleged freedom and rationality. But his answers often involve a rejection of the questions as well as the issues.

It is clear that Nietzsche is not simply attempting to provide new answers to these old questions, nor is he trying to reformulate the questions. He is rather trying to ascertain how such curious questions—and the concepts that provide their subject matter—could have arisen. It has thus been argued with some plausibility that Nietzsche is not so much a philosopher as an “antiphilosopher” who wishes to bring philosophy as we know it to an end.<sup>13</sup> I think that this claim is too strong as it stands and assumes an overly narrow conception of what philosophy is and must be. From our existential perspective, for instance, Nietzsche’s efforts should be construed as aimed



at his readers, not at philosophy as a discipline. But one could embrace the “antiphilosophy” interpretation in another way. Nietzsche was a student of the ancients, including the ancient Skeptics, in particular.<sup>14</sup> The Skeptics taught that one is only befuddled, and his or her life confused, by an attention to the abstract doctrines of philosophy. Thus Nietzsche, too, can be construed as attacking the befuddlement of life that comes from paying too much attention to the nonexistential questions of philosophy.

Nietzsche’s own approach to philosophy is peculiarly psychological, but we should not exaggerate the distinction between philosophy and psychology here, a distinction that Nietzsche sometimes suggests but would not endorse. Nietzsche is concerned not so much with the analysis and justification of philosophical concepts and doctrines but rather with an understanding of the type of people who would formulate such concepts and believe such doctrines. He does not focus on the concept or the doctrine alone, as many philosophers do. (“Paul thought up the idea, and Calvin rethought it, that for innumerable people damnation has been decreed from eternity, and that this beautiful world plan was instituted to reveal the glory of God. . . . What cruel and insatiable vanity must have flared in the soul of the man who thought this up first, or second.”)<sup>15</sup> He does not aim at eternal verities (except as targets), but neither is his philosophy nothing but an attempt to explode false truths and put an end to fraudulent questions. It is not antiphilosophy but a more personal approach to philosophy, in which philosophy and philosopher are not so radically distinguished, in which it is the character of the person—and not just the “correctness” of what he or she believes—that counts. (“*The natural value of egoism.* Self-interest is worth as much as the person who has it.”)<sup>16</sup>

This approach is reflected in (but it is emphatically not reducible to) Nietzsche’s provocative and highly personal “style.” Nietzsche does not just write philosophy—that is, record his thoughts and articulate his ideas and argument. Instead, he virtually *shouts* at us. He cajoles us, teases us, confides in us. He confuses us, forcing us to think for ourselves. In section 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, Nietzsche presents us with one of the more cosmic versions of his provocative conception of the will to power, the thesis is so bracketed by subjunctives and suggested postulations that it is virtually impossible to ascertain what (if anything) is being asserted—in particular, whether one should give any credence at all to Nietzsche’s seeming conclusion that “the whole world would have to be understood as will to power and nothing besides.” The entire exercise is obviously an elaborate thought experiment, but it is therefore entirely unclear what Nietzsche actually believes about it. Even when Nietzsche is making a pedestrian point, for example, in praise of honesty, the way he does it is striking, memorable, either overstated or understated and therefore conscientiously unclear. But “Nietzsche’s style” does not or should not eclipse the ideas he is defending, and it is probably a mistake to assume that the variety of styles reflects an inconsistent or conscientiously self-undermining or “self-consuming” phi-

losophy. Nietzsche's writing consists of ideas, often dazzling ideas, insights, and insults and not just "tropes" and rhetoric. When he claims to be "writing in blood," this is not just another literary extravagance. The man is nothing if not *serious*. And if he prefers the aphorism or the bon mot and employs hyperbole and overdoes the first-person pronouncement, it is only to get us to think about those ideas and issues. Nietzsche is, whatever else he may be, a serious philosopher.

It is not as if Nietzsche were just playing with language and not taking his own moral prejudices seriously.<sup>17</sup> If the older critics were overly dismissive of Nietzsche's creative prose, many recent commentators are overly impressed by the fact that Nietzsche wrote in a style so clearly unsuitable to most academic journals today.<sup>18</sup> But style in philosophy is not just a matter of (admittedly unusual) literary sensitivity; it is first of all a style of thinking, an approach to life and not just a way of writing. A style is not superficial but deep, not wordplay but itself a worldview, a profound expression of *who one is*. A style is itself a philosophy, or, to turn it around, philosophy is first of all a matter of style. This must not be trivialized, particularly in the case of Nietzsche. The point of Nietzsche's philosophy is how to *live*, not how to write, and to confuse Nietzsche's verbal playfulness with his moral seriousness is simply to misunderstand him:<sup>19</sup> "It may be necessary for the education of a genuine philosopher that he himself . . . must have been critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and solver of riddles and moralist and seer . . . but all these are merely preconditions of his task; it demands that he *create values*."<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche's style is often that of the caricaturist, the prophet, the social critic, even the gossip. Approaching Nietzsche through his interest in the particular motives and emotions of other people may seem like a limited and even vulgar way of approaching his notoriously subtle philosophy. What about the grand skepticism that leads Nietzsche to declare, in a variety of ways, that there is no truth?<sup>21</sup> Where do the grand and famous themes of "eternal recurrence," the *Übermensch* and the will to power fit into this down-to-earth psychological approach? Isn't this pretty thin stuff on which to base a devastating critique of Christianity and Judeo-Christian morality? But our propensity to believe (including, especially, to believe in truth) is itself a phenomenon to be explained, and that triad of famous Zarathustrian doctrines is best *not* interpreted as grand philosophical theses.

Why is "truth" so important to us, and not only as philosophers?<sup>22</sup> What about the noble or the edifying lie? But why should we think that the answer to such disturbing questions lies in an abstract level of generality rather than a careful examination of ourselves as vulnerable human beings? Similarly, I think that the best interpretation of eternal recurrence is, in the phrase of Bernd Magnus, as an "existential imperative," a certain *attitude* toward one's life rather than a theory about the nature of time or a grand thesis about the meaning of existence.<sup>23</sup> How would one feel about the prospect of having to repeat this life, this moment, again and again and

again? The *Übermensch* too is far better characterized as an attitude toward life and in terms of the presence (and absence) of certain emotions than as a metaphysical projection or a possible product of biological evolution. The *Übermensch* is whatever we want, in the most profound way, to be. The will to power is nothing if not Nietzsche's one attempt at an all-embracing if not ultimately convincing psychological hypothesis. How do we explain masochism, self-destructive behavior, righteous self-denial, the urge to martyrdom, wanton cruelty? The "desire for pleasure" fails on all of these counts. The desire for power gives us a much better understanding.

It is in contrast to the sometimes bloated pretensions of philosophy, theology, and metaphysical dogma that simple appeals to motives and emotion gain their force. In attacking Christianity and Christian morality, notably, Nietzsche does not remain on the same level of esoteric abstraction as his religious and moral antagonists. What he does instead is to *undermine them*. What could be more devastating against the boastful self-righteousness of some philosophers and theologians than an *ad hominem* argument that undermines their credibility, that reduces their rationality and piety to petty personal envy or indignation? What could be more humiliating than an accusation against a morality that incessantly preaches against selfishness and self-interest that it, too, is in fact not only the product of impotent self-interest, but hypocritical as well? And what could be a more effective argument against theism than ridiculing the ground from which such a belief has arisen? ("*Historical refutation as the definitive refutation.* —In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous.")<sup>24</sup>

That humiliation, of course, is Nietzsche's objective in his psychological guerrilla war against Christianity and Judeo-Christian bourgeois morality. Humiliation, if you like, is his style. He wants to shock us. He wants to disgust us. He wants us to see through the well-rationalized surface of traditional morality to the historical development and the actual human beings who lie behind it. Like Hegel, his great misunderstood predecessor, he holds that one truly understands a phenomenon only when one understands its origins, its development, and its overall place in consciousness. But understanding a phenomenon, in this sense, does not always lead to further appreciation.

Nietzsche's theory of morality is suggested in his "middle works" *Daybreak* and *Gay Science* but first fully spelled out in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and, especially, in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). He contends that what we call "morality" originated among the miserable slaves, the *Lumpenproletariat* of the ancient world (that is, the lowest classes of society, a term introduced by Marx). Morality continues to be motivated by the servile and resentful emotions of those who are "poor in spirit" and feel themselves to be inferior. "Morality," however brilliantly rationalized by Immanuel Kant

as the dictates of Practical Reason or by the utilitarians as “greatest good for the greatest number,” is essentially the devious strategy of the weak to gain some advantage (or at least not be at a disadvantage) vis-à-vis the strong. What we call morality, even if it includes (indeed emphasizes) the sanctity of life, displays a palpable disgust and “weariness” with life, an “otherworldly” nostalgia that prefers some other, idealized existence to this one.

To show this, of course, is not to “refute” the claims of morality. Morality might still be, as Kant argued, the product of Practical Reason and as such a matter of universalized principles. It may in fact be conducive to the greatest good for the greatest number. But to see that such obsessions with rational principles and the public good are products and symptoms of an underlying sense of inferiority is certainly to take the glamour and the seeming “necessity” out of morality.<sup>25</sup> To demonstrate this embarrassing truth is one of Nietzsche’s primary aims, and his style is that of a vivisectionist—a disgusting, shocking profession if ever there was one. Cutting to the very heart of morality with the intent to “gross us out,” he is the ruthless diagnostician, and his method of diagnosis is the ad hominem argument. (“To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task,” Nietzsche notes.)<sup>26</sup>

## In Defense of ad Hominem Arguments

*Every philosophy is the philosophy of some stage of life.* The stage of life at which a philosopher found his doctrine reverberates through it. . . . Thus Schopenhauer’s philosophy remains the reflection of ardent and melancholy *youth*—it is no way of thinking for older people. And Plato’s philosophy recalls the middle thirties, when a cold and hot torrent often roar toward each other, so that a mist and tender little clouds form—and under favorable circumstances and the rays of the sun, an enchanting rainbow.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*

One will notice that I wish to be just to the Germans: I do not want to break faith with myself here. I must therefore state my objections to them. . . . How much disgruntled heaviness, lameness, dampness . . . how much *beer* there is in the German intelligence!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

An ad hominem argument, as everyone learns in any introductory logic or basic composition course, is an attack directed “against the person” instead of his or her thesis or argument. To so attack the person is to commit a common elementary fallacy, albeit an “informal” one. Nevertheless, this fallacy is frowned upon almost as routinely as it is actually used, in philosophy as in politics and virtually every other human endeavor where people care more about winning the argument than obeying the rules of academic etiquette.

But are ad hominem arguments really fallacies? Or do they provide fair grounds for rejecting or at least being suspicious of the views or opinions of

a person? The answer to the second question is “Of course they do,” and the answer to the first is “Not always.” To recognize someone as a compulsive liar is to be suspicious, at least, of their most sincere-sounding pronouncements. To recognize that someone has a personal interest or investment in a case (e.g., a scientist hired by the Tobacco Institute to disprove the link between smoking and cancer) is good reason to be deeply suspicious of the supposed “objectivity” of the research, no matter how painstakingly pure the experimental methodology. It is true, of course, that such suspicions do not show such pronouncements or the conclusions of such research to be false. But the entanglement of truth and method, knowing and the knower, is such that the *ad hominem* argument is often—at least as a practical matter—conclusive. The thesis may in fact be true, but in the absence of arguments from other, less suspicious parties, we may be rightly no longer willing to listen.

It is often said that the problem with an *ad hominem* argument is that it reduces a (possibly good) thesis or argument to the faults and foibles of its promulgator, thus eliminating or eclipsing our search for the truth. A cheap argument (“he’s drunk” or “she’s just an undergraduate”) may have this unfortunate effect, but a well-wrought *ad hominem* insight may explain what many pages or hours of analysis and textual exegesis will not. (“I seek to comprehend what idiosyncrasy begot that Socratic equation of reason, virtue, and happiness: that most bizarre of all equations, which, moreover, is opposed to all the instincts of the earlier Greeks.”)<sup>27</sup> *Ad hominem* arguments expand, they do not limit, the field of philosophical argumentation. Instead of restricting the focus to mere thesis, antithesis, and argument, the *ad hominem* approach brings in the motives, the intentions, the circumstances and the context of those who have a stake in the outcome. Or, in Nietzschean metaphor, *ad hominem* arguments make us look at the soil and the seed as well as the plant from which the flower grows. It also allows us to see what is *not* being said or argued, the limitations of a position as well as its possibilities. (“The Socratic virtues were preached because the Greeks had lost them.”)<sup>28</sup>

The truth is, even the most conservative philosophers leave some room for the legitimacy of *ad hominem* arguments. If one looks to see how the so-called *ad hominem* fallacy is qualified in the leading textbooks, one finds that certain uses of *ad hominem* arguments are not fallacies at all, notably, in cases in which there is an “expert.” In his *Logic and Philosophy*, for example, Howard Kahane gives the usual definition, “an attack on the person rather than the argument.”<sup>29</sup> But, he adds, it is not always a fallacy. Lawyers who attack the testimony of an expert witness and question his or her moral character argue *ad hominem*, though not fallaciously.<sup>30</sup> But why should “expert” witnesses be the exception? An expert is presented (or presents him- or herself) as particularly knowledgeable in a certain field, and to throw doubt on either their knowledgeability or their objectivity will discredit their testimony and undermine their stated opinions. But insofar as

anyone makes any pronouncement in any field, are they not presenting themselves as knowledgeable and so subject to similar suspicions, or even more so? Are not questions about their knowledge, their tendencies to lie or exaggerate, their being part of one interest group or another just as relevant and (sometimes) decisive? We suppose that an “expert” (in theory if not in practice) is defined (in part) by his or her “objectivity” and “disinterest” as well as his or her knowledge, but the fact that experts in a court of law are often hired and paid by one side or the other in an advocacy position obviously compromises their “disinterest” if not their “objectivity.” Indeed, looking at academia (and not just academia) it becomes increasingly obvious that many “experts” increasingly define themselves not just in terms of their knowledge, much less in terms of objectivity, but rather on the basis of their well-known positions and entrenched antagonisms. (How readily one’s position becomes comprehensible—whether or not it is also compromised—by the knowledge that “she’s a deconstructionist” or “he’s a libertarian.”)

For those of us who do not claim to be “experts” but may nevertheless speak as such on any number of occasions, ad hominem arguments are often effective in putting us in our place (e.g., “How could you know anything about that?” and “You’re just jealous”). But what can be most effective of all are the generic, global replies, “Oh, you think you know everything,” “You have to find fault with everything,” or “You can’t accept anyone’s opinions but your own.” Raising questions about a particular judgment or opinion allows the speaker to alter his stance, or shift her emphasis, or qualify what’s already been stated. But a generic, global put-down undermines the legitimacy of everything the speaker has said or might say. Thus Nietzsche seeks to dismiss the whole of morality on the grounds that it is born of *ressentiment*. (“While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says *No* to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself.’”) <sup>31</sup> So, too, Nietzsche supplements his “madman’s” pronouncement of “the Death of God” <sup>32</sup> with his “historical refutation as the definitive refutation.” (“In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance.”) <sup>33</sup>

Undermining an “expert” means showing that he is not to be trusted, even if his knowledgeability is not in question. But what are we to say, then, in a subject where it is by no means evident what “knowledgeability” would even mean—in ethics (as opposed to the technical study of ethical theories and arguments), in religion (as opposed to the scholarly study of theology or the history of religion), and in philosophy (as opposed to the scholarly study of the history of philosophy or the use of certain techniques of notation and argumentation)? Are there any “facts of the matter” in philosophy? (Nietzsche would certainly say “no.” The continuing effort to

restrict philosophy to a priori calculations is a not-very-subtle professional effort to give it a distinctive subject matter.) Are the faithful necessarily more knowledgeable than the faithless? (Kierkegaard would certainly echo “no.”) Does morality really require knowledge of anything more than “the difference between right and wrong” and the ability to deliberate in practical matters? (Aristotle would give a somewhat qualified “no” but urge the study of ethics nonetheless. Nietzsche would give an uncompromised “no.”) In these fields in which there are no experts, one might say that everyone is an “expert,” that is, our differences in knowledge as such are not particularly important but who we are and what we do is of considerable importance. A Christian should be judged on the basis of faith, not theology. A moralist should be judged not by virtue of what he or she says but what he or she does. And a philosopher (here is the hard part) should be judged not just by his or her arguments and cleverness (the current *raison d’être* of the entire profession) but by the integrity of not only his or her philosophy but also his or her feelings, actions, and associations. (“Your association with an anti-Semitic chief expresses a foreignness to my whole way of life which fills me again and again with ire or melancholy. . . . that the name of Zarathustra is used in every *Anti-Semitic Correspondence Sheet* has almost made me sick several times.”)<sup>34</sup>

William Halverson gives us the standard view that “rational discussion requires that views be considered on their own merits, no matter who may happen to hold or express them. The fallacy of arguments against the person occur when someone who wishes to oppose a certain view attempts to discredit the person who holds the view rather than assess the merits of the view itself.”<sup>35</sup> Halverson does not bother to qualify or question the scope of the alleged fallacy, and in this we may take him to be providing us with the same old standard, traditional view. But he also gives us a particularly appropriate example: “Don’t waste your time studying the philosophy of Nietzsche. Not only was he an atheist but he ended his days in an insane asylum.”<sup>36</sup> Halverson goes on to distinguish between *abusive* arguments, aimed at one’s character or arousing negative feelings against him on the part of the audience; *circumstantial* arguments, aimed at the context and therefore probable personal motivation; and *tu quoque* or “you too” arguments, which shift the focus from the accused to the accuser. All three, of course, have been levied against Nietzsche: (1) He was crazy (abusive); (2) he lived in a family of Protestant women (circumstantial); (3) and, wasn’t *he* as filled with *ressentiment* as anyone (*tu quoque*)? If *ad hominem* arguments are acceptable in the court of philosophy, might they not apply with devastating effect on that self-appointed “expert” in moral psychology, Friedrich Nietzsche?

It can be argued that an *ad hominem* argument throws no light on the truth of a proposition (no matter who utters it) or the soundness of an argument (no matter who argues it). But propositions are put on the table

only because they are uttered by someone in some context for some reason and arguments are argued (except, perhaps, in a logic or debating class) only because someone (in some context, for some reason) wants to prove or establish something. Where the truth can be known or investigated quite independently (e.g., a claim about the possibility of “cold fusion,” obviously intended to win the applause of the scientific community and the investment of the financial community), ad hominem arguments are something of a sideshow, at most a device to focus attention on the promulgator and distract attention from the investigation itself. (The fact that such arguments are typically driven even if not initiated by resentment is quite irrelevant here.) But when there is no such available truth or proof (the typical ontological claim in philosophy), or when the argument is essentially incomplete, with no end of counterexamples and counterarguments in sight, then ad hominem arguments become particularly appealing and appropriate.

Ad hominem arguments are appropriate when an otherwise articulate philosopher keeps repeating an incomprehensible or most implausible thesis (“that Socratic equation of reason, virtue, and happiness: that most bizarre of all equations”), when the argument doesn’t quite make sense or cohere (“Carlyle: . . . constantly lured by the craving for a strong faith and the feeling of his incapacity for it”), or when an argument is notoriously incompetent (“After all the first church, as is well known, fought against the ‘intelligent’ in favor of the ‘poor in spirit.’ How could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion?”).<sup>37</sup> Of course, there are bad ad hominem arguments too, namely those that are unsound (e.g., the speaker simply does not have the characteristic attributed to him) and those that invoke irrelevant features, that are irrelevant to the thesis or argument at hand, or that simply luxuriate in their nastiness. (“I cannot stand this motley wall-paper style any more than the mob aspiration for generous feelings. . . . How cold she must have been throughout, this insufferable artist! She wound herself like a clock—and wrote. . . . And how self-satisfied she may have lain there all the while, this fertile writing cow.”)<sup>38</sup> In matters of science, ad hominem arguments may be of secondary importance, but in matters of morality, religion, and philosophy, they are more often than not highly appropriate, for it is the *hominem* that should concern us as much as the argument.

### *Ecce Homo*: “Nietzsche Was Mad, Wasn’t He?”

The inner struggle with his pathologically delicate soul, overflowing with pity, was what led him to preach, “be hard!,” and to look up with admiration at those Renaissance men of violence who had walked stolidly over corpses to reach their goal.

—Marie von Bradke (who knew Nietzsche in Sils Maria, summer 1886)



I think the ultimate argument against [Nietzsche's] philosophy, as against any unpleasant but internally self-consistent ethic, lies not in an appeal to facts, but an appeal to the emotions.

—Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*

One can make too much of biography, and with Nietzsche this is all too tempting, particularly for those who would like to simply dismiss or ignore his ideas. (I am thinking, for example, of Ben-Ami Scharfstein's interesting but wholly reductive psychoanalytic portrait of Nietzsche.)<sup>39</sup> But, of course, Nietzsche, in an obvious sense, "asks for it." He is not one of those evaporating (sometimes said to be "dead") postmodernist authors that Barthes and Foucault talk about. Unlike Malcolm Bradbury's ludicrous example of that phenomenon (*Mesonge*), disappearing altogether and leaving his works quite literally without an author, Nietzsche is always "in our face," not only present in person but reminding us just *who* he is.

Accordingly, one can and probably should take Nietzsche himself as a philosophical example.<sup>40</sup> It is not clear that he would come off at all well. He was lonely, desperate, occasionally embarrassing in his behavior, not to mention some of his published writings. He was incompetent to the point of self-humiliation with women, this great "seducer."<sup>41</sup> He participated in no great friendships and had no memorable (or even plausible) love affairs. He did no great deeds. He was sickly much of his life. Unlike his imaginary *alter ego* Zarathustra and his onetime mentor Wagner, he addressed no crowds, turned no heads, confronted no enemies. Like his near-contemporary in Copenhagen, Søren Kierkegaard, he did not have much of a life (though at least Kierkegaard did have a genuine passion for actually making and confronting enemies, even if only in print). But for Nietzsche as for Kierkegaard, it was the "inner life," "passionate inwardness" that counted. If we feel sorry for Nietzsche with his ailments and his loneliness we readers may nevertheless envy and admire his bright enthusiasm and genuine ecstasies in life. His enjoyment of his (admittedly gorgeous) surroundings in the Alps, for instance, and his gushing joy on hearing great music were such as few of us have experienced. And writing philosophy, too, including his dozens of little and grand schemes for new books, new multi-volume projects (even a five-year plan for a work on epistemology, notably never undertaken), Nietzsche experienced a joy and richness of life that was truly exemplary. From this perspective, surely we can and should take Nietzsche as an example, as many philosophy students and some of their professors evidently have.

But a rich inner life is not yet a virtuous life, and it is one of my theses here that Nietzsche was not just an exemplar of "passionate inwardness" but of philosophical and human virtue. Even putting aside Nietzsche's more outrageous and irresponsible ravings, we should certainly ask for more than inner ecstasies and enthusiastic writing to constitute a virtuous life. Can virtues be entirely "internal," even "private"? In what sense is a rich inner life an admirable life, a virtuous life? In Kierkegaard's case, given his focus

on personal religious faith, this might seem plausible. But not for Nietzsche, for whom a rich inner life could hardly be sufficient. His warrior and earth-shattering (“dynamite”) metaphors cannot plausibly be restricted to thoughts and jottings, and what Kierkegaard called “subjectivity” was hardly his favored domain. Nietzsche’s philosophy is a heroic philosophy, and, if you didn’t know him, a philosophy of action. But the sad truth is that it degenerates into an almost self-help philosophy of health. Two of the favorite quotes of the hoi polloi are “That which does not kill (overcome) me makes me stronger” and “Live dangerously!” The first, I have always thought, is near nonsense. That which doesn’t kill me most likely leaves me debilitated. And the second? What did Nietzsche ever really risk? A few bad reviews? Getting lost on one of his Alpine walks? An occasional drug overdose? The death-defying images do not hide the fact that Nietzsche was sickly all of his life. His celebration of “health” as a philosophical ideal and standard, by a chronically unhealthy philosopher, seems pathetic, at best. But then, again, how easily we take health for granted, and how much it must have been on Nietzsche’s mind.

And while we are dwelling on the *pathos* of Nietzsche’s life, we should certainly note that Nietzsche died badly. He was perhaps the worst imaginable counterexample to his own wise instruction, “Die at the right time.” He lingered in a virtually vegetative state for a full decade, cared for by a sister whose views he despised and who ultimately used him to publicly defend those views. He railed throughout his career against pity, that pathetic emotion that, according to those who knew him, was one of the most prominent features of his own personality.<sup>42</sup> (His final gesture on behalf of animal welfare deserves sincere appreciation.) As an example, Nietzsche is more plausibly viewed as a play of opposites, like Rousseau, who cannot be understood either in terms of his work or his life alone.

Thus Nietzsche’s life, insofar as it serves as an example at all, might seem to be an example of a tortured and unhappy spirit who managed, through his genius and through his suffering, to produce a magnificent corpus of writings. Thus Alexander Nehamas, in one of the most ingenious philosophical-biographical reconstructions since Plato set his sights on his teacher’s career, gives us good reason to ignore the “miserable little man” named “Nietzsche” and accept instead the *persona* he created, namely *Nietzsche*.<sup>43</sup> One might counter by insisting that “life isn’t literature,”<sup>44</sup> but I now think that this blunt contrast glosses over not only the fascinating intimacy between Nietzsche and *Nietzsche* but also clouds over some of the most fascinating features of the notion of “character” and, thus, the nature of both personal identity and ad hominem arguments in philosophy.

Briefly stated, that intimacy has to do with the complex interaction between a person’s thoughts, plans, emotions, and self-conception and what one might (problematically) identify with the bald “facts” about a person’s behavior, accomplishments, comments, and history. I am concerned here with the familiar distinction in Jean-Paul Sartre between “facticity” and

“transcendence” (without getting into the exponential complications of what he calls “being-for-others”). The problem is that how we “read” a person’s behavior and the narrative of that history depends to a large extent on the person’s intentions, ambitions, and ideals. In Nietzsche’s case, the “events” of his life were so minimal and his intentions, ambitions, and ideals were so grand that it is a mistake, as well as unfair, to interpret either without continuous reference to the other. In other words, what I am trying to do is to clear a path between overly ad hominem psychoanalytic reductionism and Arthur Danto’s old “Nietzsche as Philosopher” thesis (which Danto himself has retracted).<sup>45</sup>

The relationship between Nietzsche and *Nietzsche* raises all sorts of tantalizing questions, such as whether good fortune—or good health—is indeed (as Aristotle simply presumed) a presupposition of the virtuous, *eudaimon* life or whether (as in Kant) it is ultimately irrelevant. But the question of virtue, and the philosopher as example, is first of all to be answered in terms of the writing itself. This is not always easy or comfortable. (Consider the cases of Martin Heidegger and Ezra Pound, both of whom supported the Nazi cause. To what extent can we discern their despicable sympathies in their work? To what extent is the work compromised by their politics?) It is an enormous mistake to think that ad hominem arguments ought to look at the personal character *instead of* the writing, an even bigger mistake than its converse, just reading the writing and forgetting about the person who thought it up and produced it. It is the philosopher-in-the-philosophy that ought to be our point of focus. The virtues of the philosopher are those that are evident in the philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

Like many philosophers (Plato, Rousseau, and Marx come to mind), Nietzsche created an ideal world—or in his case an identity—dramatically different from the world of his experience. That vision becomes, in an important Sartrean sense, an essential part of the identity of the philosopher. Thus there is another interpretation of the view that a philosopher should be an example, with somewhat less dramatic requirements. One need not be a world-historical figure. One need not be a hero or even happy. One must not be a hypocrite, of course, and this alone would eliminate a considerable number of would-be philosophers, including not just a few philosophy professors. We judge a philosopher—and not only his or her ideas—by what he or she says, even ironically (especially ironically). Pleas for “playfulness” won’t get you off the hook. In writing, in case anyone ever doubted it, one betrays oneself—pseudonyms, sarcasm, dialogue, scholarly form notwithstanding. Nietzsche’s character, in other words, cannot be detached from his writings. Nietzsche and *Nietzsche* cannot so easily be distinguished or separated for the purpose of criticism and interpretation.<sup>47</sup>

A very different response to Nietzsche, not necessarily to Nietzsche’s advantage, has issued out of the oddly persistent French obsession with the virtues of madness, which has led some au courant Parisian neo-Nietzscheans (e.g., George Bataille) to suggest that Nietzsche was a great philosopher

because he was mad. But I find no evidence that he was mad when he wrote most of his books. Even if it is true, as C. G. Jung argued in his seminars, that the fault lines of Nietzsche's eventual madness were already present as neurosis throughout his career, I do not think that Nietzsche's life needs to interfere with a proper appreciation of his insights.<sup>48</sup> The question is, Can we get this knife to cut one way but not the other? How can we even begin to legitimize Nietzsche's use of ad hominem arguments against others without finding that we have already dismissed him as some sort of a crank who is not to be taken seriously? In the immortal words of Edward G. Robinson's "Little Caesar," "He can dish it out, but can he take it?"

If the reader detects a certain inconsistency here, it is not one for which I intend to apologize. To diagnose a motive is not necessarily to dispute the genius through which it is expressed. To find pathos in the philosopher is not therefore to dismiss the philosophy. Ad hominem arguments don't have to be dismissive. The more we look at the thinker rather than only the thoughts, the more we may find to admire, even through his or her foibles and frailties. In his several attacks on Socrates, to take the most dramatic example, Nietzsche's ultimate admiration and even envy of his ancient Athenian hero's ironic genius and Socrates' ability to turn his rather obnoxious personality into a powerful weapon emerge quite clearly, giving rise to interminable and ultimately pointless disputes about whether Nietzsche ultimately "liked" or "didn't like" Socrates. Nietzsche "saw through" Socrates, but in doing so he made his great predecessor's accomplishments all the more remarkable.

More to the point, Nietzsche's well-known critique of morality in terms of its underlying motive of *ressentiment* is in fact far more ambivalent and multifaceted than it is usually thought to be.<sup>49</sup> Far from simply rejecting "slave morality," Nietzsche finds much to admire in both its origins and its possibilities. True, both his attacks on Socrates and his attacks on much of morality and many religious moralists are often vicious, ad hominem in the worst sense and uncompromising, displaying no sign of ambivalence whatsoever ("the intestinal morbidity and neurasthenia which has affected priests at all times").<sup>50</sup> But Nietzsche was not easily given to praise. Nor was he the sort of philosopher who felt comfortable with "on the one hand . . . on the other hand" accounts of his own opinions and prejudices, no matter how often he urges us to adopt now this perspective, now that one. Not surprisingly, therefore, his writing abounds in the most libelous ad hominem arguments. A more careful reading, however, requires cutting through that aspect of his "style" to see some of the most important ambiguities of Nietzsche's philosophy emerging by way of context and contrast. An ad hominem argument can bring out virtues as well as vice, and a more complete portrait of a philosopher should make us think more of him, not less.

It is not implausible to suggest that Nietzsche's works were neither substitutions nor expressions of himself, but rather a kind of rage against his solitude and suffering, against those who sought to conceal or deny their

own suffering, and a protracted effort to come to terms with himself and produce something spectacular (if not “beautiful”) out of it. Thus the relation between the author and his texts is not, despite the persona, one of self-expression but rather of antagonism and dialectics. Could it be that Nietzsche, far from declaring himself one of “the few” who was the hope of the future, was rather more like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, quite explicit about his own unhappiness, outspoken in his perversity, concerned to envision and promote a *world in which there would be no more people like himself*. Quite the contrary of self-glorification, Rousseau’s works (excepting his *Confessions*, of course) argue for a world filled with people *not* like himself, not so unhappy, not so “corrupted.” True, Nietzsche sometimes addresses the “philosophers of the future,” who will, he hopes, read him. But does it follow that he sees himself as one of them, like them, an untimely precursor of them? I think not. Nietzsche’s poignant argument is against himself and against the petty bourgeois moralistic world that produced him. *Amor fati*, on this interpretation, is Nietzsche’s ultimate self-irony; if only he *could* accept his life as it is, not wish for another one, or a new age, or a new breed of philosophers, or an *Übermensch*. (“My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary, still less conceal it . . . but *love* it.”)<sup>51</sup>

I believe that Nietzsche wanted to live like that. His life was the test for that “love of fate.” He failed the test. But then again, who among us would pass? Nietzsche often tells us how important it is to turn your weaknesses into virtues and advantages (the Greeks turned their suffering into beauty, Nietzsche tells us, and Napoleon compensated for his stutter by making it even worse). Nietzsche *used* his resentment. He made resentment his style—with its tarantula-type attack and the quick retreat, the ferocious diatribe in the safety of one’s private hole—and his target, with obvious irony, was other people’s resentment. It is through this perverse holistic picture of the failed philosopher and his heroic philosophy that we can best appreciate Nietzsche. And it is in the need for a similarly holistic picture of human insecurity and resentment and the absolute commandments that people impose on themselves that we might best appreciate the rather striking phenomenon that we call “morality.”

## Nietzsche’s Perspectivism and the Perspectives of Morality

There is only a perspective seeing, a perspective knowing; and the more affects we allow to speak about a thing, the *more eyes*, different eyes, we can lend to the thing, the more complete will our “concept” of the thing, our “objectivity” be.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12.

What justifies an ad hominem argument is the essential connection between the thought and the thinker, the insistence that the quality or value

of an idea depends in part on the person and the context. But it is not necessarily the person *as such* that is relevant to the argument, if by that we mean the person as a “bare particularity” or the person as the incidental bearer of an innumerable collection of aspects, properties, and relations. A person is related to an idea “insofar as . . .”: insofar as he or she is a Christian, or believes in God, or is a Republican, or an atheist, a male or a female, an American or an Asian. The fact that a philosopher smokes cigars is not relevant to her opinions on Aristotle or her religious beliefs. The fact that a philosopher drives a Lotus Elan may or may not be relevant to his opinions about the meaning of life or the finality of death, depending on what he believes that meaning to be and how he tends to drive. To put it a different way, a person is related to a thesis or an argument by virtue of his or her membership in a certain class: trivially, the class of those who promulgate that thesis or argument. Our ideas are rarely our own. Despite the popularity of the phrase, no one really has a “personal morality.” We share our morals with our communities, our social class, our religious affiliates, our political allies, our families, tribes, interest groups, and institutions. Thus we relate to our ideas and our values not just as individuals but as representatives.

We share our ideas and our values with the class of those who are in a similar social situation or position, who share a certain concern, who have access to certain instruments of knowledge, whether an apparatus or a language. To take an obvious example, the arguments concerning the existence and nature of distant and mysterious astronomical phenomena depend upon access to certain very sophisticated, extremely expensive equipment and the evidence gained thereby. One can argue about such matters without the advantage of such equipment (Hegel’s *a priori* argument for the necessity of there being only seven planets in our solar system being an embarrassing case in point), but once such equipment is available its use becomes essential to the issue. Thus the beliefs that make up astronomical knowledge do not just concern the facts of cosmology. They are mediated by the perspective afforded by the telescope (and its successors), and they are now unthinkable without it.

In religion, the class in question would be the class of believers, although what class that is will depend on the specificity of the issue in question. Disputes concerning papal infallibility tend to include only Catholics (though others may readily voice their irrelevant opinions), while arguments concerning “who’s a Jew” will include mainly Jews, Israeli politicians, and (sadly) anti-Semites. Questions about the divinity of Christ will naturally include virtually every Christian, while Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* arguments against the Judeo-Christian tradition presuppose a certain antagonistic stance that understandably tends to alienate and offend believers. But also—and this is the critical point—such antagonistic arguments against the Judeo-Christian tradition come from *within* that tradition. It is not a matter of ironic coincidence that Nietzsche’s father was a Lutheran minister and that

Nietzsche himself grew up thinking he was bound for the ministry. It is almost impossible to imagine Nietzsche's rage (as well as his insider's knowledge) if he were not attacking and trying to work his way out of his own childhood perspective. Thus when Nietzsche comments that he is an atheist "by instinct" in his autobiography, this should be taken as disingenuous and ironic, at best.<sup>52</sup> One does not find such vicious atheists in the foxholes of mere unbelievers.

So, too, all questions of morality depend on one's belonging to a culture. (Claude Levi-Strauss: "When I witness certain decisions or modes of behavior in my own society, I am filled with indignation and disgust, whereas if I observe similar behavior in a so-called primitive society, I make no attempt at a value judgment. I attempt to understand it.")<sup>53</sup> If there are any universal rules or principles of morality, it is because we share a common context, minimally, the context of being "human." (The charge of what Peter Singer calls "speciesism" looms here, an exaggerated estimation of the importance of human interests and a neglect of the interests of other species.<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche would be very sympathetic to such a charge.) Morality depends upon context, and whether or not there are universal rules or principles of morality, one's view of what is and ought to be will depend on one's particular culture, background and experience, one's family and friends, one's class, one's health and financial position. So too more generally, the search for truth in philosophy depends on one's abilities, one's approach, and one's viewpoint. The continuing search for a "method" in philosophy reflects the perennial desire for some definitive perspective yielding direct access to the issues, but the proliferation of such methods (phenomenological and analytic, for example) only underscores the evident fact that philosophies differ as people and perspectives differ. *Who* one is (in the relevant sense) is a definitive (though not sufficient) determinant of philosophical results.<sup>55</sup> "Methods" are often post hoc means of confirmation.

In other words, Nietzsche's use of ad hominem arguments has very much to do with his much-debated "perspectivism." That is, his view that one always knows or perceives or thinks about something from a particular "perspective"—not just a spatial viewpoint, of course, but a particular context of surrounding impressions, influences and ideas, conceived of through one's language and social upbringing and, ultimately, determined by virtually everything about oneself, one's psychophysical make-up and one's history. Thus Nietzsche sometimes goes on record as insisting that perspectives are strictly *individual*, indeed, that everyone's perspective is "unique." And in a somewhat trivial sense, this is true. No one else can be in exactly my spatial location at exactly the same time with exactly my background and experience. Sometimes, indeed, Nietzsche even goes so far as to break perspectives into moments, suggesting that each of us is many selves and different selves may have different perspectives. Or, perhaps we have no selves at all but we are *only* these momentary perspectives, now seeing the world this way (e.g., when we are angry), now that way (e.g., when we are falling

in love). But I think that breaking things down so far robs the general thesis of its real strength, which is to insist that there is no perspective-free, global viewpoint, no “God’s eye” view, only this or that more or less particular perspective. Ad hominen arguments have some validity because there is no such thing as an idea or a truth that does not come *from somewhere* and *from someone*.

This thesis has often been turned into Nietzsche’s supposed “doctrine” of “perspectivism,” (a term he uses just once). There is, according to this doctrine, no external comparison or correspondence to be made between what we believe and truth “in itself” but only the comparison, competition and differences in quality within and between the perspectives themselves. As the charge that an ad hominem argument is a fallacy turns on this rejected assumption, that there is such a ready distinction and available comparison between what we believe and truth “in itself,” Nietzsche’s perspectivism would be a defense of his ad hominem method.

The perspectivism metaphor (and it *is* a metaphor) actually leaves open the question of whether there is or might be some “truth in itself,” which is the ultimate (even if never “unmediated”) object of all perspectives. After all (Robert Nozick argues in his *Philosophical Explanations*<sup>56</sup>) to insist that something is viewed from a perspective seems to presume that “it” exists independently of the perspectives. Nietzsche’s answer to this challenge is equivocal and incomplete. He famously claims, “there are no facts, only interpretations,” and elsewhere he tells us, “there are no moral facts.”<sup>57</sup> But this flamboyant relativism is typically misinterpreted, first, by leaping to the unwarranted conclusion that interpretation therefore has no basis and perspectives cannot be compared, and second, by similarly leaping to the conclusion that perspectivism leaves no grounds for evaluation. In its most vulgar form, “One interpretation is as good as any other.” (To insist that something is “just an interpretation” is not necessarily to say that it is not also true.)

A perspective is always a perspective on something. But it would make no sense to talk about perspectives if it didn’t also make sense to compare and contrast perspectives in terms of that “something,” to weigh the benefits of one perspective against the others. It is an open (and sometimes unanswerable) question whether the “something” that is considered from two different perspectives is the same thing in both interpretations. (Is the “gene” of classical genetics “the same” as some particular strands or particles of the complex protein called DNA? Is the body seen and described by an enraptured lover “the same” body examined by his or her physician?) So, too, to speak of perspectives is not to deny the significance of all of those interpretive questions, about “fidelity” to the original, about “depth” and “insight,” about being “strained” or simply implausible. And, of course, there are any number of practical and heuristic concerns that very quickly lead us to prefer some interpretations over all of the others. Perspectives and interpretations are always subject to measure, not by comparison with



some external “truth,” perhaps, but by evaluation in their context and according to the purposes for which they are adopted.

It is well worth noting that while Nietzsche may deny that there is any “God’s-eye” perspective, he often aspires to a suprahuman perspective and laments our “human, all too human” points of view. This wouldn’t make much sense unless he allows that we *can* escape our contemporary human viewpoint, imagining, for instance, the *Übermensch*, or the lives and psychology of the “masters” of three millennia ago. It would be one thing if Nietzsche merely noted or even lamented that we are stuck in our human perspective. It is something else to criticize it as “human, all too human” and suggest if not urge that we move beyond it.

We should note how often Nietzsche himself does this, sometimes with shocking results. In his notorious discussion of cruelty in *Genealogy* II, for instance, he describes ancient festivals of cruelty (and their modern equivalent in punishment) without condemnation. This is not to say that he either encourages or condones such behavior—clearly he does not, but neither does he add the obligatory expressions of horror and moral outrage that any contemporary writer would be required to make (consider, for example, writing about the Holocaust, or slavery in America, or the mention of King Leopold’s genocide in the Congo). In those passages, Nietzsche adopts a diagnostic perspective, like that of an oncologist who examines a malignant growth without (for the moment) any hint of compassion or sentimentality for her patient. So, too, when he examines the entire history of morality, in something of a caricature, to be sure, but more importantly (for this point) from a genuinely suprahuman distance—that is to say, from neither point of view but more like an American anthropologist might describe the relationship of Hindus and Muslims in a remote area of Maharashtra, or a zoologist would describe the relationship between two species (say, lambs and the birds of prey that feed on them), detached and utterly uninvolved.

This notion of a suprahuman (not *superhuman*) perspective explains a great deal of Nietzsche’s “amoral” tone of analysis. Unlike Kant, who unapologetically begins *within* the realm of morality and then tries to describe its necessity, Nietzsche steps firmly outside of the “moral point of view” and examines it as a specimen, from many different viewpoints, to be sure, but none of them particularly moral. So, too, he examines the religion in which he was raised (and in which he himself had youthful aspirations) sometimes from the insider perspective of one who was deceived and betrayed, but sometimes from the point of view of a cultural anthropologist who sees Christianity as just another human curiosity.

Loose and abstract talk about perspectives as if they were nothing but potential viewpoints leaves out the critical aspect of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, the fact that a perspective is *occupied*. One might talk metaphorically, as Nietzsche does, about “looking now out of this window, now out of that one,”<sup>58</sup> but the image of a perspective as yet unoccupied belies the primary thrust of his argument. There is no separating the spectator from the spec-

tacle, and in evaluating the one we inevitably evaluate the other as well. In the abstract, of course, one can blithely talk, on the one hand, about a possible perspective and, on the other, about the people who might possibly occupy that perspective. But within a perspective, there is no such ready distinction between the particular person and the perspective itself. If my outlook is that of a Jew or a scholar or a pessimist or a pervert, how much of that is *my* perspective and how much is *the* perspective of a Jew or a scholar or a pessimist or a pervert? And what an emaciated conception of self would one need in order to pretend that everyone could (or must) adopt exactly “the same” perspective? This is emphatically *not* to suggest that “everyone has his or her own perspective” or that there can be no comparing or contrasting one perspective with another. That is what an *ad hominem* argument is all about, not the substitution of merely offensive insult for serious consideration of the thesis in question but the serious consideration of the person through whom and perspective through which the thesis has come into question.

So, too, an interpretation is formulated and adopted by someone, and the quality or value of the interpretation depends, in part, on what we think of the interpreter. To be sure, a simple empirical observation (“the cat is on the mat”) can be more or less confirmed without delving into the character of the speaker. But can any statement about value—whether it concerns the taste of the coffee or the desirability of a reduced capital-gains tax—be adequately considered without asking whose it is? The *ad hominem* approach to philosophy asks, Whose interpretation is this? If it is a claim about justice, is it that of virtuous Socrates or of brutish Thrasymachus? It is not incidental to the overall “argument” of *The Republic* that Thrasymachus is presented by Plato as a sarcastic thug while Socrates is the embodiment of virtue. Socrates’ arguments are not really all that good or convincing, and Thrasymachus’s political “realism” is not all that implausible. But by force of character and expansiveness of vision, Socrates wins the day. Other Platonic dialogues similarly show us a *character*, not just a sequence of arguments separated by a bit of drama. It is Socrates’ virtue and charm, not his arguments, that persuade us.

Nietzsche was himself captivated by Socrates, whom he often called a “buffoon,” a term of some endearment.<sup>59</sup> Not surprising, it is Socrates’ character (also his looks) that attracts Nietzsche’s attention, even though Socrates is, for him as for us, a largely literary figure, created for us by Plato.<sup>60</sup> There is no easily separating the character from the position and, except by means of a fatal vivisection, teasing out the arguments away from the context. Elsewhere in the Platonic dialogues, character is also presented as an “argument.” Cephalus, a rich but shallow old man, displays as well as presents his views in the *Republic*, as does Thrasymachus. In *The Symposium*, the characters of the scoundrel Alcibiades and the beautiful young poet Agathon are essential to their “speeches” about love. Socrates’ character in *The Symposium* is shown to be overly aloof and somewhat insensitive,

demonstrating something important about how we are to take the doctrines derived from his supposed conversation with the muse Diotima.<sup>61</sup> An interpretation is not just an abstract possibility; it is an embodied, sometimes impassioned viewpoint. It involves an engagement in which the dispassionate logic of the argument alone may be of little relevance and of minimal interest. Thus the rhetorical trick of some logicians, who easily demonstrate the infinite proliferation of interpretations and the inaccessibility of the mythical “ur-text,” quickly breaks down in practice. Beneath the interpretations lies a person, and while we readily admit that a person may be “of two [or more] minds” about an issue, there is a real-life stopping point that logic may not recognize.

Is it reasonable to hold that every interpretation, every perspective, is as good as any other? Only if interpretations and perspectives are considered in abstract isolation from any context in which they might be evaluated. But this is, sensibly enough, precisely what Nietzsche denies. There is *always* such a context, and it is defined in part by the character and circumstances of the person who holds the interpretation. Some interpretations and perspectives are superior to others because some people are better educated, more sensitive, more insightful than others. It is only the most decadent or lazy egalitarianism that would argue that “everyone has his own opinion” (i.e., “one opinion is as good as any other”), that all interpretations and perspectives are equal because all people are equal, no matter what else might be true of them. (The truth of even such minimal equality, of course, is one of the doctrines that Nietzsche wants most to call into question.) One could also argue that there will always be a plurality of interpretations and that, apart from some particular perspective or purpose, the choice between them is “undecidable.” But this plausible suggestion has been absurdly expanded into the merely mathematical possibility that there might be an infinity of interpretations and perspectives and no “truth” or “facts” to distinguish between them. If we take into account the “truth” of our practical concerns and the “facts” of our social and biological embodiment, however, would or could there be any such myriad of conflicting interpretations that actually mattered to us? One should not become overly wedded to the distinctive American use of the term, but Nietzsche was nothing if not “pragmatic” in his views about value. It is what “makes a difference” that matters, not the abstract possibilities of difference (or *differance*) as such.

What defines the context of our concern for knowledge and values alike is the inevitable “fact” of *conflict*. Typically, we come to realize that we have a perspective, that what we believe is (only) an interpretation, only when we run up against a different perspective or confront an alternative interpretation. We meet a person or enter a culture and find ourselves simply unable to understand what is going on. We get into a discussion and find ourselves in sharp disagreement, not about “the facts” (insofar as these are not also determined by our interpretations) but about the significance of those facts. Two knowledge claims contradict one another; two value sys-

tems clash in what might well become ideological warfare. But interpretations collide precisely because they claim to be interpretations of one and the same phenomenon, because they claim to share a context even though they have very different and incompatible implications for our lives. Perspectives can be recognized as perspectives just because they differ and they disagree. We thus demand criteria with which to evaluate our disagreement and order our perspectives. We will use “facts” if we can find them but in most philosophical matters we will more likely stand on our own sense of conviction and muster what arguments and rhetorical weapons we can to ward off doubt and prevent humiliating refutation (which, however, rarely undermines our faith in the doctrine at issue.) In other words, we tend to justify our perspective(s) primarily on the basis of the singular fact that they happen to be our own. (“My judgment is *my* judgment’: no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such philosophers of the future may perhaps say of themselves.”)<sup>62</sup>

### Confessions and Memoirs: A Plea for the Personal in Philosophy

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Nietzsche’s philosophy is “the personal confession of its author,” whether or not it is “involuntary” or “unconscious.” It would be a crass inconsistency for him to claim otherwise (though he could, I suppose, try to capitalize on the “so far” in his comment and claim himself as the first exception). Nietzsche’s philosophy is not merely a confession, of course. (No great philosophy could be.) It is, however, irreducibly *personal*. In every case, Nietzsche argues, philosophy expresses the outlook of the philosopher and defines (sometimes misleadingly, sometimes fraudulently) his or her engagement with the world and relations with other people. Thus a critique of the philosophy entails criticism of the philosopher, and vice versa. But to read philosophy as “memoir,” to read Nietzsche’s own philosophy as “expression” if not “confession,” is not a reason to ignore the philosophy, nor does it mean that soundness and persuasiveness of argument are not *de rigueur* as well.

An *ad hominem* argument, properly understood, appreciates not only the profundity of an idea and the effect of an argument but their source and author as well.<sup>63</sup> It thus involves a rich conception of the self, as opposed to the minimal, emaciated and merely “transcendental” self—“unencumbered” by emotions, desires, personality, or character—presupposed by so many philosophers from Descartes and Kant to John Rawls. Nietzsche presumes a substantial self, but certainly not in the style of Descartes, as a configuration of drives, a psychological self that cannot be distinguished

from its attributes, attitudes, and ideas. He holds an equally tangible conception of ideas and arguments not as abstract propositions but as part and parcel of the personality or personalities that promulgate them. Thus the first person voice is not, for him, a mere presentational device, a rhetorical anchor (as in Descartes's *Meditations*) for a chain of thoughts that could be (and were intended to be) entertained by anybody. Nietzsche's continuing emphasis on his own uniqueness—one of his more obnoxious stylistic obsessions—is important not for its megalomania but for its more modest message that there is always a particular person behind these words, these books, these ideas.

Philosophy, according to Nietzsche, is first of all personal engagement, not arguments and their refutations. The concepts of philosophy do not have a life of their own, whether in some Platonic heaven or on the blackboards of the philosophy lounge. They are from the start culturally constructed and cultivated, and insofar as they have any meaning at all, that meaning is first of all personal. The does not mean that they are private, much less personally created, but that they are personally *felt*, steeped in and constitutive of the character of the person in question. So much for the alleged ad hominem "fallacy." The fallacy, to the contrary, is supposing that a philosophy or its arguments can be cut away from their moorings in the soul of the individual and his or her culture and treated, as they say, under the auspices of eternity. That is precisely what Nietzsche refuses to do.

## Chapter 2

### NIETZSCHE'S MORAL PERSPECTIVISM

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Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities that have so far been prevalent on earth, or are still prevalent, . . . I finally discovered two basic types and one basic difference. There are *master morality* and *slave morality*. . . . The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight—or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents of every degree.  
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, perhaps together with *Beyond Good and Evil*, is one of the five or six seminal works in secular ethical theory. It is also the most outrageous of those seminal works in ethics. Plato gives us the perfect society; Aristotle gives us a portrait of the happy, virtuous life; Kant provides an analysis of morality and practical reason; John Stuart Mill gives us the principle of utility with its benign insistence on collective high-quality happiness. Nietzsche, by contrast, offers us a diagnosis in which morals emerge as something mean-spirited and pathetic. What we know as morality is in fact "slave morality," so named not only because of its historical origins but because of its continuing servile and inferior nature. The basis of slave morality, he tells us, is *resentment* (he uses the French *ressentiment*), a bitter, reactive emotion based on a sense of inferiority and frustrated vindictiveness. He contrasts slave morality with what he variously calls "noble" and "master" morality, which he presents much more positively. His descriptions leave little question which of these two "moral types" he (and consequently we) find preferable. Nietzsche's "genealogy" of morals is designed to make the novice reader uncomfortable with his or her slavish attitudes, but it is also written to inspire a seductive sense of superiority, to urge us to be "noble." These are dangerous attitudes, quite opposed to the edifying moral support we usually expect from ethical treatises. They are also (as in most seductions) extremely misleading, both as a moral guideline and (judging from some of his other writings) as an expression of Nietzsche's own intentions.

Nietzsche most often refers to "noble" morality, a much more appealing term than *master* in matters of morality. True, Nietzsche does make refer-

ence to the ethics of the ruling class, but *master* has harsher implications than that, as one half of the standard “master-slave” dichotomy. (Nietzsche also calls slave morality “herd” morality, which may still be unflattering, but at least it does not invoke visions of beatings and oppression.) But what Nietzsche ultimately has in mind is not social status but *culture*, or what used to be known as “high culture.” What he values is a certain kind of cultivation, an exquisiteness of taste, a way of bearing and thinking about oneself. What he disdains is the lack of cultivation, vulgarity, bad taste, kitsch. The historical fact that those with noble tastes have typically come from the privileged classes and those with vulgar tastes tended to be underprivileged (until the advance of modern democracy) is not at issue here. Impoverished Nietzsche was an exemplar of a man with exquisite taste. Bismarck, the boss of all Prussia, was an example of vulgarity. So, although I will occasionally write of Nietzsche’s preference for “master morality,” please keep in mind that it is this sense of cultured nobility that he is advocating, not a perverted nostalgia for slave-owning days.

Nietzsche’s “genealogy” is, in fact, only a small part genealogy; it is much more a psychological diagnosis. It does include a very condensed and rather mythic account of the history and evolution of morals, but the heart of that account is a psychological hypothesis concerning the motives and mechanisms underlying that history and evolution. “The slave revolt in morality begins,” Nietzsche tells us in essay I, section 10, “when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.”<sup>1</sup> Modern critics might well dismiss such speculation as yet another version of the genetic fallacy: the question is not the genealogy, genesis, or motivation of morals but only, in neo-Kantian terms, the *validity* of our moral principles. Traditional moral theorists and Nietzsche expositors thus often talk past one another, the former focusing on arguments concerning the form and justification of moral precepts, the latter exposing the history and ulterior motives that underlie these supposedly universal, impersonal, and necessary ideals. It is a large and still largely unanswered question—how genealogy and psychology can best engage the concerns of current morality and moral philosophy. But in this and the following chapters I would like to focus only on the more particular question raised by Nietzsche in his *Genealogy*—the ethical dimensions of resentment and the implications of resentment for ethics.

How does resentment give rise to ethical judgments and what does this imply about those judgments? Is resentment as such a “bad” emotion, and does its diagnosis therefore suggest the inadequacy of a morality based upon it? Max Scheler raised similar questions about the relationship between resentment and Christianity many years ago; his intention was to protect Christianity from Nietzsche’s harshest accusations.<sup>2</sup> I have no such ax to grind here, but I do have mixed feelings about the Nietzschean campaign against morality and *ressentiment*, which will be evident in this and the following chapters. Like most novice readers, I, too, was wildly enthusiastic

about the master and slave/strength and weakness dichotomy (assuming, as an eighteen-year-old, that I was certain to count as one of the “masters”). But I confess that as a supposedly responsible philosophy teacher and educational writer, I also promulgated it and held onto it perhaps longer than I should have.<sup>3</sup> There is no denying the power of Nietzsche’s self-styled “polemic,” but we philosophical lambs should remain cautious in our respect for birds of prey, however noble they may be.

### Nietzsche’s Moral Perspectivism

The concept good and evil has a two-fold prehistory: *firstly* in the soul of the ruling tribes and castes. . . . *Then* in the soul of the subjected, the powerless.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” is most in evidence and most at issue in his moral philosophy. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he introduces and in the *Genealogy of Morals* he explains the two perspectives that dominate moral thinking, the opposed and conflicting moral viewpoints of the noble and slave, respectively. In line with his perspectivism, Nietzsche denies that there are any “moral facts,” but what is most striking from a Nietzschean point of view is that neither noble (master) morality nor slave (herd) morality sees itself as a perspective, much less as a mere interpretation. Both see themselves as “true.”

The noble sees himself and his outlook as simply superior, and for the most part unthinkingly assumes that the “slaves” share the same perspective (according to which, of course, they are the losers). The standards according to which the noble is superior are, however, his own, and for the most part unexamined and self-fulfilling. The noble is his own moral paragon. As the arrogant aristocrat sings in the comedy *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, “I am my own ideal!” The slave, on the other hand, is psychologically much more complex and interesting. Slave morality from its very inception is a *reaction* to noble morality. Unlike noble morality it is bound to a theoretical framework and hungry for self-justification. This emerges, first of all, in its desperation to cope with the fact that, by the standards of master morality, the slaves are the losers. They lack not only the nobles’ power and privileges but consequently they lack most of those things that the nobles consider good, not only wealth and status but, much more important, the virtues that come with nobility. Thus their reaction, which displays itself most evidently in their incredible sense of self-righteousness and in the proliferation of theories and theologies that are brought in to support it. By contrast, a “theory” of noble morality is almost unthinkable. The closest one might come is Aristotle’s *Ethics*, in which the Athenian virtues are simply catalogued and described, along with a rich commentary of fine distinctions and observations. Nevertheless, Aristotle (as opposed to Kant, for instance) does not give us any kind of theory or



attempt at justification. The idea of defending or justifying those virtues would have seemed to Aristotle absurd, and the question "Why should I be virtuous?" the sign of an ill-educated or wicked mind. And insofar as it does tend to theory or some sort of justification, Aristotle's ethics, according to Nietzsche, is already "decadent," a far remove from the utterly self-confident Homeric virtues that Nietzsche sometimes seems to be defending. In its original form, noble morality is a perspective that, while never bothering to acknowledge itself as a perspective, is taken by its practitioners to be *the* perspective, by virtue of their own inherent and unquestioned superiority.

So, too, the morality of the "slaves" is seen as the only moral perspective—it is "Morality." (I will from now on use an uppercase *M* to specify this.) So it is not seen as just one perspective either, but rather as the *only* perspective. The current phrase "the moral point of view," like the older "moral standpoint," is already a fatal admission that it is or might be just one view among others. But Morality gains its power over us and its alleged justification by virtue of the fact that not only is it the only game in town but, not coincidentally, it is sanctioned by the only God (or at any rate the mightiest God) in the Heavens. (The nobles also assumed themselves the "beloved of the gods," but their gods, in the view of the slaves, were *false* gods.) The slaves perceive their nemesis, noble morality, as just a perspective, but it is a false if not wicked perspective based on arrogance and selfishness and the pursuit of false goods (wealth, luxury, power, fame, beauty, elegance, nobility, and worldly happiness). Moreover, the rigorous egalitarianism of slave morality entails the *immorality* of elitist master morality. Thus slave morality's emphasis on "inner goodness" as opposed to external fortune actually puts the masters, with all of their wealth and power, at a grave moral disadvantage.

The act of *most spiritual revenge*. It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) and to hang onto this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying, "the wretched alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God . . . and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity, and you shall be in all eternity the unblessed, the accursed, and damned!"<sup>4</sup>

The nobles view the slaves as inferiors, taking their own worldly superiority and advantages as obvious. Thus they can easily deny or (more likely) ignore the peculiar ravings and rationalizations of slave morality. But because the slaves clearly see noble morality as a perspective, they feel the need to defend their Morality against it. Slave morality is "reactive" in that it consists first of all in the rejection of an opposed perspective, that of noble

morality. The subsequent evolution of ethical theory as a theory of "Morality" and the attempt to define and defend Morality against all objections and alternatives is first and foremost the attempt to utterly discredit noble morality, which is construed as no morality at all but merely as "might makes right" and selfishness.

Because it is true and absolute, whether dictated by God or by Practical Reason, the slaves' perspective is not seen as a perspective. The notion of "perspective" not only implies "more than one" but also tends to neutralize the claim of any one perspective to be the "right" one. Thus Morality cannot be a perspective, or a "view" or a "standpoint." The whole history of Morality from the Ten Commandments to Immanuel Kant's "categorical imperative" makes manifest this absolute nature of Morality, and its internal logic would indicate that too. "Morality" means "trump" status. According to this absolute or unconditional conception of Morality, a moral objection trumps a practical, prudential, or merely instrumental consideration every time. (No end justifies an immoral means.) But even if Morality cannot view itself as a perspective or a "point of view," that is exactly what it is. Nietzsche's "genealogical" analysis, whatever else its excesses and outrages, has the redemptive virtue of reminding us of just that. Nietzsche, like Kant, marveled at "the moral law within," but where Kant accepted its presence with "awe," Nietzsche squinted and scrutinized and wanted to know just what could have prompted and motivated such a perspective.

Because Kant accepted Morality at face value, he saw his primary task as analysis: just what is it that constitutes Morality (as opposed to custom, mores, moral sentiments, personal conscience, etc.)? Kant concluded that Morality is distinguished by its formal and "a priori" features. Morality is not simply taught or learned from experience, nor is it contextually derived. It consists of laws ("dictates") of pure (i.e., non-empirical) Practical Reason. Nietzsche's critique of Morality consists first of all in his refusal to share Kant's fascination with the formal and a priori aspects of the so-called logic of morality. His emphasis, by contrast, is entirely on the empirical aspects of context and character. Nietzsche's question might be put, What kind of a person would adopt (and what sort of people actually have adopted) the kind of practical "logic" that Kant so incisively analyses? What kind of philosophers would spend their lives analyzing (and justifying) such a logic? And what, by virtue of that obsession, are they avoiding or denying?

I should note here that Nietzsche is by no means a Kant scholar, nor even a very careful reader. In construing Nietzsche's moral perspectivism as opposed primarily to Kant's ethics, I am rather contentiously (and from the point of view of Kant scholars no doubt irresponsibly) fashioning something of a straw man ("Kant" but also "Kantians") as Nietzsche's target. But since the questions Nietzsche is asking are so very different than the questions that Kant is asking, it is hard to see what single forum for debate would do justice to both of them. But since this is a book on Nietzsche and what Nietzsche

would make of us and not about Kant and what Kant would make of us, I feel not too ashamed of joining Nietzsche in his caricature of the great “Chinaman of Königsberg,” if only to specify a philosophically prominent target as a way of clarifying Nietzsche’s contrarian ambitions in ethics.

What is the logic of Morality? Above all, it is the rejection of selfishness (and milder forms of self-interest), and in order to do this it embraces a logical principle that systematically eliminates not only references to oneself but also any reference to particular persons or situations. The linchpin of that logic, accordingly, what some authors have taken to be the conceptual core of Morality and moral judgments, is *universalizability*. Whatever one *ought* to do, anyone else (in sufficiently similar circumstances) ought to do so as well. On the face of it, universalizability expresses a profound egalitarianism—all of us are moral equals. There are to be no exceptions, no special cases, no privileged people or classes.

The complications of this thesis (and, especially, of its parenthetical qualification) had been a matter of serious debate since Hegel,<sup>5</sup> but what Nietzsche points out is that the universalizability formulation presupposes a seemingly obvious falsehood, that all moral agents (at least *qua* moral agents) are essentially the same. Thus universalizability represents the exact antithesis of the *ad hominem* argument, since the whole point is to deny the relevance of personal differences and insist that we do not treat ourselves as exceptions to the moral law. Kant warns us: “If we now attend to ourselves whenever we transgress a duty, we find that we in fact do not will that our maxim should become a universal law . . . we only take the liberty of making an exception to it for ourselves (or even just for this once).”<sup>6</sup>

So, too, it is supposed (although Kant himself would not argue in this utilitarian way) that since we are all in the same moral boat, the moral rules are ultimately to the advantage of everyone. But any rule with any substance, no matter how many people it benefits, will work to the disadvantage of someone. A “level playing field” works to the disadvantage of those who are skilled at climbing hills and leaping potholes. An easy grading system (“grade inflation”) works against the interests of the best students who then have no opportunity to show their superiority. Slave morality, riding on the presumption that we are all in some sense of equal moral value, succeeds in protecting those who are vulnerable to harm and offense while prohibiting those who can very readily protect themselves from harm and take advantage of others. At least sometimes, such constraints can work to the disadvantage of the more powerful. There is no doubt that with our egalitarian sense of justice we insist on the fairness of this arrangement, but that is not the question. The question is whether there are universal rules which assure benefits for everyone, and this, despite the common supposition, Morality does not do.

Of course, Nietzsche does not come out in defense of harming and offending people (though on occasion he comes dangerously close to doing so, for

example, in his apparent defense of cruelty and in his insistence on making enemies).<sup>7</sup> More often than not, Nietzsche's "cruelty" is aimed exclusively at oneself, as in the "ascetic ideal" to which he often subscribed. And offending people was never a goal for him but rather (given his courtesy) a reminder (sort of like "assertiveness training") not to be *too* courteous, not to be so considerate of other people's feelings that he was not true to his own. But he does see in the universal restrictions of Morality a genuine bias against those who would, could, and should assert themselves for the good of both themselves and their society. It has been argued since ancient times that those who rule and those who take the greatest risks for the sake of society (whether or not that is their personal goal) must sometimes ignore the moral inhibitions that are binding on ordinary citizens. And since the nineteenth century, at least, artists and intellectuals have often argued that they must remain "above" ordinary values if they are to be creative, culminating in the romantic cult of genius with which Nietzsche is associated. (E.g., "*My conception of genius. Great men, like great ages, are explosives in which tremendous force is stored up. . . . What does the environment matter then, or the age, or the 'spirit of the age,' or 'public opinion!'*")<sup>8</sup> But what is also wrong with Morality is what it hides and how it distracts us, even us ordinary citizens. By presuming an utterly minimal self and the importance of following a set of universal peculiarly "moral" rules, it removes all consideration of personal character and virtue (except, of course, as these may be redefined as the principled compulsion to follow the rules). What gets lost is the ancient concept of *excellence*, which is something much more than doing your duty and not breaking the moral rules.

"Submission to morality can be slavish or vain or selfish or resigned or obtusely enthusiastic or thoughtless or an act of desperation, like submission to a prince: in itself it is nothing moral."<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche is not an "immoralist"—as he occasionally likes to bill himself. He is instead the defender of a richer kind of morality, a broader, more varied perspective (or, rather, an indefinitely large number of perspectives) in which the gifts and talents of each individual count first and foremost. Nietzsche doesn't advocate immorality; he rather points out how minimal and inadequate is a Morality of "Thou shalt not." Ultimately, he says, it is no less than a denial of life, a denial of our best talents, our energies and our ambitions, a denial of what is most admirably human about us. It is not that we ought to break those standard moral imperatives against stealing, killing, and lying. Nietzsche again and again protests that he has no such notion in mind. It is rather that we should see how little and how pathetic it is *just* to obey such rules in the absence of any other virtues of character or excellence. How presumptuous it is for morality to give itself "trump" status at the expense of any number of other "non-moral" virtues such as heroism, wit, charm, and passionate devotion. Do we really want to celebrate the "good" man when we might have a great one instead?

## Genealogy as ad Hominem Argument: Resentment as a Diagnosis of Morality

How different these words “bad” and “evil” are, although they are both apparently the opposite of the same concept “good.” But it is *not* the same concept “good”: one should ask *who* is “evil” in the sense of *ressentiment*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Genealogy, I want to suggest, is something of a protracted ad hominem argument writ large. Genealogy is not mere history, a search for origins, verbal or material, but a kind of denuding, unmasking, stripping away pretensions of universality and merely self-serving claims to spirituality. Nietzsche presents it as if it were nothing but description, but his language shows it to be anything but that. Walter Kaufmann feels compelled to remind us that Nietzsche is not here defending noble or master morality and attacking slave morality,<sup>10</sup> but once he has finished describing the difference in terms of “nobility” and “excellence” on the one hand and “misery” and “pathos” on the other, need one doubt “Nietzsche’s preference” for one over the other? It is an ad hominem question: What sort of a person would want to be a slave and not a master?<sup>11</sup> And what sort of person would look at them as nothing more than a couple of alternative ways of living, “lifestyles”?

The argument of the *Genealogy*, briefly stated, is that what we call “Morality” is in fact nothing other than the development of a special set of particularly pragmatic “prejudices” of an unusually downtrodden lot of people. The twin appeal to history and social psychology is designed to account for—rather than to justify—moral principles and moral phenomena. Part of that account is that Morality consists of universal principles in order to impose some uniformity on a social world of individuals who are anything but uniform. It is the process that Nietzsche, after (but not following) Kierkegaard, calls “leveling.” Who benefits from this procedure? Obviously those who are worst off, the weak, but also, and perhaps equally, the mediocre. The system works above all to suppress the drives and the energies of the superior, the strong, those who would rather make something of themselves that “Morality” does not allow or, in any case, does not sufficiently recognize.

If what concerns us is not just obeisance to Morality but greatness, heroism, and artistry, then Morality falls far short of our ideals. From that perspective, Morality appears not as a virtue but as an obstacle. Again, this is not to say that for the sake of great ideals one ought to break the moral rules or abuse others. It is rather to say that most of the demands placed on us by morality are minimal demands. Of course, a Kantian would rightly reply that this is all that Morality can or should be expected to do, and the further desirability of heroic and saintly (“supererogatory”) behavior and of excellence in general is simply not what we mean by “Morality.” But when

moral imperatives are used to insist on uniform equality at any cost to deny or trump any and all non-moral virtues, we see a very different story. It is against such “leveling,” as supposedly dictated by the increasingly influential ideologies of democracy and socialism, that Nietzsche wages his campaign against Morality. He instead defends Homeric heroic virtues and Aristotle’s aristocratic morality against Kant’s universalizable (slave) Morality. Greatness is the goal, not just good behavior.

Universality, according to Nietzsche, is thus not so much a logical feature of moral judgments, as philosophers from Kant to R. M. Hare have argued, but rather part of the strategy of the weak to deny the significance of the non-moral (“hypothetical”) virtues and impose their own Morality on others. That, after all, is just what slave morality is all about: passing judgment on others in moral categories that may not be their own: “No wonder if the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief for their own ends and in fact maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that the strong man is free to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb—for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey.”<sup>12</sup> Thus even if universalizability were a (non-trivial) logical feature of moral language, one could raise the question why someone would adopt such a logic and language and why they would try so hard to defend and *justify* it as Kant and others do.<sup>13</sup> The ultimate goal of moral language is to undermine those who would be your superiors, and even if this doesn’t work one has the subjective advantage of self-righteousness, knowing that one is “right” and “good” while they are “wrong” and “evil.”

Noble morality also passes judgment, but the judgments are first of all *self-directed*, concerning one’s own virtues, and for the most part they are judgments of *self-praise*. “How many are the ways in which we are virtuous!” Thus Aristotle provides us with list of the virtues that he finds prevalent and generally praised among the aristocratic Athenians of the fourth century (B.C.E.). Each virtue listed is accompanied by two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. To fail at virtue or (worse) succeed at vice is indeed blameworthy, but Aristotle makes it clear that the primary concern of his ethics is virtue and excellence rather than vice and wickedness, which for the most part get only passing attention. Compare both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles on this score. Slave morality, according to Nietzsche, is obsessed with the category of evil, and its virtues are for the most part banal and mere obedience. For Aristotle, it is obvious that different virtuous men may nevertheless display different virtues in varying proportions.<sup>14</sup> The weapon of the weak, on the other hand, is a single scale of values that ignores or neutralizes virtues except for the minimal virtue of “obedience”—or worse, mere passivity—not doing wrong by not doing much of anything at all. (“Only the emasculated man is the good man.”)<sup>15</sup>

Whereas Aristotle’s aristocrat shows himself to be virtuous by “being himself” and doing well what he does best, Kant’s moral slave shows him-

self to be moral and to have virtue (in the singular only, not “virtues”) by *not* doing anything that is forbidden by the Moral Law. Thus it is far more common to universalize a negative commandment to abstain from certain actions (“Thou shalt not . . .”) than to universalize a positive prescription to do something. The law proscribes drowning someone, for example, but there are few “good Samaritan” laws that require a passerby to actually save or even try to help someone who is drowning. Indeed, in most states, it is not a breach of law to sit fishing while watching a person drown, “without lifting a finger.” (The much-debated philosophical distinction between “killing” and “letting die” is dependent on just the same dichotomy.)<sup>16</sup>

To enforce the supposedly singular (“absolute”) scale of values that Morality commands, a metaphysical presumption is required that “every ego is equal to every other ego.”<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, by contrast, is primarily interested in appreciating and defending interesting and important *differences* between people. The point of genealogy is to demonstrate the plurality of human histories and the essential difference between the values of the weak and the virtues of the strong. If Nietzsche errs here, I would suggest that it is in the paucity of moral types he discovers, not their plurality, and it seems odd to me that “strength and weakness,” which he too readily conflates with “rulers and ruled,” the politically advantaged and the socially disadvantaged, should constitute the definitive difference between them. Nietzsche sees this, and in some of his less flamboyant observations he makes it quite clear: “I have found strength where one does not look for it; in simple, mild and pleasant people, without the least desire to rule—and, conversely, the desire to rule has often appeared to me as a sign of inner weakness.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Nietzsche sees quite clearly that social power does not dictate mastery or noble morality, and slave morality is not unknown among those who rule. Nietzsche thus warns us again and again against confusing political power with strength and misfortune with weakness.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche often argues that what constitutes strength is the endurance of misfortune. But the crucial argument, as always, is not aimed against Morality or its putative justification as such. Nietzsche did not argue that Morality is “wrong.” Rather he continues to hammer away at the issue with a quasi-psychological question: What kind of people would choose to (or have to) live this way?<sup>20</sup>

## Is Genealogy a Genetic Fallacy?

*Historical refutation as the definitive refutation.*—In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous. . . . In former times . . . atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

Is Nietzsche's "genealogy" in fact nothing but a sophisticated version of the so-called genetic fallacy—the conflation of something's value and its origins?<sup>21</sup> We should not dismiss this dismissive view of contemporary moral theory too easily. It is certainly true—as Nietzsche says—that the genealogical argument is much more "interesting" than the often vacuous ratiocinations concerning the various forms of the categorical imperative. But "interesting" is not yet an argument, and we should be cautious about putting too much weight on Nietzsche's collective ad hominem argument. Indeed, he is cautious as well, and he is well aware of the dangers of the so-called genetic fallacy. In *Gay Science* (345), he writes, "Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value." In one obvious sense this is just what the genealogy of *ressentiment* does for us—as if our defense of the one sort of "fallacy" were to fall prey to another. On the other hand, if Nietzsche's "genealogy" is really more psychology than history (albeit presented in a specific historical context), then the charge of "genetic fallacy" may be quite beside the point. It is hard to argue, despite the still heavy Kantian bias in ethics, that the content of ethical analysis should not include the motives (as opposed to just the maxims) of those who practice an ethics. Indeed, Kant himself would insist that one cannot evaluate the "moral worth" of an action without considering as central the intentions (or the "will") behind it, and as Kant also points out, the distinction between the formal intentions of an action and the motives behind it may in practice be ultimately indeterminable.<sup>22</sup> But Kant argued that rationality (Practical Reason) may itself be motivating. Nietzsche dismisses this out of hand (although he elsewhere argues that reason is itself nothing but a "confluence of passions"). That raises the question anew: What does motivate moral behavior? Thus Nietzsche's genealogy of morals is, first of all, a thesis about the *motivation* of morality.

It has become apparent to many people, after a century of competition between Kant's style of ethics and utilitarianism, that the substance of ethics is not to be found only in mere maxims and their formal generalization or in the circumstances and consequences of acts and judgments. The past decades have seen a welcome resurgence of an ancient paradigm of ethics—now often called "virtue ethics." (Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is typically cited as the prime example.) The core claim of virtue ethics is the importance of moral character and virtues of character in determining moral worth.<sup>23</sup> I will spend a good part of this book trying to understand Nietzsche's version of virtue ethics, but for now, it will suffice to make the point that in the evaluation of character, a person's motives and emotions in acting are surely essential. An action performed out of noble sentiments is a noble action, even if the act itself turns out to be rather insignificant and inconsequential. An action expressing vicious sentiments will be vicious, even if (through error in judgment, by chance or by some sublime act of fate) it turns out to have benign consequences.



Moreover, the substance of ethics includes what one might generically call “feelings”—or, better, what Kant called the “inclinations”—which would include not only such Kantian *Gefühle* as respect and a sense of duty and the sweet Humean sentiments of sympathy and compassion but also the nasty negative emotions of envy, anger, hatred, vengeance, and resentment. Furthermore, emotions and sentiments—“passions”—not only explain the continuing motivation of what we do but also establish the framework within which a person not only acts but also lives a certain kind of life. Thus one could construe Nietzsche’s philosophy and what he would make of us in terms of a transformation of our emotions. Sartre famously writes that emotions are “magical transformations of the world.” One way to see the slave revolt in morals and the transvaluation of values is by way of such a “magical transformation” under the direction of the emotion of resentment. One way to capture Nietzsche’s own transvaluation is by postulating another magical transformation under the auspices of joy.

Where do motives and emotions fit into an ethical analysis? One familiar suggestion is the idea that they actually serve not only as motives but they also determine the ends and goals of action. They define our purposes. To a significant extent, it is their satisfaction that is the ultimate aim of moral (as well as non-moral) behavior. Adam Smith’s supposedly “impartial” gentleman acts not only “out of sympathy” but also in order to satisfy the demands of that sympathy. (E.g., “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”)<sup>24</sup> The utilitarian and the hedonist act not only *because* of the desire for pleasure but also *in order to* maximize pleasure, if not just for oneself then for the optimal good for all. Indeed, a fully reflective utilitarian will do so as a matter of principle (“the principle of utility”). But if the utilitarian insists that ethics must be based on the pursuit of pleasure (or happiness) and the moral sentiment theorist suggests that morality depends on such sentiments as sympathy, the door is already open to the suggestion that an ethics might be based on any number of other motives or sentiments, including pride, or anger, or love, or resentment.

It remains to be seen whether we live for pleasure or, as Nietzsche quipped, only the English utilitarian does, but it is by no means an unreasonable hypothesis that we live for *power* rather than pleasure and ultimately prefer an increased sense of self-importance to mere satisfaction. This is the empirical hypothesis Nietzsche entertains under the dubious but flashy title, “the will to power.” What if all or at any rate most of our passions were better described in terms of power or self-esteem or security and vulnerability than in terms of pleasure and happiness (versus pain and suffering). Resentment, for example, is above all an emotion obsessed with power and status—or rather, with the comparative lack of them. An ethics based on resentment, then, would strive ultimately to satisfy the resent-

ment, *even at the expense of pleasure and happiness*. Of course, the satisfaction of resentment might bring with it its own perverse pleasure (*Schadenfreude*) and a bitter kind of self-satisfaction (hardly “happiness”), but in any reasonable utilitarian terms such behavior would hardly be rational. All in all, resentment would seem to make everyone involved less happy, both the resentful and the resented.

We have to be careful how this idea is developed. Lack of power is not the only *cause* but the *content* of resentment, and resentment in turn is not merely the cause but the content of Morality, as Nietzsche envisions it. It is not the soil from which Morality springs (one of Nietzsche’s routine metaphors) but rather the structure (the morphology) of Morality as such. Of course, a sufficiently formal or narrowly focused account of Morality might be able to ignore this by concentrating only on the logical features of the “categorical imperative” or the consequences of an action rather than its psychological structure. (Bentham and Mill are both rather lax about specifying the precise nature of “utility,” whether it is pleasure or happiness or “desirability” or interests or preferences, and they disagree about whether it is quantitative or qualitative.) But at the very least, as dozens of ethicists have recently (and not so recently) argued, these formal and consequentialist accounts leave much that is crucial out of the account.<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche’s genealogy of resentment, accordingly, is not an instance of the genetic fallacy but a substantial moral insight.

Whatever his occasional claims to the contrary, Nietzsche’s genealogy of resentment is itself an ethical thesis. The study of moral “types” is not value-free, and “revaluation” is itself evaluative, not just descriptive. To put the point differently, meta-ethics is itself a way of doing ethics, though often indirect, subversive, even fraudulent—the familiar rabbit-out-of-the-hat trick in philosophy. A substantial normative conclusion is miraculously derived from a purely formal analysis of the “grammar” of ethical language or certain formal assumptions about rationality. Meta-ethics claims to be ethically neutral but Alasdair MacIntyre, in his attack on the entire “enlightenment tradition and its project,” has argued persuasively that modern meta-ethics is a nihilistic form of compensation (or resignation) for the loss of social consensus, and he makes an equally biting accusation concerning the loss of content in ethics.<sup>26</sup> He, too, argues that the essential missing ingredient is an adequate concept of the virtues and the kindred concepts of character and culture. Nietzsche’s emphasis on character and his sketch of moral typology help supply this missing ingredient.<sup>27</sup>

I thus find it surprising that MacIntyre identifies Nietzsche as a nihilist, the “last word” on the enlightenment project, and juxtaposes him against Aristotle. In chapter 5 I will argue in some detail that it would rather seem that Nietzsche should be one of MacIntyre’s main allies, together *with* Aristotle. Whatever else it may be, Nietzsche’s emphasis on nobility and resentment is an attempt to stress character and virtue (and with them, tradition and culture) above all else in ethics. A morality of nobility is an expression

of good, strong character. An ethics of resentment is an expression of bad character—whatever its principles and their rationalizations. This is why abstract ethical theories, allegedly logical notions of universalizability and most models of practical reasoning are suspect; they distract us from concrete questions of character, and, in addition, often provide not only a respectable facade for faulty character but also an offensive weapon for resentment. Reason and resentment have proven themselves to be a well-coordinated team in the guerrilla war of Morality and moralizing.

We have learned to distrust the motives that underlie such seemingly formal moves in moral theory, but we should also distrust any reductionist argument that claims neutrality while undermining some cherished ideal by showing its origins—of whatever kind—in something slimy, smarmy, or suspicious. Nietzsche sometimes denies that he is passing judgment on Morality, but one has to be a fool to think that there is nothing discouraging or demeaning about the suggestion that we should understand our current moral “prejudices” as “slave” or “herd” morality or to suppose that one can accept any such suggestion without looking upon morality with a kind of revulsion or embarrassment:

These bearers of the oppressive instincts . . . they represent the regression of mankind! And, “rather that we no longer have anything left to fear in man; that the maggot [*Gewürm*] ‘man’ is swarming.”<sup>28</sup>

Nietzsche’s characterizations of *ressentiment* are anything but ethically neutral (“the hopelessly mediocre and insipid man”), nor could they be—given the ethical content of the emotion itself. Resentment is an emotion of inferiority, of defensiveness, of vindictiveness. Walter Kaufmann is in one sense undoubtedly right when he reminds us that “it is not Nietzsche’s concern in the *Genealogy* to tell us that master morality is good, while slave morality is evil,” and indeed, Nietzsche insists that we overcome our childish tendency to think of all valuation in terms of Manichean “opposite values,” good and evil in particular. But in the last line of *Genealogy* I, he reminds us again that this rejection of “good and evil” does not entail the rejection of good and bad, and it is not only Nietzsche’s more Manichean readers who impose the polemical polarity of master and slave on the whole of ethics. It may be true that Nietzsche “wants to open up new perspectives,” but this does not subtract from the overwhelming impression, not just due to Nietzsche’s hyperbolic rhetoric, that Morality as such is something disgraceful, pathetic, despicable—and those who “invented” it were contemptible (even if they were also diabolically clever).

[The man of *ressentiment*] loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble. A race of such men of

*ressentiment* is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race; it will also honor cleverness to a far greater degree.<sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche insists that he is providing historical descriptions, not an evaluation as such, much as Heidegger and Sartre later insisted that they were providing phenomenological ontologies and not ethics. But in Nietzsche's case even more than in the work of his two illustrious successors, it is clear that there is much more to ethics than "the murky realm of values," categorical imperatives, and specific advice. Just as the jargon of "authenticity" or "own-ness" (*eigentlichkeit*) has its unmistakable if nonspecific moral imperatives, the unavoidable message of the diagnosis of resentment and the pathology-laden language that surrounds it is that slave morality is *bad*. So, too, master morality—albeit in refined and more artistic form and not as primordial brutishness—is not only good but in some sense *natural*. Nietzsche, like his moral revolutionary predecessor Jean-Jacques Rousseau, insists that "we cannot go back," that more than twenty centuries have had their beneficial as well as deleterious effects. We have become more spiritual, more refined, largely under the auspices of slave morality and Christianity. What we should aspire to, therefore, is no longer what he described as noble or master morality, though it is notoriously unclear what Nietzsche's "legislation" of morals for the future ought to look like.

Nietzsche never tires of telling us—a certain misanthropy clearly showing—that the *Übermensch* is clearly beyond us, and even the best of the "higher men" are still "human, all too human." And so we seem stuck with our "slave" or "herd" morality, and the neutrality of Nietzsche's genealogical diagnosis may be no more than a uniform disdain and an unhealthy distance from all things human. Indeed, one of the more awkward features of this philosophy that always insists that everything is perspectival and that there is no "God's-eye view of the world" is Nietzsche's continuing effort to get a view from outside humanity, to look at the whole of the species and all of its cultures from some seemingly external vantage point. But at the same time there is the unrelenting contrast of the *Genealogy* between what is natural and noble and what is reactionary and born of *ressentiment* and we are all caught up in this and have to decide who we really are and what we should do with ourselves.

Nietzsche makes it hard for us to avoid the uncomfortable acknowledgment that, yes, morality does protect the weak against the strong and, yes, it does sometimes seem to be the expression of resentment and, yes, it is often used to "put down" or "level" what is best in us in favor of the safe, the conformist, the comfortable. From a warrior's perspective—the perspective that Nietzsche absorbed from reading the *Iliad* and that so many American college students are taking away from Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger action movies—our everyday conception of morality does indeed seem limp and timid, conducive to civility perhaps but not to spontaneous self-expression, nobility or heroism. This is dramatic and polemical rather

than logical, but it is no “fallacy.” It is rather a shocking set of reminders of what we really value and (given our ‘druthers’) what we really want.

But does resentment lie behind Morality as such, as its underlying motive and definitive characteristic? Is what we call “Morality” in fact a “slave” morality, based on and an expression of weakness? This is much the same defensive question asked by Max Scheler, and my answer will be much the same too: Nietzsche had a series of powerful psychological insights but overstated and oversimplified them. There are aspects (and uses) of Morality (and Christianity) that do indeed invite a diagnosis of resentment, but it is wrong to think that the condemnation is therefore global, much less “the definitive refutation.” There are indeed “herd” and servile aspects of Morality, and the motivation of Morality may indeed (in part) be based on *ressentiment*. But even *ressentiment*, we shall see, has its uses.

### Perspectives on Responsibility: Nietzsche’s “Blaming” Perspective

In his *Genealogy*, Nietzsche makes a great deal out of the perspectival differences between noble and “slave,” but what he makes much less explicit is the fact that he also employs several quite different perspectives in his discussion of Morality. It is not just a question of what is good and what is not (whether *evil* or *bad*). That is, there are multiple perspectives through which one can describe and evaluate one’s agency and behavior and the agency and behavior of others as well as the overall nature of their actions. One such dimension of perspectival evaluation is that of *responsibility*, or, one could say, of agency itself. One might say, in terms defended by Bernd Magnus and Richard Rorty, that the language of personal responsibility is an *optional vocabulary*. There are any number of ways of describing our behavior (for example, as the product of physio-chemical processes) in which the language of responsibility is inappropriate. But in general, although by no means consistently, Nietzsche suggests that we are responsible for our behavior and the cultivation of our virtues even if he rejects, in Kant’s words, the idea of “Will as a kind of causality” and thinking of ourselves as “members of the intelligible [or supersensible] world.”<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche has a robust sense of agency, even if he rejects the exaggerated notions of freedom that Kant and some existentialists attach to it. His whole philosophy is couched in terms of tasks to be taken up and difficulties to be overcome.

There are at least two ways of talking about freedom and responsibility, though Nietzsche does not say much by way of prying them apart. They might both be considered theories of agency, a subtle and tricky notion. On the one hand, there is that long tradition that goes back to medieval notions of the Will, a distinctive faculty of mind whose function is to give a “push” to one course of action or another. One can trace this from Augustine through Aquinas to Descartes and then Kant. It is also central to the exis-

tentialist philosophy of Sartre. In Kant and Sartre, in particular, the theory of the Will requires removing agency from the world's network of causal connections. Kant does this by way of his "two standpoints" view (which might be construed as a form of perspectivism—see my argument in chapter 7). Sartre does it by way of a contentious phenomenological description of consciousness. (Sartre does not use the term *Will* in his analysis, but his "Being-for-Itself" of consciousness certainly serves much the same philosophical purpose.) But this Kantian-existentialist conception of agency leads to a number of serious philosophical problems, many of them forcefully prosecuted by Nietzsche. It requires that free choice entails a form of metaphysical freedom that in turn requires a contentious conception of "free will" and the "subject." This has recently come under enormous fire in philosophy, and it is routinely dismissed—with good reason—by social scientists.

But there is another conception of freedom and responsibility, one advocated by Hegel as well as by Nietzsche along with the ancients and certain modern "pagans" (e.g., David Hume and, perhaps, Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt). This is a conception of freedom and responsibility that is tied not to any mysterious notion of agency but rather to the narrative "fit" between an action (or an emotion) and the rest of a person's character, circumstances, and culture. It makes sense in terms of the narrative of one's life. The troublesome idea that an action or a decision must in some sense be a "cause of itself" and not caused by antecedent conditions need not play a role in this conception of agency. An action that "fits" and makes sense in one's life story can be said to be free (and one is thus responsible) even if the act in question is unconscious or semiconscious, instinctual or habitual. On this perspective, one might hold tight onto the notion of agency, but there is nothing mysterious about it, no special "faculties," no strange views of the "subject." There is no necessary connection between agency or responsibility, on one hand, and "free will" on the other.

It is also a mistake, and one that Nietzsche is particularly keen to point out, to think that the category of agency and the language of responsibility applies first of all or primarily in "one's own case," from the phenomenological or "first person standpoint." This is the view of Kant and Sartre, in particular, and when Sartre lapses into descriptions of other people's freedom and bad faith (e.g., in the four dubious examples in the "Bad Faith" chapter of *Being and Nothingness*), it is clear that he is demonstrating a kind of bad faith himself.<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, by contrast, is very clear that agency and responsibility have a primary application to *other people's* behavior as well as one's own. This, too, allows for a number of different perspectives. One perspective is what we have just been discussing, what one might call (following Nietzsche) the *diagnostic* perspective, that taken up by a psychiatrist or a "physician of the soul." Many of Nietzsche's most brutal ad hominem passages, especially those pertaining to *ressentiment*, exemplify this perspective. The diagnostic perspective renders notions of agency and responsibility

suspect, of course, but it is by no means obvious that Nietzsche opposes diagnosis to attributions of responsibility. It is also worth noting how captivating this can be. Such a perspective, once taken up, is by no means easily discarded. Medical students, admitted to psychiatric wards as part of an experiment, found that they were unable to establish their sanity once the psychiatric staff had accepted the diagnosis that they were psychotic. Even the most reasonable pleas and explanations were variously interpreted as paranoid, manipulative, and delusional behavior.<sup>32</sup> So, too, Nietzsche's targets would have good reason to squirm. Once we have read Nietzsche's diagnoses (Carlyle's dyspepsia, Kant's cowardice regarding the state), it is very hard to read their works in anything like the same way.

We can also adopt what (further following Nietzsche) we might call the moral perspective, or, more to the point, the *blaming* perspective, in which people are straightforwardly held accountable as the undeniable agents of their actions. Of course, their actions can also be praised and they can be forgiven, but I think "blame" best captures what Nietzsche takes to be the dominant motive behind such a perspective, both as Nietzsche understands it and, admittedly, as he exemplifies it as well. One might well note the pragmatic inconsistency—or common hypocrisy—of blaming others while absolving oneself of blame, and at the same time accepting praise for one's achievements. But this only underscores rather than undermines the perspectival nature of such attributions.

Nietzsche has a great deal to say about this blaming perspective, to be sure, but it can be fairly argued that he manifests it at least as often as he criticizes it. But the fact that Nietzsche so often adopts it should suggest that it would be an enormous mistake to assume that this perspective thereby presumes the heavy baggage of "subject" and "Will" that Nietzsche so frequently criticizes. Indeed, Nietzsche's main reason for rejecting these Kantian concepts seems to be his disgust with the blaming perspective, however often he adopts some more "naturalistic" version of it himself. (Throughout his works, he resolves to be less judgmental, e.g., in *Gay Science*, where he says, "I do not want to accuse. I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. . . . Some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.")<sup>33</sup> The point, however, is that there are alternative perspectives for the description and evaluation of both one's own behavior and others' behavior, and these alternatives are by no means exhausted by what one might summarily call the "causal" (or "deterministic" or "fatalistic" or "third person") and the "moral" (or "free will" or "agent-based" or "first person") viewpoints.

The blaming perspective is, as always, just one perspective among many. Thus if Nietzsche's *amor fati* formulations ("to want nothing different than it is") make him sound a bit too blasé about responsibility, that, too, is just another perspective. And, indeed, his heavy-handed use of the blaming perspective more than makes up for it. Against those recent commentators who have insisted that Nietzsche is no moral philosopher or moralist and gives us no concrete advice in his deliberations on morality, his head-bash-

ing use of the blaming perspective is a flat-out refutation. The harshness of the blaming perspective may be softened somewhat by its juxtaposition with different perspectives, but it is not thereby eliminated or neutralized. Against those who would rather read Nietzsche as an anthropologist who does not take a stand on the value of the perspectives he describes, we should always make it a point to remind ourselves what Nietzsche actually says and does in his fiery polemical writings. Nietzsche is, first and foremost, a fire-and-brimstone moralist. And if he sometimes sees through all of that and puts that, too, into perspective, it nevertheless sets the tone and establishes the overall perspective of his entire philosophy.



# Chapter 3

## NIETZSCHE'S PASSIONS

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As if every passion did not contain its quantum of reason.  
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never regard a grand passion as a destructive torrent upon which a man is swept into uncertain actions as by fate, and which, therefore is an excuse for them.  
—Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism."

Nietzsche is known for his passionate writings, but he also wrote and thought deeply, if not always consistently or systematically, about the passions, about emotion and the less rational and reflective aspects of human behavior. He was also a passionate defender of the passionate life—that is, a life filled with excitement, adventure, and pathos as opposed to a life of merely rational calm and tranquility. Emotions for him were not disruptions or disturbances in life. They constituted its very meaning. One way of understanding Nietzsche's moral perspectivism, and in my mind the most important way, is to understand him as writing from the perspective of the passions (and from the perspective of particular passions), not—as in most philosophers—from the supposedly singular and "objective" perspective of reason and rationality. Thus we get from Nietzsche what so annoys most philosophy professors but delights their students: seemingly unbridled enthusiasm, hyperbole, metaphor, ad hominem insults, and exclamation points instead of cautious hypotheses and careful arguments. What Nietzsche offers us is not in the mode of truth and proof but rather in the fashions of rhetoric and aesthetics. His vocabulary, accordingly, is far more concerned with what in meeker philosophers (David Hume and Adam Smith, for example) are called "moral sentiments" than with practical reason or reasoning. Such emotions as disgust, indignation, joy, fury, jealousy, pity, awe, envy, and resentment lie at the heart of Nietzsche's moral views, not to mention his pervasive obsession with "the will to power."

There are long-standing objections to Nietzsche for this—his seeming celebration of the irrational, his apparent rejection of reason and rationality, his emphasis on the "Dionysian" at the expense of "Apollonian," his

apparent obsession with “power,” his frenzied celebration instead of calm contemplation. And there is some truth to these charges, as well as considerable if scattered textual support to back them up. Nevertheless, I believe that the objections are deeply flawed and reflect a profound misunderstanding not only of Nietzsche but of the emotions and, I would even suggest, of the nature of philosophy. Nietzsche was not an “irrationalist,” whatever that is supposed to mean; much less was he consistently (or inconsistently) irrational. His enthusiasm and his hyperbole are not irrational—unless, of course, one tries to define excitement as in itself irrational. And he employs reason in the obvious sense that he writes philosophy with targeted questions, thoughtful criticism, and an attempt to comprehend what previous thinkers (he says) failed to comprehend. Why should such a display of rationality be dry and unenthusiastic?

Nietzsche did not, for the most part, celebrate irrationality. He rather highlighted and urged acceptance of those less obviously rational parts of the soul, our natural instincts, our appetites, our passions, our emotions. But these less cerebral aspects of the soul are by no means irrational either. Our appetites, for example, are necessary for our survival. Our natural instincts are arguably the result of evolution and presumably not detrimental to life even if not adaptive.<sup>1</sup> Emotions are not irrational either, a point that Nietzsche explicitly made on a number of occasions and in a number of very different ways. Emotions, he says, have their own rationality. What’s more, he suggests, rationality itself may be nothing more than a certain product or confluence of emotion.

Thus the charge of “irrationalism” becomes confused and falls apart on careful analysis. William Barrett’s classic “irrational man,” whether or not it applies to some others in the existentialist lineup (Kierkegaard and Heidegger, for instance), cannot be straightforwardly applied to Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> (I would actually argue the same for Kierkegaard and Heidegger.) Nietzsche (like Kierkegaard and Heidegger) throws the very notion of rationality into question.

And, we might add, philosophy is not just the business of employing and explaining rationality. For all of the emphasis that has been placed upon “reason” in the history of philosophy, even the greatest rationalists, for example, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, have insisted (in various ways) on the importance of passion and its ineliminable role in philosophy. It was Plato, after all, who defended philosophy as the product of *eros*, and Kant, before Hegel, who said that “nothing great is ever done without passion.” From this perspective, might see Nietzsche as the heir of even the rationalists, as far as his appreciation of the importance of passion is concerned. He tries to teach us how to think—and ultimately, how to *feel*—differently.

I would not go so far as to suggest that Nietzsche had a “theory” of the passions. Indeed, whether Nietzsche had any theories at all (and whether the purpose of philosophy is to produce theories) is a matter I do not want to pursue here. But it is clear that Nietzsche had some insightful things to

say about the emotions, both as a generic category and, more important and with much more detail, as particular phenomena in human life. (I will not make any sharp distinction between passion and emotion here except to suggest that passions are particularly strong and durable emotions.)<sup>3</sup> Consider, as a small initial sampling, Nietzsche's many comments on pity, on vanity, on resentment, on love and relationships, on being moved by music, on the various kinds of suffering, on enmity, and on vengeance. There is, moreover, his more generic praise for the passions, at least, for the "grand" passions of life and of art. Not all passions are grand, of course, but there is as much grandeur in the passions as there is in that "divine spark of reason."

### Nietzsche on "Deep" Emotions

We have to learn to think differently—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

Much of what Nietzsche had to say anticipated Freud and other psychoanalysts, particularly Adler and Jung, but so much of what he said went far beyond them as well. Freud, Adler, and Jung are frequently referred to as "depth psychologists," and so Nietzsche, too, is often referred to as a depth psychologist.<sup>4</sup> But we should ask, with Nietzsche, in what ways the human psyche is or is capable of being "deep." The term (like its more sophisticated analog, "profound") is variously used—and abused. Most often, these are simply terms of praise. Great poetry, great thoughts, and paradigm-shifting scientific theories are said to be "deep" or "profound," without any apparent reference to topography. Of course, such praise might also be ironic (my favorite example is mob boss Lee J. Cobb's snarling insult—"deep thinker"—to his unhappy attorney Rod Steiger in Elia Kazan's classic *On the Waterfront*). Sometimes Nietzsche uses it this way. His descriptions of passions and emotions as "deep" may sometimes be so understood. But "deep" usually indicates high praise, not sarcasm. This in itself is not very interesting or revealing. Despite his better efforts, Nietzsche is Manichean about so many things, good and bad emotions included. So the fact that he sometimes praises passions as deep or profound just because he approves of them should not surprise us.

But these adjectives have other, more "profound" uses in Nietzsche's philosophical psychology. Sometimes, anticipating Freud, he really does seem to mean some sort of topography of the mind or soul. Thus he is rightly construed as not only a forerunner but as a practitioner of "depth psychology." Accordingly, a passion might be distinguished from its more superficial manifestation or interpretation. So an emotion such as pity or love (the superficial manifestation) might in fact betray a "deep" structure of resentment and vengefulness, according to some of Nietzsche's harsher analyses. This reading is obviously at odds with the idea that depth meta-

phors are simply praise, since Nietzsche would certainly not want to grace the vindictive emotion of resentment with praise as being profound. But sometimes, for instance, when he refers to a state of mind as “pregnant,” he is referring to promise for the future and one might so read “depth” as having a temporal (rather than spatial) significance. Elsewhere, for instance, in his most famous reference to the “eternal recurrence” (in *Gay Science*), he substitutes a “weight” metaphor for the depth metaphor. But reading the depth metaphor as referring to the *real* emotion rather than the manifest emotion, the affinity with Freud is evident. The danger here is the temptation to reductionism, reducing the rich repertoire of our emotional life to one or two “basic” emotions. On this reading of some of what Nietzsche writes, we might thus take “the will to power” as the deep structure of all passions, emotions, and motives. I think that this monistic reading, however appealing (and occasionally backed by text), is in fact rather trivializing, as it erases many of the more interesting distinctions that Nietzsche so often makes concerning emotions and motives.

Furthermore, these proto-Freudian subterranean images constitute a strategy of self-deception, as Sartre so vigorously prosecuted fifty years later (in terms of what he called “bad faith”). We attribute to psychic “repression” our refusal to accept uncomfortable facts about ourselves and act on them. Nietzsche is a keen observer of self-deception and its practices, and one of his great virtues is his willingness to suspect in himself (and get us to suspect in ourselves) the easy tendency to allow pride to eclipse memory, or vanity to eclipse proper humility. (Humility, for Nietzsche, is not a “monkish virtue,” à la Hume. It is rather an essential virtue for the self-critical personality.) But even where there does not seem to be a strategy of self-deception, “deep” may mean “unconscious” in the sense that we do not acknowledge or understand our own motives and emotions. This does not make those motives and emotions more profound or praiseworthy, nor does it make them more interesting (which is not to deny that ignorance, self-deception, and denial are fascinating topics on their own).

Sometimes, “deep” may refer not to the motive or emotion but to the interpretation (by the analyst), and thus it may serve as a kind of self-congratulation (“how wise one is to recognize this”) rather than a comment on the quality of the passion. (The continuing debate over “the deep structure of language” from Noam Chomsky to Steven Pinker says a lot more about the ingenuity of psycholinguists than it does about the origins of language.) But it may be quite wrongheaded to separate an emotion from its interpretation. Indeed, I suspect that Nietzsche would say that an emotion *is* an interpretation. Thus a deep emotion is an insightful emotion, a serious emotion, one that touches on or perhaps even grasps one of the fundamental truths about life. It is, in Nietzsche’s words, “life-enhancing.” In Heidegger’s (early) philosophy, angst seems to play this role. It is not just an emotion (as, say, fear is an emotion) but a profound insight into the nature of one’s existence. But it is important to note that, at least some-

times, a passion can be both life-enhancing and self-deceptive. Indeed, it is the latter that serves the former (especially in Nietzsche's peculiar philosophy of art as deception and artists as "liars," and in his insistence on the need for myths in culture).<sup>5</sup>

Nietzsche wrote of the romantics, "they muddied the waters to make them look deep." I take this as a serious warning. What seems deep may not be, and what is superficial—in the literal sense of being entirely on the surface—may in fact be quite profound. (For instance, it may involve seeing large but previously unnoticed patterns.) Freud's architectural imagery of the mind as having a mysterious basement may be misleading. I think that Nietzsche rightly avoids such topographical metaphors as rigorously as he avoids Cartesianism, but that leaves the matter of "depth" itself mysterious. To what extent does the structure of the mind (or of its various manifestations in emotions and the like) allow for "depth"? To what extent is such talk our muddying our own waters? I take the notion of deep emotions as a problem, not that I doubt that there is a point to such talk but because it seems to me that the spatial topographical models are very misleading.<sup>6</sup> In brief, I think that Nietzsche's precocious reply to Freud is that what makes an emotion deep is its insight, its "truth," not its presence in the unconscious.

### The Truth of an Emotion as Its Meaning

Anger, then, is not merely a feeling or a bodily response, it is an *orientation to the world*.

—Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in the World*

It is a fairly recent "hermeneutical" insight that an emotion is not merely a feeling or a physiological response reaction but a meaning, a significance, an orientation toward the world. I think that Nietzsche (at least sometimes) saw this quite clearly, despite his frequent insistence on "physiological" accounts of psychology. (It has been suggested that Freud, too, might be so interpreted.)<sup>7</sup> But many if not most of Nietzsche's psychological insights cannot be intelligibly read except through such an interpretation, with the additional proviso that not all meanings are therefore either transparent or life-enhancing. (As I expressed this idea many years ago, many emotional meanings are demeaning.)

To say that the truth of an emotion is its meaning is to give some real substance to the "depth" metaphor and the idea of "deep" emotions. An emotion is meaningful insofar as it engages with the world in a more or less meaningful way. Infantile rage is not only demeaning, it is virtually meaningless (which is not to say that there are not interesting causal, developmental, evolutionary, neurological, social, and possibly even strategic accounts of such rage). Resentment, by contrast, is deeply meaningful. It

embraces a history, a keen sense of injustice, and an imaginary future. It reaches out to other people as allies (the co-oppressed), it schemes and plans. It not only engages but also creates a world rich in details and values. Love, too, may be deep, when it embraces a history (and not only one's personal history), when it becomes creative, when it involves true intimacy and friendship and glorious ambitions for the future. But "love" that is only lust and infatuation, a desire of the moment, or an empty bourgeois ceremony has no such depth at all.

Suffering, for example, is sometimes said to be deep when in fact it is only suffering. For Nietzsche, what is important is that suffering has *meaning*, and the "depth" of the suffering is more likely the depth of the meaning than the depth of the feeling as such. One might feel miserable because of the flu or allergies, but no one would call such suffering "deep." One might feel more or less numb because of grief at the loss of a loved one, but, depending on one's relationship to the loved one, it is the loss itself that is profound. And where one suffers because of a loss that is not just personal but widely shared and essential to one's way of life—for example, the death of a beloved religious or political leader—one's suffering may be deep indeed, but not because of any particular depth of feeling. It is the loss that's deep, not the feeling. Suffering might also seem deep (at least to the sufferer) where it is really a matter of feeling sorry for oneself. There may be a kind of recursion involved, in which feeling sorry for oneself (about some particular loss or failure, for instance) invites an even more basic sense of feeling sorry for oneself (about losses or failure in general), which invites a still more basic sense of feeling sorry for oneself (for one's very existence or general worthlessness). But it seems to me dubious to call such self-imposed suffering (perhaps for the sake of *Weltschmerz*) deep. Thus Nietzsche analyzes the supposedly deep feelings of worthlessness and sin among Christians and some of his romantic brethren.

If emotions are meaningful, then emotions can be "false." (I take it that this is one antithesis to their being "deep.") The falseness of the emotions his music expressed was a good reason for Nietzsche to turn on Wagner, one of the great heroes of his life. Wagner went from being "profound" to being "false," as devastating an accusation where emotions are involved as where there is a more explicit commitment to "truth."<sup>8</sup> In this case, "false" has a double meaning: first, that Wagner did not really believe in the religious passions his music evoked; second, that the passions themselves were false—phony, based on illusion and wishful thinking. An emotion can be false, in other words, if the world it supposedly engages with is an unreal world. This is very different, I should quickly add, from reacting to a world largely of one's own creation, as in resentment or, much more extreme, paranoia. There the world is real enough, but it is shaped quite dramatically by the emotion in question. In Christianity, by contrast, there is no such world. Thus Nietzsche attacks Christianity, Christian morality, and even Christian love because what is claimed to be deeply spiritual is in fact so

much falsehood, deceit, and tepid superficiality. Romantic love, too, is often assumed to be deep, but sometimes it is only troubled and confused. In fact, there is a strong temptation, again, to treat suffering, frustration, and trouble in general as deep, as revealing of the “soul,” but sometimes this is only the rationalization that comes with muddied waters.

Sometimes one gets the impression that Nietzsche criticizes pleasure as shallow but praises and even celebrates pain and suffering as deep. It is as if pleasure has no meaning, but pain and suffering do. Some of this has to do with Nietzsche’s (traditional) German disdain for utilitarianism and its philosophy of comfort. In a more sophisticated vein, it has to do with a thesis he shares with Aristotle, that pleasure is not the end of action but rather a kind of bonus, an afterglow (“like the bloom of youth,” Aristotle says, perplexing commentators for twenty centuries). For Nietzsche, we get pleasure from exercising and feeling our power. But that renders pleasure necessarily superficial, as that which comes *on top of* other feelings and activities. It’s meaning is nothing other than the meaning of the activity or potency that produces it. Nevertheless, in some of his discussions of the psychology of the artist, Nietzsche talks (with characteristic enthusiasm) about the *Rausch* (intoxication, frenzy) that he considers essential to art (or, rather, essential to inspired and great art):<sup>9</sup> “The condition of pleasure called *Rausch* is precisely a feeling of high power . . . *strength* as a feeling of mastery in the muscles, as suppleness and pleasure in movement, as dance, as levity and *presto*.”<sup>10</sup> But elsewhere, he condemns the cheap and superficial rapture inspired, most notably, by Wagner’s music: “I know very well what sort of music and art I do not want—namely, the kind that tried to intoxicate the audience and to force it to the height of a moment of strong and elevated feelings. This kind is designed for those everyday souls who in the evening are not like victors on their triumphal chariots but rather like tired mules who have been whipped too much.”<sup>11</sup>

Such comments are confusing. To some extent they reflect Nietzsche’s growing disillusionment with Wagner and should probably be construed as an *ad hominem* argument against the Bayreuth audiences. But to what extent is Nietzsche giving us a general conception of what it means to experience depth and meaning in pleasure, and to what extent is he saying in effect that pleasure as such is never deep or meaningful? Is *Rausch* indeed pleasure at all, or is it really a sense of power (which may in turn be pleasurable), where power—as mastery, as creativity, as inspiration—is deeply meaningful in precisely the most desired sense? When Nietzsche says that *Rausch* is “a *condition* of pleasure,” is that a cause or a criterion of true pleasure, pleasure that is deep as it is based on strength and power (and is superficial, even pathetic, when it is not)? But if power is said to motivate our every action, then power as such cannot mark depth. Nor is mere *Rausch*—which can be the result of a number of easily but illegally obtained substances these days—necessarily deep or meaningful in any of these senses. Here, the pleasure is truly meaningless (although the experiences

that follow might well become attached to insights that may be significant, even 'true').

The *Rausch* of an artist, the "high" or "flow" one experiences when the notes or images or words seem to be just pouring out in a kind of continuing ecstasy, is the image Nietzsche means to celebrate here, and for a creative person, that is indeed an experience to be treasured. But it is not as if the experience itself is the goal or to be striven for. What constitutes the experience and gives it meaning is ultimately the work, the results. There is an "objective" aesthetic subtly at work here. No matter how much I enjoy or even revel in dancing, my clumsiness limits the meaningfulness of my experience. I may have a momentary experience of *Rausch*, but it is far short of the Dionysian ecstasy that Nietzsche writes about. But, of course, when Nietzsche danced—and I assume that he was not much less clumsy than I am—one might suppose that what he experienced really was *Rausch*, not because of his dancing skills but because of the genius of his personality and the richness of his "soul." The work, the result, was not the dance but Nietzsche's *Werke*. But this raises another point of deep interest about the passions and how Nietzsche viewed them. The object and expression of emotion are not necessarily what they seem to be. When Nietzsche danced, the truth of his passion and his pleasure was to be found in his philosophy.

### In Defense of the Passions: Nietzsche on Human Nature

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and to never can pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.

—David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*

Nietzsche is one of the few philosophers to attempt an unrestrained defense of the passions. David Hume would seem to be another, but his defense is concerned more with the moral "sentiments" than with passions as such, and his thesis has much more to do with the motivation of behavior than it does with the meaning of life, which is what certainly concerns Nietzsche. When Nietzsche writes in his *Birth of Tragedy*, "Only as an aesthetic phenomenon is the world justified," we may surmise that he is (obliquely) talking about the passions and how we *feel* about life, not just how we think or philosophize about it. But Nietzsche's high praise of the emotions is not much in evidence throughout the Western tradition of philosophy. In the Middle Ages, to be sure, from Augustine to Aquinas and Averroes, there were passionate if rather constricted arguments about the role of passion versus the role of reason in religious *faith* (a discussion picked up again by the German romantics and by Kierkegaard and the religious existentialists).<sup>12</sup> But for the most part, philosophy has always been the business of reason, and emotions have been considered alien if not enemies to reason.



Despite high praise for the passion of faith, much of the Middle Ages was devoted to the chastising of the sinful emotions. Gregory the Great declared pride, envy, and anger—not to mention lust and the others—to be “deadly” (a corruption of “Mortal”).

Even in ancient times, the Greeks and Romans sometimes equated emotions with possession and madness. Socrates famously warned his follower Crito against them. The Stoics thought all emotions irrational, not in the usual sense that they were bestial and “blind,” but rather in the more sophisticated sense that they were mistaken judgments about oneself and one’s place in the world. Horace thought anger was madness, as did Ovid of love. Nietzsche, of course, was a serious scholar of the Greeks and their passions (and their views *about* the passions), and he had much to say about the ancient ideals of calm tranquility (*apatheia*), and peace of mind (*ataraxia*). As for the moderns, Nietzsche rightly saw that the turn to epistemology and the narrow focus on knowledge was eviscerating to philosophy, “a doctrine of abstinence,” perhaps even philosophy “in its last throes.”<sup>13</sup> What was missing was passion and concern for the passions. Thus Descartes and the other rationalists held fast to the centrality of reason (even though Descartes and Spinoza both had much to say about the passions). Kant famously declared the “inclinations” (including the passions) to be irrelevant to morals, and many contemporary philosophers follow him in this. Accordingly, the debate about the passions, good and bad, has lost its medieval urgency, when the battle of virtue and vice (sin) motivated most philosophy. Thus Nietzsche applauds the medievals (I cannot ascertain how ironically): “Neither antiquity nor our own age has such extensive breadth of soul: its spaciousness was never greater.”<sup>14</sup>

“Il faut tuer les passions” [It is necessary to kill the passions!], screams Nietzsche in his *Twilight of the Idols*. “All the old moral monsters are agreed on this.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on to chastise the New Testament in particular, but it is by no means Christianity alone that is guilty of this war on the emotions. In an earlier section of the same book, Nietzsche had set the blame squarely on Socrates, who had made reason into a “tyrant.” He often rips into Kant, whom he calls “the Chinese of Königsberg,” presumably a racist reference to the apparent affectlessness of a people whom neither Kant nor Nietzsche had often encountered. Indeed, “the East” shares some of the blame as well, although what Nietzsche knew of Asian philosophy was more or less limited to India and the “near” East. Buddhism, which he knew from Schopenhauer, is no friend of the passions either. The Noble Truths of Buddhism declare that life is suffering. Suffering comes from passion (desire, “craving”), which is eliminable. One cannot imagine a view more opposed to Nietzsche’s. To appreciate Nietzsche’s view of the emotions—and to appreciate also his passionate style and his moral philosophy—one must begin by acknowledging the fact that he saw much of the history of humanity in terms of this war on the passions and the passionate life. He thus diagnoses

morality as “anti-nature” (in *Twilight of the Idols*), and he sometimes sees the whole of the Judeo-Christian tradition as culminating in the attempt to extirpate the passions.

In response, Nietzsche attempts a wholehearted defense of the passions. The idea of getting rid of dangerous passions, as dentists pluck out teeth that hurt, Nietzsche considers an idea of colossal stupidity.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, like so many philosophers of the preceding century, was an avid student of “human nature.” But Nietzsche, unlike his predecessors, gives short shrift to reason as the key to human nature. Human nature is defined, for better or worse, by its characteristic passions. Human nature, or the “human, all too human,” may be characterized by such pathetic emotions as resentment and vengefulness, and by way of a slap at the moral sentiment theorists of the eighteenth century (and Schopenhauer, of course), sympathy, or what Nietzsche criticizes as pity. But human nature is also characterized by its potential—or at least by the potential in some individuals—for the grand passions, those passions that make (or could make) everyone’s life richer and more worthwhile. Such are the passions of the great artists and at least one of the great philosophers. It is such passions, and the products of such passions, that characterize what is best in human nature, that speaks to us all through art and culture, if we cultivate the passionate nature to appreciate them.

The idea of defining human nature by reference to the emotions is by no means novel with the philosophers. It has long been a popular thesis that “deep down, we are all the same,” where “the same” refers to those emotions (desires, affections, sentiments, and passions) that are universal, as opposed to those aspects of culture (including cultivated or socially constructed emotions, desires, affections, sentiments, and passions) and may well differ from society to society. (It remains to be argued, of course, whether what is “deep down” are libidinal urges or universal archetypes, a “will to power,” or the *Genesis*-bound need for salvation. So, too, it remains to be argued whether the deep, dark cellar of the soul is ruled by instinct or controlled by culture-bound forces of repression. But the underlying supposition of much of traditional philosophy and psychology is that whatever is “deep down” is universal and definitive of human nature.) It does not follow, however, that the socially constructed emotions are necessarily “unnatural.” Many philosophers, including Nietzsche and Hume, consider some such emotions as quite natural even if they are also in some sense artificial. Hume considers our sense of justice such an “artificial” virtue, for instance, and Nietzsche considers most of the passions cultivated in art, especially, as nevertheless natural insofar as they conform to human nature.

But the idea of human nature has been greatly distorted—first, one could argue, by the basic metaphysics of Christianity, the distinction between the soul and the body, and then most famously by Descartes, who put his imprimatur on the mind-body dualism that still preoccupies philosophers today. But Nietzsche anticipates, I think, Heidegger’s attack on Carte-

sian dualism and on the very idea that emotions (or anything else) can be “in” (much less “below”) the mind. The mind, Nietzsche sometimes says, is a convergence of forces (in Deleuze’s overly abstract terminology), “a mass of passions flowing off in different directions,” in Nietzsche’s own “fluvial” imagery.<sup>17</sup> The mind is not a peculiar “place.” It is not “inside” of anything. It has no properties that are not ultimately biological (but without taking this term in the reductionist fashion in which it is used so often today.) Human nature has nothing to do with a mind conjoined to a body. We are embodied, biological creatures, and *that* is our nature. (“Oh, you Stoics, how could you *not* live according to nature?”)<sup>18</sup>

The emotions, according to this picture, are interpreted not as “inner feelings” pressing to “get out,” the “internal enemy” of *Twilight* V, 3, but as natural, biological phenomena, an essential part of the make-up of a value-seeking organism. But an emotion is not just “in the mind,” and then “expressed” in bodily behavior. An emotion is nothing other than its expression, but this is not to say (with the later behaviorists) that there is *only* expression. So, too, an emotion is no more than its “physiology” (again, in a nonreductionist sense), but this is not to say that there is only physiology. If I were to summarize Nietzsche’s strategy, it would go something like this: we should “psychologize” ethics in order to get rid of the false metaphysics of transcendence that has come to define Judeo-Christian Morality, and we should “biologize” psychology in order to avoid the mistakes of Cartesianism and the overemphasis on the contents of consciousness. The resulting biological ethics is thus purged of both transcendence and mentalism.

I think that this physiological approach leads to some remarkable oddities in Nietzsche’s psychology, even as I appreciate the fact that it was a bold corrective to Cartesian psychology and a healthy alternative to Christian theology. One might note that Nietzsche here parallels William James, who published his well-known essay “What Is an Emotion?” about the same time (1884) that Nietzsche was writing his more systematic psychological works. Although their analyses were quite different (James still identifies the emotion with a conscious sensation), their provocative point was the same: an emotion is basically a physiological phenomenon. An emotion is not just a mental experience. It is a bodily response. And if one wants to object that this leaves a lot out of an account of emotion, it should be countered that in the context of the times, it adds (or returns to) something essential. (It is worth noting that in Homer’s works, always an essential reference for Nietzsche, psychological states are almost always represented by physiological descriptions.)<sup>19</sup> Thus Nietzsche, like James, shifts the discussion of the passions away from the contents of consciousness and back to the body. And like Hume, Nietzsche insisted on “naturalizing” ethics, which meant not only grounding ethics in human nature (the medievals had done this by identifying human nature with the God-given soul) but restricting human nature to human psychology and, therefore, to human physiology.

## Nietzsche's Physiological Psychology

A "drive" is provisionally to be understood [to be] the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation. . . . The simplest and likeliest assumption as to the nature of drives would seem to be that in itself a drive is without quality.

—Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

Freud began with the idea that sexuality is a drive. His problem is that he did not know what a drive is or what it is for a drive to be sexual.

—Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature*

I said that Nietzsche does not have a theory of emotions, but piecing together various general comments<sup>20</sup> one can put forward at least the following suggestions: emotions, like all psychological phenomena, should be considered essentially physiological phenomena and, in particular, manifestations of *drives*. And yet talk about emotions is not separable from talk about ethics and human flourishing as well as theories (no matter how merely tacit or inchoate) about "human nature." Emotion and reason are neither opposed nor separate. Emotions involve their own rationality, and, strategically, these may be more effective than the "best-laid plans" of conscious thought. Against Descartes, Nietzsche insists that emotions are not transparent. They are therefore prone to self-deception and misdescription even without bringing in concepts like "the Unconscious." But, most importantly, emotions (passions) are, all in all, good and desirable in general rather than suspicious or sinful, as in traditional Stoic philosophy and (with many qualifications) in Christian psychology. Having emotions (but not any or all emotions) is healthy. Not having emotions is nothing less than inhuman (which is not to say "like an animal" but rather like a robot or a computing machine). If some emotions are unhealthy and debilitating (e.g., resentment), others are healthy and invigorating, and all can be explained functionally in terms of the needs and well-being of the person.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, emotions have structures and strategies and are not just physiological "happenings," "without quality," in Freud's somewhat confused description.<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche's drive theory is frequently expressed in terms of blind, irrational forces, notably the physical concept of energy and the more palpable image of raging torrents. In his notes, for example, Nietzsche comments, "The most short-sighted and pernicious way of thinking wants to make the great sources of energy, those wild torrents of the soul that often stream forth so dangerously and overwhelmingly, *dry up* altogether, instead of taking their power into service and economizing it."<sup>23</sup> Freud, too, adopts this "hydraulic" model of emotions, understanding "the psychic apparatus" in terms of volume and pressure, damming and flow, channeling and sublimation, but I think that the hydraulic metaphor leads to both a serious misconception of the emotions and a disastrous sense of irresponsibility regard-

ing them. A torrent may have a direction, but it has no purpose and no representative “quality.” It suggests an unstoppable force that must be dealt with, coped with, and cannot simply be suppressed. One can dam up or rechannel a torrent but one cannot (except over time, with population explosion and environmental stupidity) get rid of one. So, too, as Nietzsche often tells us, only fools and hypocrites want to eliminate the emotions. But so, too, I would argue, we should be very cautious about buying into the hydraulic model, one prominent version of which was the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century theory of drives.

Nietzsche’s metaphors are not all so hydraulic. Most of them are biological, physiological, psychological. Floods and torrents are mindless, in every sense, but biology, physiology, and psychology are not, even without bringing in any Cartesian talk of “the mind.” Biology is teleological; it involves purposes and functions. Physiology is not mere anatomy or histology, a mere catalog or map of dead organs and tissues. It is how the body *works*, and the purposes and functions live organs and tissues serve. And psychology, even in the dark days of fanatic behaviorism, could not get rid of implicitly functional talk, including such terms as *stimulus*, *response*, and *reinforcement*. The problem was how to bring biology, physiology, and psychology together without bringing in the problematic language of Cartesianism. And Nietzsche finds a way, by formulating his physiological psychology in terms of instincts and drives.

If we consider Nietzsche’s strategy of psychologizing ethics and biologizing psychology, we can readily appreciate why such language would appeal to him. “Instinct,” in particular, is (or was) standard fare in biology. Nonhuman animals’ behavior was routinely described and explained in terms of instinct. In fact, all too often (and utterly falsely) it was assumed that *all* animal behavior, except for a few tricks learned by dogs and trained seals and some charming anecdotes about clever chimps, could be explained by instinct. But it was also all too often assumed that virtually *no* human behavior could be so explained, except perhaps sex differences (with an obvious political and moral agenda). Thus Nietzsche’s freewheeling use of “instinct” to explain human behavior was an important part of his polemic, and if he overused this device (multiplying instincts without much empirical evidence and referring even to learned behaviors as instinctual), its polemical intent should nevertheless be appreciated.

Even today, the polemic continues to attract attention and provoke excitement. Steven Pinker, who suggests in his book *The Language Instinct* that the ability to speak a language (but no particular language) is inborn has attracted a great deal of controversy. Sociobiology, a subject “synthesized” by E. O. Wilson back in the early 1970s, continues to be a flash point for not only biological but political arguments. Sociobiology too places a heavy emphasis on our biological inheritance to explain social behavior, and though the word *instinct* has grown less fashionable, the basic thesis—the biological basis for our behavior and our continuity with the animals—

remains much as Nietzsche (and, of course, Darwin) suggested back in the nineteenth century. So, too, the current topic of “evolutionary psychology” attributes much of human behavior, such as the emotion of jealousy, not to environment, learning, and culture but to evolution and genetics.<sup>24</sup> The concept of “drive” is even more appropriate for Nietzsche’s purposes. Whereas “instinct” is (properly) defined in terms of inherited (or “innate”), unlearned, stereotypic behavior (e.g., a bird’s nest-building according to its particular species), “drive” does not carry nearly so much biological baggage. Drives can be acquired as well as inherited. Drives can vary from individual to individual as well as being common to a species. And whereas the purposiveness of an instinct is ambiguous (a bit of behavior may serve certain purposes for an animal but it may make no sense to say that the animal *has* that purpose, and an instinct may have been “selected for” by evolution but nevertheless become anachronistic or even harmful), the very notion of “drive” carries with it the idea of a direction and an aim.

The sex drive, to take the most common example, is the drive to mate. That is its aim, and satisfying that aim is fulfilling the drive. Drives are quite appropriately conceived of as “pushes” to behave in certain ways, and yet they can readily operate without any conscious awareness, including any awareness of their aim. An adolescent may be sexually driven but may experience and understand this as nothing other than an irritation or an urge to misbehave. The experience and understanding may supplement the drive, but they are not responsible for it. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of drives is that they often escape our understanding but nevertheless have their way with us. (Thus drives play a central role in Schopenhauer’s conception of the irrational Will.)

Nevertheless, I do not take Nietzsche’s celebration of the drives very seriously. I appreciate his effort to biologize psychology, and I think that conceiving of (some of) our behavior in terms of drives instead of in terms of conscious deliberation and planning makes excellent sense. But we should remind ourselves why drive theory, which was all the rage in the early twentieth century, went flat (and gave way to behaviorism). It wasn’t that drive theory ignored conscious thought and planning (indeed, behaviorism would have none of that, either). It was rather the multiplication of drives to explain much too much, and, consequently, little if anything was actually explained. Where the drive is rather specific, for example, the sex drive as a drive to mate, the explanation is plausible but rather vacuous. Animals have the drive to mate, and it is obvious why evolution should select for this (as opposed to animals that had no interest in mating) in straightforward terms of natural selection. But where the drive can take on other manifestations, such as in the desire for same-sex partners, the sex drive theory suddenly becomes ad hoc, requiring all sorts of supplemental explanations to make sense of it. It is no longer a simple “push” but a complex of motives and environmental shaping devices. Indeed, we should now ask what is gained by saying that people have a “sex drive” as opposed to say-

ing that (most) people want some sort of physical relationship with others, and this seems to be inborn but subject to all sorts of environmental and cultural factors.

One might plausibly say that all of the appetites represent drives, but once we move past the acquisitive appetites, food and thirst, perhaps (in some animals) a drive to establish and defend one's "territory," it all starts to look quite suspicious. Is there a sleep drive (granted that a person deprived of sleep will get sleepy)? Is there a work drive (granted that primates, unlike dogs and cats, tend to be restless and tend to look for "something to do")? Is there a drive to spirituality? Or beauty? Or adventure? Or status? Granted, all of these things can be motivating, and perhaps they can be shown to be so in a species-wide or trans-species way. But to so multiply drives deprives the concept of the force it once had, to stress the "natural" biological origins of certain sorts of desires. Thus I find Nietzsche's multiplication of drives disturbing and self-defeating. When he speaks of "the will to truth," for example (where "the will to" is his most common expression for "having a drive to"), I think that Nietzsche is either speaking tongue-in-cheek or eviscerating his own theory. It would be hard to say what "grounds" such drives. Today, neurological syndromes might provide the distinctive "modules" that cause the various drives. But what is particularly interesting is that the neurological modules do not match up at all neatly with the putative drives, suggesting that expanded drive talk is simple-minded on the neurological as well as the motivational level.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's theory suffers from a paucity of drives. This is, perhaps, the place to make a first foray into Nietzsche's infamous notion of "the will to power." Nietzsche often indicates that the will to power is a drive; indeed, it is the prototype for all drives. Sometimes, he suggests that it is one among several (or many), but the most powerful drive. Other times, he suggests that it lies at the basis of every drive. Elsewhere, it is a feature of drives, and thus not a particular drive of its own. For example, he writes that each drive has its own will to power and thus includes a drive to overcome all of the other drives.

I find this jumble of hypotheses incoherent. What would it mean to say of a drive that it has a drive? To be sure, Nietzsche often personifies emotions, passions, and drives in this way. It is harmless enough to say that "pity wants . . ." or "resentment needs . . ." so long as we keep clearly in mind that this is shorthand for saying that "a person who pities wants . . ." or "the resentful man needs . . ." But when Nietzsche suggests (for the most part in his unpublished notes) that drives have drives it does not look as if he is saying "a person with two drives will act on the stronger of the two." It rather looks as if there is a struggle going on in a person between two animate and independent beings, the one drive that wants  $x$  and another drive that wants  $y$ . The real model is Darwin, and a sort of "survival of the fittest" (not Darwin's term) of the drives. To be sure, Freud was mightily influenced by similar metaphors (and toward the end of his career he started talking

explicitly about different psychic “agencies”). But this undermines Nietzsche’s most basic intent, to get rid of such explicit, deliberate, conscious agencies and return to the more impersonal structures of biological explanation.

Moreover, this attempt to explain all drives as manifestations of the one drive—the will to power—demands that we thus further inquire what makes the manifestations so different, and how they can come into conflict. This will probably result in our distinguishing those manifestations of the will to power that seek pleasure from those that seek status from those that seek domination from those that seek to avoid humiliation from those that seek self-esteem, and so on. So what have we gained? What we have lost is Nietzsche’s keen eye for the *particular* motives and emotions that move us in this or that situation.

I think that Nietzsche’s pressing the will to power in an account of the various motives that explain our “moral” behavior is an extremely fruitful and interesting contribution to “moral psychology.” It is an excellent counter to the often mindless hedonism that is assumed in so much of ethical theory. But his tendency to elevate the will to power to absolute status, in addition to betraying the residual (and unwanted) influence of Schopenhauer, undercuts the very genius of Nietzsche’s hypothesis that *some* (not all) behavior is motivated by desires that we would rather not recognize. And as for his emphasis on drives and instincts, I think we can appreciate and accept Nietzsche’s Darwinian attempt to explain human behavior in continuity with animal behavior without either becoming reductionist or dismissing the dramatic complications of consciousness and culture in all of this. In most cases, Nietzsche’s use of “drive” can simply be replaced by “passion” or “emotion” or “desire,” and his thin theory of the drives thus returns to a rich theory of the multiplicity and complexity of the motives of human behavior.<sup>25</sup>

One must admit that the hydraulic model or metaphor and with it the image of mindless drives has taken a firm hold on our language. To be sure, it “feels as if” emotions “flow” through us, “rise up” in us, are “about to explode” in us. But this only pushes the question one step back: why does it feel that way? Why does the language of flow seem to fit “the stream of consciousness” so well? Or is it the other way around, that we cannot think of our psychic life in any other terms because we now have no other terms? (Cf. “We believe in God because we have grammar.”) Between Nietzsche and Freud, one might argue that the drive theory of emotions has gained hegemony in our self-understanding, but I would argue that they both also suggested something far more promising, best represented, perhaps, by Freud’s “talking cure”: What if having an emotion were more like “having something to say”? No spatial metaphors there, and insofar as the “flow” imagery is the least bit applicable, it applies only to the results of saying—the flow of *parole*—rather than to forces going on “in a person’s mind.”



Or consider some of Nietzsche's own scattered suggestions about "harmonizing" the mind,<sup>26</sup> aimed at Plato, derived from his own love of music and no doubt inherited from Schopenhauer and Buddhism (although more akin to Taoism). That, too, is a truly nonspatial model for emotions, and though one might talk of "flow" in the rather minimalist sense of "the flow of the music" (i.e., the flow of time) this model certainly doesn't recommend either an engineer or an economist. It requires a musician, or, following Graham Parkes, a composer. But Nietzsche's model of emotions, despite his more semioticist and musical inclinations, remains firmly tied to physio- and physical imagery. This might be argued to betray a reductionist impulse that even the greatest of thinkers find all too tempting.

### Nietzsche on the Emotions as Strategies

In short, in emotion it is the body which, directed by consciousness, changes its relations with the world in order that the world may change its qualities.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*

Nietzsche (much like the French moralists of the previous century)<sup>27</sup> enjoys personifying the passions, that is, talking about what a passion or emotion "wants" as opposed to talking more literally about what the person who has the passion wants. But, also like the French moralists, he does this with a bold thesis in mind. The passions are not merely the result of physiological disturbances, nor are they merely the causes of such disturbances. The passions are or at least can be *strategies*, or as I put it earlier and less controversially, ways of engaging with the world. This is apparently quite at odds with Nietzsche's physiologizing of psychology. It is a view of emotions that contains an element of *agency*, not to mention more than a modicum of what is now called "emotional intelligence."<sup>28</sup>

The idea that an emotion can be a strategy was later defended by Sartre, but Nietzsche certainly anticipated it. The most obvious examples are his many analyses of the "ulterior motives" of various emotions and moral sentiments, love and pity in particular. But the most pervasive and dramatic example is his analysis of resentment (to which I will devote a good deal of my attention), in which resentment is presented as a strategy for the self-protection of the weak. But how, then, does this fit with Nietzsche's attempt to reduce psychology to physiology? It is by no means obvious that the two sorts of analyses—the physiological and the strategic—fit together in any neat way. This is, on the one hand, one of the most persistent problems in the analysis of the emotions, most obviously in Descartes, who famously struggled to reconcile his physiological analysis in terms of "animal spirits" with his quasi-purposive analyses of the emotions as such ("Love is an emotion of the soul caused by the movement of the spirits which incites it to

join itself willingly to objects which appear to it to be agreeable").<sup>29</sup> That problem, to put it in an overly Cartesian way, is that physiological analyses of emotion tend to ignore both intentions and intentionality, while intentional analyses of emotion are not clearly "grounded" in physiology and too easily tend to appear disembodied.

But, on the other hand, we can resolve this seeming conflict if we give up Cartesian dualism and think of physiology itself as purposive, not only in the familiar sense in which biological functions are defined by their teleology but also in the much more radical sense in which physiology is not just a matter of dumb organs performing their proper functions but also includes learning and coping. Such learning and coping takes place on a fairly primitive "noncognitive" level, as in the development of antibodies against novel infections and the learning of "spontaneous" movements in response to subtle changes in the environment. (Think of "learning to breathe" at high altitudes or learning to hold your breath under water.) Of course, much more than this is involved in learning and employing the emotions as strategies, but the point to be made first of all is that purposiveness and physiology are not necessarily opposed. There are strategies (if we want to call them that) at the very core of living physiology, and especially for a philosopher such as Nietzsche, who often talks about his physiological psychology in terms of "drives" and "instincts," such an account is clearly both appropriate and helpful. It means that we can talk sensibly about emotional strategies without supposing the (clearly implausible) idea that we consciously and deliberately plan our emotions with an eye to their purposes and results.<sup>30</sup>

Such talk of emotional strategies makes more sense if we stop looking exclusively at self-reflective human consciousness and instead look to the animal kingdom. Looking at animals, we are much less inclined to think of an emotion as a conscious process (indeed, when we do so, we are committing the dread scientific sin of "anthropomorphizing"). Animal behavior involves awareness of the world, to be sure, but it is wholly bodily. A happy dog does not feel happiness that it *then* expresses by vigorously wagging its tail and jumping around. Its happiness *is* its vigorously wagging its tail and jumping around. Nevertheless, even animals do not just emotionally *react* to circumstances. They *use* their emotions and emotional expressions to manipulate circumstances, especially the emotions and behavior of their cohorts. Beta-male monkeys give false predator screams, to momentarily fool their larger kin away from the food. Puppies whimper not only out of discomfort or from fear but *in order to* solicit the attention of their mother. It would be foolish to talk about "acting" and "pretense" in such situations, but it makes good sense to speak of both physiology (perhaps even of inborn predispositions) and of strategy. It is only in talking about humans that we are so tempted by Cartesianism (which is why Descartes thought that animals were nothing but machines). In animals, physiology and strategy go unproblematically together. So why not in humans as well?

Cartesianism is the problem. Nietzsche's biologism is the answer. We are biological creatures with an inbuilt need to exert and express ourselves. We do not just live in the world but shape it and create it through our emotional engagements. This is our nature, and it is not just *human* nature. If Nietzsche occasionally goes overboard and (following Schopenhauer) suggests that the "will to power" pervades all of nature, what remains perfectly sensible is his insisting that it is not exclusively a human phenomenon but one that extends a good way down the phylogenetic ladder. This is not anthropomorphism but its very opposite, understanding ourselves in terms of the behavior of other animals. Thus our understanding of human nature is not so tempted to overly focus on the self-reflective and purely conscious features of our emotional life. Our emotions are our ways of being-in-the-world, or to borrow another Heideggerian phrase, our emotions are our ways of "being tuned" to the world.

We see in other people—if not always so easily in ourselves—the emotional strategies through which they (we) navigate and cope with life. One does not get a "glimpse" of an otherwise hidden emotion when one catches another person's eye. That is another metaphorical vestige of Cartesianism. And if Nietzsche suggests that, ultimately, one experiences only oneself,<sup>31</sup> that should not be understood as Cartesian solipsism (or as a merely trivial analytic point). It is to say that it is only through understanding (or misunderstanding) ourselves that we understand (or misunderstand) other people, and (just as important) the other way around. To see other people's emotional behavior as merely a symptom or a sign of something hidden and inaccessible to us is to employ a false conception of (hidden) cause and (manifest) effect and to fall into one or another of Nietzsche's "four errors."<sup>32</sup> Again, an emotion is not a cause, nor is its expression a mere effect. We live our emotions not privately but publicly (even when we are alone or disguise them well). We are not Cartesian souls trapped in animal bodies. We are animals, and our human natures are evident in our peculiar animal existence, which may be complicated and subtly strategic but is by no means defined (much less *exclusively* defined) by consciousness and self-reflection and by those strategies that are hatched of conscious thought and deliberation.

### Life-Enhancing and Life-Stultifying Passions

All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity—and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they "spiritualize" themselves.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

The emotions, according to Nietzsche, can be divided into two categories. In *Twilight*, he famously refers to these as the "life-enhancing" and the "life-

stultifying” passions. There are, of course, any number of other divisions that might be made (and Nietzsche, despite his high reputation with the poststructuralists, seemed to thrill in divisive polarities). And one might well object to the oversimplification involved in this particular scheme, as if all emotions had a single ethical dimension and had value quite independent of their context. But the point to be made here is that all emotions have value, and different values, and that the very idea that emotions as such are either good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, moral or immoral, is simple-minded. This is not a new point, of course. The Greeks were quite clear about the complex role of emotions in ethics, and the medieval philosophers spent considerable effort distinguishing them (by way of accounts of sin and virtue). Even Kant says compassion is “beautiful,” though it has no “moral worth.”<sup>33</sup>

One predictable aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of the passions is his use of master-slave metaphors. In itself, this isn’t very interesting. “Master-slave” is a pervasive image in Nietzsche (as in German philosophy before him). But we might note that it is also a pervasive metaphor in the entire history of the passions in philosophy. One of the most enduring metaphors of reason and emotion has been the image of master and slave, with the wisdom of reason firmly in control and the dangerous impulses of emotion safely suppressed, channeled or, ideally, in harmony with reason. The master-slave metaphor has traditionally displayed at least two features that still determine much of the philosophical view of emotion today, the inferior role of emotion—the idea that emotion is as such more primitive, less intelligent, more bestial, less dependable, more dangerous and thus to be controlled by reason, and more profoundly, the reason-emotion distinction itself, as if we were dealing with two different natural kinds, two conflicting and antagonistic aspects of the soul. Even those philosophers who sought to integrate them and reduce one to the other (typically reducing emotion to an inferior genus of reason, a “confused perception” or “distorted judgment”) maintained the distinction and continued to insist on the superiority of reason. It was thus a mark of his considerable iconoclasm that the Scottish skeptic David Hume, in the eighteenth century, famously declared that “reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions,” but even Hume, despite an ingenious analysis of the structure of emotions, ultimately fell back on the old models and metaphors. It is in this long-standing context that we both should appreciate the historicity of Nietzsche’s use of “mastery of the passions” language and can also appreciate his attempts to get beyond that. Thus the radical force of Nietzsche’s quick claim, “As if every passion didn’t contain its own quantum of reason” and, in general, his defense of the passions.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s frequent treatment of emotions in the metaphor of streams and torrents conveys the strong sense that emotions are forces of nature barely within our control and separate from the self. In the

second volume of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche tells us, “A man who is not willing to become master over his wrath, his gall and vengefulness, and his lust, and who tries to become a master in anything else, is as stupid as the farmer who lays out his field beside a torrential stream without protecting himself from it.”<sup>35</sup> That looks suspiciously like a metaphor from Plato’s *Republic*, including Socrates’ rejection of the pleasures of the body and his defense of a rationalism that Nietzsche clearly despises.<sup>36</sup> Thus in *Twilight* Nietzsche writes that “All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity—and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they ‘spiritualize’ themselves.”<sup>37</sup> But this suggests a much more interesting and sophisticated conception of the emotions, one in which emotions develop and learn, one in which the emotions are cultivated. Quite contrary to the “emotions as drives or instincts” theory, our emotions are thus not given and fixed but malleable and the product of culture, experience, and upbringing. They are not, in the strong sense that Nietzsche seems to intend, just “natural” at all. What it means for an emotion to “wed the spirit” or “spiritualize” itself is, of course, a crucial question. But at the very least, we can be sure that in Nietzsche this means that the emotions can become vehicles for an exquisite appreciation of the finer things in life, elegant not only in their expression but in their very engagement with the world. Quite the contrary of a torrent to be mastered, our emotion is or can be itself a kind of mastery.

I think what Nietzsche, with too many mixed metaphors, is getting at is a thesis more insightful and more personal than the usual “mastering the passions” patter. It fits into his much larger “dialectic of the self” (or what Parkes calls “composing the soul”), in which the self and what belongs to the self is negotiable, always in question, always “in play.” The tradition, before and following Nietzsche, that takes the emotions to be strictly “other,” the agitations of the body infecting the soul or the “it” from below, fails to appreciate the extent to which the self includes and embraces (not yet to say “chooses”) its emotions, the extent to which it is constructed of them and motivated to compose itself according to their own ideas. Nicolas de Malebranche (quoted by Adam Smith) says that “every passion creates its own justification.”<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein, we might say that every passion *is* its own justification, in the sense that each passion both has its own autonomy and distinctness and contributes to the overall blend of the soul, “the grand arc of a total passion.”<sup>39</sup>

The emotions, like our own bodies as infants, at first strike us as something “other,” as beyond our control. Gradually—sometimes suddenly—we learn control, mastery, we make them our own. With cultivation and practice, we can become quite skillful, graceful, elegant, “completely in control.” And yet, any great artist will tell you (they are often anxious to do so) that their relation to their “daemon” or “muse” or simply “pas-

sion" is still one of intimate otherness. Thus Parkes points out that "it is a maxim of depth psychology that when something of one's own is constantly denied it becomes alien, other, and thereby disturbing—if not terrifying" and Nietzsche responds by insisting that we "deprive the passions of their terrifying character and thereby prevent their becoming devastating torrents."<sup>40</sup> Freud certainly picked up the maxim here, declaring that "where there is id, there shall ego be." The passions both define the self and are not of the self, as, in infancy, the body both escapes the self and yet defines the self. To understand the shadow role of the passions as both self and not self, as in control and beyond control, is an essential part of Nietzsche's distinctive romanticism and, I would argue, his inchoate theory of the emotions.

Like Freud after him, or, rather, anticipating Freud, who may or may not have copied him, Nietzsche defends an "economic" model of the emotions. An emotion is an investment, an investment in how things are or could be, and as such it incurs costs and aims at benefits. Thus we can understand the difference between life-enhancing and life-stultifying passions as the difference between wise and stupid economics, between enriching the future or squandering it away by getting wholly caught up in past offenses and injustices. That is why love (though not the Christian kind) is so "grand," and that is why resentment (as we shall see) is the very paradigm of a life-stultifying passion. But unlike Freud, Nietzsche is no good bourgeois, accustomed to capitalism and quite taken with economic ways of thinking. Nietzsche claims to be far more spiritual. His materialism was for the most part confined to his enthusiasm for Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius and ancient atomism. In England, intellectual life had been thoroughly taken over by the (relatively) new economic vocabulary, notably in the philosophy of political economist John Stuart Mill and his updated version of "utilitarianism." But Nietzsche despised Mill and his movement and considered them vulgar (as he surely would have American pragmatism with its emphasis on the "cash value" of ideas). But one need not take such economic talk all that literally.

Graham Parkes suggests that Nietzsche means to suggest the root of "economics" in the Greek *oikos* (household, where *oekinomicus* meant, for Aristotle notably, something like household management),<sup>41</sup> indicating the domestication of the emotions. I doubt that Nietzsche would use "domestication" in such a positive light, especially when discussing the power of the passions. One domesticates a dog or a cat, not a lion. And becoming a lion, in one of Nietzsche's favorite metaphors, is certainly not to be identified with becoming domesticated. Nevertheless, the economic metaphor makes sense in the context of Nietzsche's many fluvial metaphors of emotions and passions as streams and torrents, so long as we think of these as meaningful and not as mere forces. But if an emotion is a torrent, it is nevertheless *our* torrent, and one for which we are ultimately responsible.

## The Will to Power and the Passionate Life

Nothing has become more alien to us than that desideratum of former times, “peace of soul,” the *Christian* desideratum; there is nothing we envy less than the moralistic cow and the fat happiness of good conscience.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Antichrist*

I have abstained for the most part from making very much of much less analyzing Nietzsche’s famous notion of the “the Will to Power.” I think that the notion serves an important purpose as a number of particular and limited hypotheses, namely, that some (much?) of human behavior is motivated by the need for status, by the desire for control, by the attempt to shore up one’s resources and defend oneself. Thus considered, it stands opposed to hedonist hypotheses to the effect that people act in pursuit of pleasure and/or in avoidance of pain. But it is clear that, in Nietzsche’s more ecstatic moments, the Will to Power hypothesis came to mean much more to him, in ways that are not readily intelligible.

Nietzsche’s remarks concerning “the will to power” begin in full force in *Daybreak* (1881) and culminate in his clearly outrageous overstatements that begin his last philosophical work, *The Antichrist* (1889, published 1895). “Will to power” has been interpreted in all sorts of ways, from Heidegger’s extravagant and implausible claim that it is the Being of Nietzsche’s metaphysics to the much more sensible and defensible hypothesis mentioned above, the psychological hypothesis that much (most) human behavior is better explained by the pursuit of power (or pursuit of the *feeling* of power) than by the pursuit of pleasure (and/or the avoidance of pain). But the phrase “Will to Power,” which Nietzsche obviously relished, really doesn’t make much literal sense in his philosophy. He strives at virtually every turn to distance himself from Schopenhauer’s metaphysics and his pessimism, and so he has many nasty things to say about the “Will.” Understood as that mysterious faculty or agency that Kant postulated at the base of all rational behavior, Nietzsche would not consider it for a moment. Even understood as the general realm of subjectivity, of desire and emotion—Schopenhauer’s understanding of the term—Nietzsche would and should have his doubts. What is this mysterious “inner” realm (even leaving aside the dubious claim that it is “the thing-in-itself”)?

Nietzsche occasionally makes (or seems to make) some pretty wild claims about the Will to Power. In *Beyond Good and Evil* §36 he toys with the idea of Will to Power as a universal explanatory principle, but it is far from clear that he ever asserts anything in addition to his playful ruminations. In his unpublished notes he tries out some truly astounding claims about Will to

Power as metaphysics and the principle of all nature (which Heidegger uses as the basis for his interpretation), but those notes are so at odds with Nietzsche's overall campaign against metaphysics, and they were in any event unpublished (and Nietzsche showed no intention of publishing them), that they are best ignored or relegated to occasional footnotes. As for the psychological hypothesis, that serves Nietzsche well, more often as a guiding theme than as an explicit theory, in his insightful studies of human behavior and morality. (In his early use of the phrase "Will to Power," it should be pointed out that Nietzsche doesn't praise it at all, much less think of it as a virtue. Rather, he diagnoses it as the "dirty little secret" behind most putatively moral human behavior.) It is not hedonism that drives us but the pursuit of power, and Nietzsche gives us hundreds of examples in which this seems to be so. But I think we are cutting Nietzsche's thesis too thin when we simply mark the contrast between pleasure and power just as we are giving him much too much leeway when we take seriously his occasional thought experiments in which Will to Power becomes the essence of everything. I think that there is a much more plausible and grand thesis that is waiting in the wings.

"Power" (*Macht*) serves as a powerful label for the ambitious and aggressive motives that Nietzsche sees operating in most human behavior, although it has often been pointed out the many ways in which such a term (as opposed to "strength" or "vitality," for example) is misleading. *The Will to Power* would seem to negate both Nietzsche's admirable psychological pluralism and the enormous richness and variety of his various diagnoses. Nietzsche displays considerable confusion as to whether power is an expression of strength or the desire for strength, whether it is the motive (the source of the drive) or the goal, whether it is the feeling of power or the achievement of power, as well as whether it is power over others or power over oneself that is at issue. Nietzsche's warrior metaphors certainly make it seem as if it is power over others that is at issue, but the whole of Nietzsche's campaign for a rich passionate life make it clear that it is power over oneself, self-mastery, that is at stake. But, as I suggested above, this does not mean mastery over one's passions, master-slave style. It rather refers to the cultivating, enriching and heightening of one's passions. Thus I think that we would do much better to understand the Will to Power as the Will to Vitality, the Will to Life, the Will to *Live*, or, even better, not as a kind of Will at all. It is, instead, an odd and unfortunate name for what Nietzsche really wants to defend, *the passionate life*, living with passion and therefore not an *aspiration* to do so.

The hallmark of Nietzsche's affirmative ethics, the upshot of his saying "Yes!" to life, is what one might call *the passionate life*, a life defined by emotions, by impassioned engagement and belief, by one or more quests, grand projects, embracing affections.<sup>42</sup> It is also sometimes characterized, by Goethe in *Faust*, by Kierkegaard as well as by Nietzsche, in terms of frenzy, vaulting ambition, essentially insatiable goals, impossible affections. We



should contrast such a conception of life with ordinary morality and the ethics of “being a good person” as well as the age old philosophical quest for passionless “peace of mind” and “tranquility” (*apatheia* and *ataraxia*). It is a vision of life that burns brilliantly rather than rusts inexorably. A Dionysian temper of life is suggested by dynamic rather than static metaphors, notions of “energy,” “enthusiasm,” “charisma,” even mania.<sup>43</sup> It is also the erotic conception of life suggested by such poets as Homer, Byron and (Allen) Ginsberg, occasionally weighted down with despair and *Weltschmerz*, perhaps but buoyed by joy and exuberance as well.

Throughout philosophy (East and West), there has been staunch resistance and loud condemnation of strong, violent emotion—the sort that is said to “sweep us away”—as at best untoward but more often disastrous, even fatal. Ethics has long been defended (even by Plato) as the employment of reason in opposition to the unruly passions, and modern ethics (Kant, in particular) has quite decisively opposed reason to the “inclinations,” but especially to the passions. And even in Aristotle, it turns out that the virtues are “states of character” and not passions. It is obvious that many if not most of the virtues involve concern for the emotions, but too often in a negative way. Courage, for example, has much to do with *overcoming* fear, as Aristotle argued at some length in his (*Nicomachean*) *Ethics*. Phillipa Foot has famously argued that the virtues are “correctives” of emotion, keeping in check the more vulgar, self-interested emotions.<sup>44</sup> Most of the traditional vices (avarice, lust, pride, anger, and perhaps envy, though notably not sloth) are readily defined as excesses of emotion. Too often, however, the *absence* of any such emotion is counted as virtue (abstinence, chastity, modesty, etc.) Thus Nietzsche warns us (in various places) against identifying the “emasculated man” with the good man.<sup>45</sup> It was David Hume, reacting to this long opposition, who famously insisted “reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions,” thus reversing the long-honored priority of reason and sticking it to those who would degrade the passions. But where Hume was content to defend the gentle “moral sentiments” and “calm passions” under this banner, Nietzsche heaps scorn on pity and other sentiments that he finds wimpy, merely “sentimental,” or worse. Indeed, he takes them at their worst, shot through with smugness, a bullying superiority, and hypocrisy.<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche claims something far more revolutionary (in keeping with his usually unacknowledged romantic background): reason is and ought to be the slave of even what Hume called the “violent” passions, including, perhaps, some of those traditional vices and “deadly sins” that so much of the tradition has warned us against. But, better, those passions can and should be cultivated and mastered in their own terms.

The pizzazz of the phrase “the will to power” captures this general vision of the passionate life while making clear that it’s not hedonism or ordinary happiness that is at issue here. The will to power isn’t just any passion. It is passion directed to self-mastery and self-expression. It embraces such particular passions as pride (a “deadly” sin for Christians, but a virtue to

the Greeks). It embodies anger and its aggressive kin (another sin for Christians, but again a virtue to the Greeks—Aristotle insisted that only a “dolt” doesn’t get angry when he ought to.) It includes joy, but mainly that energetic joy that comes with victory and strength, not the quiet and quietist “bliss” praised by Christians and Buddhists, and, more recently, by Spinoza. As the ultimate value, it embodies rather than opposes rationality, and the power Nietzsche celebrates should be understood in terms of force of character and the success of the passions in a larger scheme of human flourishing. Thus happiness (in its usual sense) is not essential to flourishing, nor is “success” in its more mundane sense. Human flourishing, for Nietzsche as for Aristotle, is living a life worth not only living but celebrating, in which greatness and in particular greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*) is a much more central consideration than feeling happy and content or achieving success in one’s career. Indeed, Nietzsche would be the first to say that the passionate life is rarely conducive to such ordinary well-being, and it is in this that the formulation “the will to power,” though highly misleading, marks his basic disagreement with Bentham, Mill, and the other utilitarians.

In Nietzsche’s book *The Gay Science*, the very title indicates a defense of the passionate life, *La gaya scienza*, the life of the troubadours, a life of longing (*languor*) and love. Nietzsche’s “immoralism,” accordingly, has often been taken to rather be akin to aestheticism, that is, the thesis that ethics and ethical judgments reduce to or can be translated into aesthetics and aesthetic judgments.<sup>47</sup> I think that there is a great deal of truth to this, a truth that Nietzsche shares with some ancient Chinese philosophers, in particular, some of the Taoists. (Even Kant suggests it when he talks about compassion as “beautiful.”) But then I think that Nietzsche’s emphasis on the passions and, in particular, his vigorous notion of “the will to power” emphasizes not aesthetics but something else, “energy,” “enthusiasm,” “strength,” as well as “self-mastery,” which does not mean the conquest but rather the cultivation of the passions. This is obviously opposed not only to Kantian practical reason and utilitarian calculation and hedonism and those more benign conceptions of emotion in ethics defended by the moral sentiment theorists and (closer to Nietzsche’s heart) by Schopenhauer. After all, what was central to Schopenhauer’s thinking and to his pessimism was the Buddhist set of premises to the effect that “life is suffering” and “suffering comes from *craving*”—which would presumably include the passions. Nietzsche’s antipessimism (hardly an “optimism”) begins by denying what Schopenhauer had affirmed, not that life is suffering but that life should therefore be lived without passion. To the contrary, Nietzsche tells us, it is by way of the passions that life has its meaning, and thus the best life is the vibrant harmonies of the well-composed passionate life.

# Chapter 4

## NIETZSCHE ON RESENTMENT, LOVE, AND PITY

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The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Among those passions Nietzsche recognizes as “life-stultifying,” the one which he by far spends most of his energy attacking is the singularly malevolent emotion of resentment, which he calls *ressentiment*.<sup>1</sup> Slave morality, he tells us, is a defensive reaction against the values of the more powerful, a reaction that is born of resentment. I want to talk about the nature, uses, and vicissitudes of resentment and locate resentment and the other “reactive” emotions within the scheme of Nietzsche’s general conception of the passions. Oxford philosopher P. F. Strawson has recently created quite a stir in the analytic debates over the “free will problem” with his essay “Freedom and Resentment,” in which he outlines the significance of the “reactive emotions” in our conception of ourselves and others in what I have called “the blaming perspective.” One could, I think, pursue a similar argument with reference to Nietzsche, that our sense of responsibility (especially the ascription of responsibility to others) is part and parcel of that perspective which employs resentment as its driving motive. Nietzsche, of course, is critical of this perspective, but I think the philosophical insight is the same. Resentment and responsibility are part of the same conceptual brew, and though one can ascribe responsibility without resentment (for example, in praise and admiration), one cannot easily imagine resentment without the ascription of responsibility.

There are other reactive emotions, that is, emotions whose nature is essentially a reaction to (or against) other people. That unpleasant but close-knit family includes envy, spite, pique, and of course that peculiar emotion, *Schadenfreude* (delight in other people’s misfortunes). Other emotions are somewhat kin, such as jealousy and indignation, but the differences are informative. Jealousy requires an involvement and a sense of right that are absent from envy, and indignation includes a sense of moral right that is notably absent from many reactive emotions. In this chapter, I want

to explore some of these similarities and differences in detail, but for now, it is enough to note that all of these emotions are to be distinguished by the fact that they require another person, a person who is in one way or another blamed or held liable, as their object. The obvious contrast would be an emotion such as pride, which is (at least arguably) both self-directed and wholly laudatory. But love and pity, which would seem to be dramatic contrasts to the reactive emotions, are more akin to resentment, according to Nietzsche. Love seems to be an emotion directed at another in a wholly laudatory way, but Nietzsche argues (among other charges) that it is ultimately the most selfish and possessive of emotions. So, too, pity would seem to be all caring and concern for other people and waive any claim that they are responsible for their plight. But in some cases, at least, such claims turn out to be false and hypocritical, based instead on resentment and an invidious concern for one's own superiority.

Resentment is the emotion that Nietzsche focuses on, and for good reason. Resentment is most obviously directed *against* others (as opposed to love and pity, for instance), but unlike hatred and contempt, for instance, it does so from a marked perspective of *inferiority*. Rather than taking responsibility for one's own inferior position, resentment always projects the responsibility onto other people (or groups or institutions). Simply stated, resentment is a vitriolic emotion that is always aimed outward and whose presupposition is one's own sense of oppression or inferiority. Nietzsche's most profound philosophical ad hominem argument is that people who defend Morality are in fact expressing their resentment, and the "moral" values that they present as ideal and objective are in fact nothing but the expressions of bitter resentment and should be understood as such. They may be understandable reactions to what oppresses and threatens, but they do not have any Moral much less absolute or divine status.

As a master if perhaps overly imaginative philologist, Nietzsche traces the language of noble and slave morality back to the nobles and slaves of ancient times. He suggests that our most cherished values originated not among those who were the best and brightest of their times, but among those who were the most oppressed and impoverished. The dominant emotion in the evolution of Morality, in other words, came to be not pride in oneself or one's people but a defensive prejudice against all of those who succeeded and achieved the happiness that one could not oneself achieve. The ancient Hebrews and then the early Christians, Nietzsche argues, simmered with resentment against their ancient masters and concocted a fabulous philosophical strategy. Instead of seeing themselves as failures in the competition for wealth and power, they turned the tables ("revalued") their values and turned their resentment into self-righteousness. Morality is the product of this self-righteous resentment, which is not nearly so concerned with living the good life as it is with chastizing those who do live it. In its extreme form—asceticism—it is the aggressive *denial* of the good life, even insofar as one is able to achieve it.

Morality is neither justified nor refuted by its historical or psychological origins. The nature of the motive that drives one's action need not necessarily undermine the action's value (or, for that matter, guarantee it). But it is not only Nietzsche who insists that the rightness (or wrongness) of an action has much to do with its motives and intentions. It is very much in agreement with Kant, for example, that Nietzsche asks, Is acting "in conformity with" the moral rules sufficient to be moral (or Moral)? And the answer, for both of them, is clearly "no." One has to be properly motivated as well; one has to have the right intentions. As Kant puts it, one has to act for the sake of duty and duty alone, motivated by reason and not by our inclinations. But even Kant freely admits that the actual motives of our behavior may be unknown to us. Among those inclinations may well be such self-absorbed and bitter emotions as resentment and "ulterior motives" that have nothing to do with duty at all. Thus Nietzsche's *ad hominem* argument emerges within the Kantian scheme: insofar as "moral behavior" is motivated by resentment, it is thereby despicable. Kant's (complementary) argument is that insofar as our action is motivated by duty, it has "moral worth." The difference between Nietzsche and Kant lies in the difficult question, What is to count as an "inclination"? Why are respect for the moral law and the urge to do one's duty not, for Kant, inclinations? How do some inclinations undermine the claim of an act to moral goodness while others do not (if even compassion has no moral worth)? Nietzsche, who would reject the very distinction between reason and the inclinations, would argue that the motive of resentment may be just as relevant to the evaluation of morality as the intention to do one's duty.

It is unclear for Kant whether resentment would undermine or simply be irrelevant to moral worth, assuming (as both Kant and Nietzsche do) that motivation is complex and both respect for one's duty and resentment of others are possible motives. Nietzsche would deny that there is any such motive as a sense of duty for its own sake, but he would clearly insist that if there were any such motive it would not eclipse but should rather be explained in terms of the resentment that accompanies it.

### What Is Wrong with Resentment?

What is wrong with resentment? Why does pointing out that someone is acting (or theorizing) out of resentment undermine their moral authority? Resentment cannot be despicable just because it is an inclination or a feeling, for all acts, according to Nietzsche, are motivated by the inclinations—our desires, passions, and emotions. Indeed, it is action supposedly motivated solely by reason that he finds most suspicious (and he therefore suspects that resentment may be the actual motive). The problem with resentment cannot be its lack of "objectivity" either, since Nietzsche denies that *any* moral authority is objective in the required Kantian sense. Neither

is the problem the apparent egoism of resentment, for Nietzsche often argues that all acts are essentially egoistic: the question is rather, “whose ego?”<sup>2</sup> One might well object to the hypocrisy of claiming to be selfless while defending rules that are clearly to one’s advantage, but it is not even as if deceit as such is a vice. Indeed, Nietzsche (like Machiavelli) sometimes seems to quite admire it and he practices it in his work with some regularity. Nor can the problem be that resentment (like vengeance, to which it is closely related) is notoriously self-absorbed and obsessive. All passions and virtues are in some sense self-absorbed and obsessive, according to Nietzsche, and that (as opposed to the “disinterestedness” of reason) is one of their virtues.

Resentment undermines claims to authority, according to Nietzsche, because it is essentially *pathetic*. It is an expression of weakness and impotence. Nietzsche is against resentment because it is an emotion of the weak that the strong and powerful do not and cannot feel. What is not clear is whether resentment is an emotion expressive of weakness or rather an emotion that *produces* weakness by enervating or “draining” the person who has it. (Spinoza, sometimes Nietzsche’s model here, would stress the latter but would also endorse the codependence of resentment and weakness.) Strong personalities who are politically or economically oppressed for a short time may also experience the most powerful feelings of resentment, but in them that emotion may well turn out to be a virtue. The difference, Nietzsche says, is that they *act* on it. They do not let it simmer and stew and “poison” the personality. There is also petty resentment, and sometimes Nietzsche makes the case against resentment in these terms. Resentment is an emotion that does not promote personal excellence but rather dwells on competitive strategy and thwarting others. It does not do what a virtue or a proper motive ought to do—for Nietzsche as for Aristotle—and that is to inspire excellence and self-confidence in both oneself and others.

A simple but useful example of this particularly vicious and unvirtuous aspect of resentment is a simple footrace. There are two ways of winning such a race. One is to run faster than everyone else and in doing so inspire those you beat to greater effort and faster speeds too. (It is not unusual, when a runner breaks a world record, for those behind her to clock their best times ever too, and sometimes to even break the old world record themselves.) The other way to win is to trip your opponents, greasing the track, perhaps, or through some deceptive strategy to degrade the race, demean the skill, and trade the virtue of “good sportsmanship” for a cheap victory. It is clear what Nietzsche would object to here. If the moralist replies that the rules of Morality are formulated precisely to prevent such a strategy, the Nietzschean response is that the universal rules of Morality are *themselves* just such a strategy, a strategy for inhibiting the best.

Nietzsche’s protracted ad hominem argument, his “genealogy” of morals, is not a simple undermining of Morality, and though his language shows this only grudgingly, he clearly admires the genius of the slave’s

“revaluation of values” as much as he condemns that strategy as the desperation of the weak. True, there are “life-denying” aspects of slave morality. The universalization of Morality ignores if it does not inhibit the exercise of the virtues. But it is just too simple to say, as is often said, that Nietzsche wants to get rid of Morality or that he wants to get rid of slave morality and replace it with a new, improved, updated version of noble morality. What Nietzsche wants to do is to get rid of the Kantian analysis of Morality and those features of Morality that depend upon universalizability and our undifferentiated equality as moral agents. He wants to replace these with an ethics of the virtues not unlike Aristotle’s, a compromise between the spirituality we have developed over two thousand years of Christianity and the rather barbarian morality of the masters of Homeric Greece. The role of ad hominem arguments—and genealogy in general as an ad hominem argument writ large—is to demonstrate the viciousness as well as the inferiority of the minimalist character of the “moral point of view.” This may not “refute” either Morality or *ressentiment* but it does expose one pretentious form of resentment whose primary purpose is to deny or inhibit the virtues and enjoy a judgmental self-righteousness at the expense of excellent action and enthusiasm.

### Nietzsche on Love and Pity

The most subtle artifice that distinguishes Christianity from other religions is a word: it speaks of *love*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*

From pity, a great cloud approaches: beware!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Resentment plays a central, continuous, and complex role in Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is, on the one hand, the primary example of a “life-stultifying emotion,” what in the vernacular is often referred to as a “negative” emotion. But, on the other hand, it is anything but “stupid,” and it serves an essential function for those who need it, those who are weak, or oppressed, or suffer from injustices that they cannot readily correct. Thus the distinction between “life-stultifying” and “life-enhancing” passions (and the distinction between “negative” and “positive” emotions) comes into question. “Life-stultifying” or “negative” emotions are not necessarily “bad” or bad for you, and “life-enhancing” or “positive” emotions are not necessarily good or good for you. And this is nowhere more in evidence than in Nietzsche’s extremely complex (but often outrageous) views on two of the most “positive” of emotions, love and compassion (pity).

“Love makes the world go ‘round.” “All you need is love.” “Love is the answer.” And other such mindless fluff. But love, we all know, can be suffocating, foolish, cruel, tragic, or disastrous. It may be the most positive of so-called positive emotions, but it nevertheless represents much more than an

exhilarating beautiful or “selfless” experience. (“Nothing is beautiful in itself.”)<sup>3</sup> There are many “kinds” of love, of course, from parents’ love of their children to the love of country to the love one has for one’s closest friends (*philia*) and the various sorts of sexual, erotic, “companionate,” and conjugal love. There is also that supposedly more spiritual or soulful love developed through Christianity, often called *agapé* (in Greek) or *caritas* (in Latin). Nietzsche’s comments on love are mainly confined to the last two groups, erotic, sexual, “companionate,” and conjugal love on the one hand and Christian *agapé* or *caritas* on the other.

Regarding the first complex of more or less sexual passions, ad hominem arguments concerning Nietzsche’s own quite pathetic love are almost impossible to avoid. The public record indicates that he had virtually no sex life. He was uncomfortable and awkward with the opposite sex. He proposed precipitously and inappropriately to two women, one of them the brilliant but still very young femme fatale Lou Salomé, and of course he was turned down both times. (Lou later ran off with his best friend Paul Rée.) Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s comments on both love and marriage can be insightful and surprisingly down to earth. He says, for instance, that one should think of marriage “as a long conversation” and “as a friendship between two souls.”<sup>4</sup> A few giggles aside, that is sage advice. He can also be surprisingly insightful and sensitive about women’s situation and motivation, an aspect of his thinking that is often eclipsed by a few overexposed and flamboyant Schopenhauer-like wisecracks about women (although anyone who is familiar with Schopenhauer’s outrageous misogyny will find Nietzsche mild indeed by comparison). Nietzsche’s main argument concerning erotic love does not condemn *eros* but quite clearly celebrates it. Like Plato, Nietzsche pronounces philosophy itself as an erotic enterprise, and his writings are filled with erotic allusions and metaphors. But with romanticism, erotic love has become misunderstood as one of the most “selfless” of emotions. Nietzsche points out, quite plausibly but also polemically, that love on the contrary is one of the most *selfish* emotions. It is an emotional strategy of all-embracing possessiveness. And it is sometimes a strategy of declaring oneself one with an opponent one cannot overcome (the covert strategy of many an abusive marriage as well as the motive behind many ill-matched courtships). It is such hypocrisy about love that Nietzsche brutalizes, not (erotic) love as such.

The claim of selflessness is also Nietzsche’s primary target in attacking Christian *agapé*. (“So much for the three Christian virtues: faith, hope, and charity—I call them the three Christian *shrewdnesses*.”)<sup>5</sup> That is not all, of course. Compared to the focused, even obsessive *eros* of erotic love, the universality and banality of Christian love strike Nietzsche as a limp emotion at best. And, most important, Christian love, whatever its claims, is first and foremost a *strategy*. It is the emotional equivalent of “turning the other cheek.” Such love is a kind of “balm,” a salve for hurt feelings and resentment.<sup>6</sup> *True* love, if we can use such an expression for Nietzsche, is



ecstatic and creative, not reactive (or as we might say today, “proactive” and preemptive). It is by no means universal in its scope and is first of all (as Rousseau also argued) a kind of *self-love*, that is, not vanity but self-assurance. It is a kind of *Rausch*, a “rush,” a rapture, an erotic and Dionysian frenzy. Not surprisingly, Nietzsche sometimes subsumes both kinds of love, erotic and Christian, under his general rubric “the will to power,” but the former quite straightforwardly so, the latter as part and parcel of his diagnosis of the slave morality of the weak in spirit. Indeed, coupling love and spirituality, Nietzsche suggests at least two tracks of analysis, love as a naturalized and ecstatic spirituality and love as an expression of a *lack*, an image Nietzsche takes from both Socrates (in the *Symposium*) and Schopenhauer. Following dozens of sarcastic comments about the limpness of Christian love, Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the Idols*: “The spirituality of sensuality . . . called *love* . . . represents a great triumph over Christianity.”<sup>7</sup> It becomes clear that Nietzsche saw great virtue in passionate love but he had nothing but contempt for that meek sentiment that shares (or has usurped) the same name.

But there is one kind of love that we have not discussed at all, and this, perhaps, is the truest of the true loves that Nietzsche would defend. That is friendship, *philia*, which may or may not contain an erotic component (Nietzsche would have intended as much in his proposal to Lou) but in any case represents a kind of ideal of Being-with-Others for Nietzsche. If erotic love is too obsessive and Christian love is too banal, friendship gets it just right. Nietzsche has a model of friendship, however, that is quite idealized. It is not just a matter of “liking” one another or “hanging out” together. In a later chapter I will discuss at greater length Nietzsche’s “Aristotelian” conception of friendship, which is neither for the sake of mutual advantage nor for mutual enjoyment but for mutual inspiration and creativity. It thus resembles the *eros* that some of Plato’s characters describe in the *Symposium*, and it is clearly if sometimes embarrassingly represented in Nietzsche’s letters to his best friends.<sup>8</sup>

Compassion, or pity (*Mitleid*), by contrast, is an emotion—or more accurately, a “moral sentiment”—that Nietzsche thoroughly savages. There is virtually nothing good he has to say about it. He makes few allowances for what we would call “sensitivity” (though he does list *Mitgefühl* as a virtue in *Beyond Good and Evil*). He seems to be oblivious to the virtues that his mentor Schopenhauer defended so elegantly in the same emotion (tellingly translated into English as “compassion,” not “pity”). In *Gay Science*, Nietzsche unceremoniously refers to “the nonsense about pity” in Schopenhauer.<sup>9</sup> One might think, reading through his works, that the man did not have a sympathetic bone in his body. This is in stark contrast, of course, with the picture we get from those who knew Nietzsche, who was hypersensitive and compassionate to a fault. Of course, attacking one’s own most painful traits in philosophy is nothing new (Rousseau again comes to mind), but Nietzsche, it must be said, overdoes himself. He has thoroughly

rebelled against his mentor Schopenhauer and thus reflexively rejects whatever that fallen philosophical god had to offer. And, of course, he must have been annoyed to distraction by the endless repetition of the cloying Christian harangue about the necessity of “charity.” But again, instead of simply dismissing Nietzsche as an insensitive lout, we should think carefully about what he has to say to us about pity. If some of it is outrageous, some of it is keenly insightful too, and, as always, it forces us back on ourselves to examine our own motives and behavior, especially at those moments when we are feeling most self-righteous.

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche tells us that pity is “benevolent revenge.”<sup>10</sup> That summarizes the main thrust of his attack. Like love, pity is first of all a strategy. It is not selfless but selfish. It feigns concern but in fact *gloats*. It is a strategy for self-righteousness, first of all the self-righteousness of “bad things happen to them, not to me” and second, the *feeling* of self-righteousness because one recognizes in oneself the virtuous sentiment of compassion. This is a reflective sentiment well captured by Milan Kundera in his now classic description of *kitsch*: “Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.”<sup>11</sup> So, too, it is the “second tear” of pity that displays its banal hypocrisy, though Nietzsche would insist that the “first tear”—the feeling of pity itself—is also steeped in a strategy of emotional manipulation and thus guilty of self-deception as well.

In one sense, it is true that almost every case of *Mitleid* involves a sense of superiority, namely, by virtue of the fact that the person suffering has an unwanted affliction that the person feeling compassion does not have. I am “superior” to the beggar to whom I give money because I have money and he does not. So too I am “superior” to (in this case, just “luckier” than) my friend because he had the heart attack and I did not. But it is clear that this limited sense of superiority—namely, the superiority of good fortune by virtue of which one person suffers a tragedy and the other does not—is not enough to make the harsh case that Nietzsche wants to prosecute. In the second case, in particular, it is not because I am a superior *person* that my friend had the heart attack and I did not. It may be true that I take better care of myself than he does, but the very opposite could also be true. Even in the first case, one cannot simply argue that I am superior to the beggar because I have money and he does not: he may very likely be a hard-working family man caught in hard times while I am a prodigal (even if generous) heir. In an instance of pure chance—you are shot in the leg by the terrorist’s stray bullet rather than I—it is quite clear that the built-in sense of superiority here does not take us any distance at all; it means only that you are suffering and I am not. And it certainly does not follow from this that I am feeling compassionate *in order to* feel superior. Quite the con-

trary, in all three cases I will mostly likely feel embarrassed (if not worse) about my comparative well-being.

And yet, we can all think of those cases in which a grand display of compassion is self-serving and apparently designed precisely in order to demonstrate as well as feel one's own superiority. One manufactures pity as a means to appear and feel oneself to be not only a good person but a person with great merit. One is virtuous, first of all, for feeling this grand emotion and recognizing the plight of this poor unfortunate, and one is virtuous, second but even more, because one is not the sort of person who is prone to such misfortune. One might note that this sometimes obnoxious but often quite ordinary display of supposedly selfless emotion is the professional liability of liberals, for whom the self-aggrandizement of pity is always a temptation. Indeed, one can (or should) easily understand the conservative criticism and the accompanying accusations of hypocrisy of millionaire liberals and well-heeled liberal professors who make their careers out of compassion but make no sacrifices and accuse those who would pay for their plans (usually the working middle class) of selfishness and lack of public spiritedness. (And this is to say nothing of "compassionate conservatism," an oxymoron as well as a brazen emblem of hypocrisy.) So, too, one can understand the reaction to extreme acts of charity and self-sacrifice when such acts impoverish and do not ennoble the giver that declares these "foolish" and "imprudent." Such behavior, when generalized, gives rise to a fraudulent notion of "altruism" [or pity] as self-sacrifice, for example in the works of Ayn Rand, which is then unfavorably contrasted with "the virtue of selfishness." Altruism, in such an interpretation, turns out to be a kind of foolishness indeed, if it is not also a kind of madness. But, as always, one must be cautious about taking such examples as illustrative instead of cautionary, and what they show about pity and compassion is not necessarily the self-serving nature of these sentiments.

In fact, Nietzsche had a substantial variety of views on pity, by no means all coming from the same perspective. Sometimes, he simply argues that pity is *inefficient*, that is, it does not in any way diminish the suffering that is its object. He also argues that pity tends to be superficial—that is, it is a superficial understanding of one's suffering (which "strips away whatever is distinctively personal" and "knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and intricacies that are distress for *me* or for *you*").<sup>12</sup> It also represents a kind of "outrageous" chutzpah, "the intellectual frivolity with which those moved by pity assume the role of fate."<sup>13</sup> He also gives us the very Nietzschean argument that "it never occurs to them [those who pity] that the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell." Thus pity is in fact a kind of *interference* in the life path of another. But among his various attacks, Nietzsche most often argued that pity was nothing but a false front for an insecure sense of superiority and thus a covert form of revenge. As such, it was a hypocritical form of contempt

rather than the care and consideration it pretended. But, sometimes, it is those who are pitied who are the target of Nietzsche's attack: "At least they still have one power, in spite of all their weakness, the power to hurt."<sup>14</sup> A cruel observation, to be sure, but considering the "in-your-face" strategies of some vagabonds and "street people" it is sometimes borne out in our experience.

Often, and predictably, the attack on pity is just an attack on weakness, the grounds being predominantly aesthetic. Nietzsche's presumption is one that harks back to *The Birth of Tragedy*, that what made the Greeks "so beautiful" was their capacity for great suffering. Thus Nietzsche contrasts pity regarding the relatively small misfortunes in life (or what we might demeaningly call "tragedies") to the unspeakable and overwhelming numbness of real tragedy, the sort of thing depicted by the great Greek tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles, the sort of tragedies that Nietzsche presciently anticipated in the coming (twentieth) century. Pity, in other words, is a petty emotion and not worthy of the grand passions with which it can be contrasted.

Often, Nietzsche depicts pity itself is a weakness, or rather as a cause of weakness (or both), as the following problematic quote suggests: "Pity [*Mitleiden*], insofar as it really induces suffering [*Leiden*] . . . is a weakness as is any losing oneself to a harmful affect."<sup>15</sup> Behind the quote is an argument not unlike those of Schopenhauer when he "quantifies" the pleasures and pains of life and insists that the latter overwhelm the former. The argument here (and elsewhere) is that pity, when it is not merely a sham and a facade for self-righteousness and actually does represent suffering in the person who pities, does not ease any suffering but only adds to the suffering in the world (by adding one's own suffering to the suffering of the one pitied.) Insofar as pity represents a kind of weakness, one might also see it as imposing harm on oneself for no good purpose other than fellow feeling. The argument, though a bit clumsy, makes an important point. Pity alone, without any effort to alleviate the bad situation, adds nothing good to the world. But Nietzsche certainly recognized, whether or not he emphasizes it in his philosophy, that a person's character might nevertheless be very differently appraised depending on what he or she feels, quite apart from the question of what there is to do. Indeed, Nietzsche's virtue ethics would seem to require it. This is where we should start to consider Nietzsche's inclusion of sympathy (*Mitgefühl*) as a basic virtue in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Clearly he is marking off an important distinction which, unfortunately, is not spelled out in his writings. Clearly Nietzsche is specifying some version of sympathy or compassion that is a virtue and a "plus" in one's character. At the very least, it should at least make us ask to what extent Nietzsche is pointedly rejecting Schopenhauer and Christian ethics but ultimately not rejecting all forms of compassion after all.

The warning against "losing oneself" takes us back to those "torrent" and "swept away" metaphors that become most dangerous in the case of

the “life-stultifying” passions. Pity is a weakness insofar as it really does produce suffering (as opposed to merely the facade of “suffering with”). But it is not clear whether it is the harm of suffering itself or the giving into it that is the real harm done. Here again, it is the mystique of personal strength that is in question, and quite clearly strength concerning one’s own self-mastery. Insofar as pity is a kind of “losing oneself” and avoiding pity is a kind of self-mastery, Nietzsche has rather stacked the deck psychologically. Pity is weakness, being “hard” is an expression of strength.

In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche gives us a pair of aphorisms: “*Why beggars still live*. If all alms were given only from pity, all beggars would have starved long ago,” and “*Why beggars still live*. The greatest giver of alms is cowardice.”<sup>16</sup> One way of reading the first quote is as the claim that there are many motives that look like pity but are not. This interpretation has the advantage of leading directly into the second quote, thus claiming that cowardice *and not pity* is the motive behind compassionate actions. But another way of reading the first quote is that what passes for pity (and not just the motive for pity) is *not pity*. Looking forward to Nietzsche’s other claims, one might suppose that what passes for pity is really feelings of superiority, even a mild sort of sadism. That, however, contrasts sharply with the second aphorism. One can take Nietzsche to be presenting two different views here, that pity is motivated by a sense of superiority (as part of a strategy of self-righteousness) and that pity is motivated by the *fear* of what will happen if one does not give (or is not seen to give). Both might be true in at least some cases, and both might even be true in one and the same case. The notion that one would cover up his fears with an assertion of self-righteousness and superiority is certainly not at all foreign to Nietzsche’s way of thinking—or to our observations of our own behavior. But I think that the underlying *ad hominem* argument is that Nietzsche felt—as most of us do—extremely uncomfortable in the presence of beggars. Whether or not we have a good liberal conscience that tells us that it is somehow our fault that these people are in their impoverished state, we want to not only get away as quickly as possible but to rationalize our way out of our discomfort as well. One can guess (and find it in his letters) that Nietzsche was one of those sensitive souls who simply couldn’t bear the sight of the very poor or the guilt that accompanied the encounter with beggars. In this light, we might interpret much more literally than he intended Nietzsche’s comment in *Gay Science* where he suggests that “there is no trick which enables us to turn a poor virtue into a rich and overflowing one; but we can reinterpret its poverty into a necessity so that it no longer offends us when we see it and we no longer sulk on its account.”<sup>17</sup>

What lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s inconsistent attacks, I think, is a mixture of contempt and helplessness in the face of both suffering and compassion. The philosopher whose last fully conscious action was embracing a dumb animal to keep it from being beaten was deeply troubled both by the weakness of others and his own weakness. Of course, the weaknesses

are not the same. In the case of the former, poverty and the penalties of bad luck and bad upbringing have always had ambiguous existential status, perhaps nowhere more so than in contemporary America. On the one hand, there is the unavoidable recognition of misfortune and inherited disadvantage. And, on the other side of misfortune, anyone with any sense, “self-made” or not, must recognize that success in life is always (at least in part) an accident, a gift, the product of contingencies over which one had no conceivable control. Both fortune and misfortune fall under the rubric of *amor fati*, and perhaps in his moments of abstraction Nietzsche could wholly accept both of them, but it should not be surprising that most people hesitate giving up credit for their own achievements and would be equally hesitant to accept the blame if or when misfortune fell on them. The latter hesitation leads us into the familiar ambiguity of fortune, namely, the “existential” suspicion that, no matter how terrible a person’s circumstances (with certain minimal limits, perhaps) he or she could “do something about it if he/she tried.” Thus the weakness of poverty becomes weakness of will, weakness of the spirit becomes unwillingness. This obviously taps into some pervasive concerns of Nietzsche’s, namely the whole question of “will,” of “self-improvement,” of trying to become what you are not or could not be as opposed to “becoming what one is.” I will address some of these issues in chapter 7. But the point concerning pity is that Nietzsche sees pity as a multiple embodiment of weaknesses, on a number of different fronts and in a number of different dimensions.

In all of these, pity is not merely a “feeling” or an “expression” or even a “reaction” so much as it is, again, a *strategy*. Both on the part of the supposedly compassionate and on the part of the pitied, pity is (or can be) manipulative, contemptuous, and self-justifying. But the contempt and self-justification are not confined to the person with pity. The pitied are often in a position to feel “upward contempt” and thus they have ideological justification in confronting their benefactors.<sup>18</sup> It is this, no doubt, that so deeply and personally troubled Nietzsche. Thus there is a suggestion that the attack on pity is really an attempt at the “self-containment” and invulnerability to the misfortunes of life (on one’s own part and for others) defended by the Stoics.<sup>19</sup> I think this pulls some important threads out of Nietzsche’s philological inheritance but understates the vehemence of Nietzsche’s defensiveness. Pity is a way of seeing the world, a way of “being tuned,” but by way of pathos and impoverishment rather than exuberance and strength, and this is what Nietzsche holds against it: “With difficulty I escaped the throng of the pitying, to find the only one today who teaches ‘pity is obtrusive’—you, O Zarathustra. Whether it be God’s pity or man’s—pity offends the sense of shame. To be unwilling to help can be nobler than that virtue which jumps to help.”<sup>20</sup>

I hope that I do not need to say that I do not at all agree with Nietzsche’s overall condemnation of *Mitleid*, but I do see the point of his attack and I think that he prompts very real worries when I think about some of my

own “liberal” attitudes. Here, as elsewhere, Nietzsche gives us “only perspectives.” One would be callous to accept it as the whole story about pity, but one would be foolish as well to dismiss it as nothing but “heartless.”

### *Ressentiment* Reexamined

While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself, . . . the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul squints.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

What is wrong with resentment is that it interferes with the good life as Nietzsche conceives of it, a life of rich “inner” experience as opposed to a life of reaction against external treats and slights. It is thus a life-demeaning and life-stultifying emotion. What is novel and radical about Nietzsche’s philosophy is not the discovery of resentment or his charge that resentment is a life-stultifying emotion. Resentment is an embarrassingly familiar emotion. Nor is it his claim that, unfortunately, it is part and parcel of human nature. We all know this all too well. What Nietzsche sees is that it is much more than this. It is, for many people, their very *raison d’être*, a strategic perspective from which they perceive and judge the world. But it remains to be seen whether this is grounds for the contempt that Nietzsche heaps on this admittedly defensive emotion.

Resentment is often taken as a paradigm of a “negative emotion,” hostile, vengeful, disfiguring for the person who has it, dangerous for the person it’s directed toward. But what characterizes resentment is not just the fact that it is “reactive.” It is also a strategy, the expression of a *need*: “This *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*.”<sup>21</sup> Thus resentment is always aimed at others (sometimes individuals, sometimes groups or institutions, and in odd if not pathological cases, divine or inanimate objects). It is typically a reaction to an injury or slight (whether intended or not) and it is often linked up with frustrated fantasies of revenge. (“That falsification perpetrated on its opponent—in *effigie* of course—by the submerged hatred, the vengefulness of the impotent” and again, “The submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred.”)<sup>22</sup> Of course, the frustration of those vengeful fantasies further fuels the resentment, which stimulates increasingly drastic fantasies for vengeance, and so on. By way of contrast, “should [*ressentiment*] appear in the noble man, [it] consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not *poison*.”<sup>23</sup> If vengeance (according to an old Mediterranean proverb) is “best served cold,” resentment tends to simmer away in the kitchen and most likely it is never to be served at all. (Think of Dostoyevsky’s “underground man,” who is incapable, even after elaborate planning, of carrying out the most mundane act of ordinary vengeance.)

Resentment is not just a version of hatred or anger—with which it is sometimes conflated. Both of these presume an emotional and expressive

power base that resentment essentially lacks. Resentment is typically obsessive; “nothing on earth consumes a man more quickly,” Nietzsche tells us, but its usual description embodies such metaphors of duration and consumption as “smoldering,” “simmering,” “seething,” and “fuming”—rather than “raging,” which would quickly burn itself out.

Resentment is also notable among the emotions for its lack of any specific desire. In this, it is not the same as envy—another kindred emotion—which has the advantage of being quite specific and based on desire. Envy wants, even if it cannot and has no right to obtain. If resentment has a desire, it is the desire for revenge, but even this is rarely very specific. It may, for instance, become the infantile desire for the total annihilation, prefaced by utter humiliation, of all the world (though the vindictive imagination of resentment is such that even that would probably not be sufficient, if it were possible, which, of course, it is not). So too, resentment is quite different from spite, into which it occasionally degenerates, for resentment is nothing if not prudential, strategic, even ruthlessly clever. It has no taste at all for self-destruction; to the contrary, it is the ultimate emotion of self-preservation (we are not talking about mere survival) at any cost.

I said that resentment is an emotion that is distinguished, first of all, by its concern and involvement with *power*. It is the self-recognition of one’s own inferiority, and a desperate attempt nevertheless to salvage or create what power one can. Resentment is life-stultifying because it focuses all of one’s energy on this salvage attempt. But it is not the same as self-pity, with which it often shares the subjective stage; it is not merely awareness of one’s misfortune but obsessively occupies the blaming perspective and is rife with personal outrage. It requires an outward projection and while it can be very focused, frustrated resentment ultimately engages the entire world. When it becomes obsessive, resentment knows no limits. First one may feel powerless and inferior vis-à-vis some particular adversary or oppressor, but as it remains unexpressed the resentment expands to feelings of powerless and inferiority before everything and everyone. Its overwhelming sense of injustice thus becomes capable of blaming any and everyone, even the gods or the cosmos itself. From Albert Camus, we get the enduring image of defiant and “scornful” Sisyphus, shaking his fists at the gods. And then, years later, the mournful image of “John the Baptiste” Clamence, indicting all of humanity from his sleazy bar in Amsterdam. Although Camus seems not to have been a particularly resentful man (despite his ostracism from Sartre’s political circle), he clearly understood the logic of resentment as well as anyone, except Nietzsche, of course. One suspects that even the will to power was more of an expression of resentment, a psychological confession of sorts, than it was, ultimately, a psychological hypothesis.

Contrary to the most familiar accounts of Nietzsche’s ethics and many of his own uncompromising condemnatory statements, Nietzsche has mixed feelings about resentment. If creativity is one of the highest virtues—and it certainly seems to be for him—then resentment would seem to be one of



the most virtuous emotions, for it is certainly among the most creative, perhaps even more so than inspirational love. (Compare the schemes of Iago and Richard the Third with the witless reactions of Othello and Orlando, for example.) Insofar as language and insight, ruthless criticism and mastery of irony are skills worth praising—Nietzsche is perfectly willing to build an entire self out of them<sup>24</sup>—then resentment would seem to be one of the most accomplished emotions as well, more articulate than even the most righteous anger, more clever than the most covetous envy, more critical than the indifferent spirit of reason would ever care to be. Not surprisingly, our greatest critics and commentators are men and women of resentment. Nietzsche is surely right, that our most vocal and influential moralists are men and women of deep resentment—whether or not this is true of morality as such. Our revolutionaries are men and women of resentment. In an age deprived of passion—if Kierkegaard is to be believed—they alone have the one dependable emotional motive, constant and obsessive, slow-burning but totally dependable and durable. Through resentment, they get things done. Whatever else it may be, resentment is not ineffectual.

Resentment may be an emotion that begins with an awareness of its powerlessness, but by way of compensation (or “expression”), resentment has forged the perfect weapon—an acid tongue and a strategic awareness of the world, which in most social contexts guarantees parity if not victory in most social conflicts. (I exclude bars in such places as Dallas and San Bernadino, where a rapier tongue can quickly get one killed.) Thus the irony, the dramatic turnaround of fortunes, in Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values, where defensive resentment overpowers defenseless self-confidence and the sense of inferiority overwhelms its superiors. The neo-Nietzschean stereotypes are too often portrayed as the cultivated, noble master versus the cloddish, vulgar slave. To be sure, the descriptions in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* certainly encourage such a reading. But the typology that actually counts in the genealogy of resentment and morals is the articulate slave and the comparatively tongue-tied, even witless master. It is the slave who is sufficiently ingenious to do what even Nietzsche despairs of doing: he or she invents new values. And it is the master, not the slave, who becomes decadent and dependent and allows him- or herself to be taken in by the strategies of resentment.

Hegel had it right in the *Phenomenology*; so did Joseph Losey in his 1963 movie *The Servant*. Speech is the swordplay of the impotent, but in the absence of real swords it is often overpowering. Language may be the political invention of the “herd” (as Nietzsche suggests in *The Gay Science*), but it is also the medium in which real power is expressed and exchanged. Irony is the ultimate weapon of resentment, and as Socrates so ably demonstrated, it turns ignorance into power, personal weakness into philosophical strength. It is no wonder that Nietzsche had such mixed feelings about his illustrious predecessor who created the “tyranny of reason” as the successful expression of his own will to power. Nietzsche used irony and “geneal-

ogy” as Socrates used dialectic, to undermine and ultimately dominate others and their opinions.

Nietzsche tells us that certain emotions “drag us down with their stupidity”—but resentment is surely not one of them. There is no emotion more clever, more powerful, more life-preserving if not life-enhancing, no emotion more conducive to the grand act of revenge that Nietzsche himself wishes to perpetrate on modernity and the Christian world. Resentment creates its own power, which displaces its own targets and (even despite itself) satisfies its desire for revenge. Thus the victory of the slave over the master in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Thus the victory, writ large, of slave morality. The felt impotence of resentment should not be confused with its expression, which is a kind of arrogance, or with the practical results of resentment, which sometimes tend to be powerful and effective indeed.

Thus what Nietzsche despises about resentment—and an ethics built out of resentment—is not its lack of success, which he often acknowledges and even admires (e.g., in *Genealogy of Morals*, where he comments, “The Jews were the priestly nation of *ressentiment par excellence*, in whom there dwelt an unequalled popular-moral genius” and “A race of such men of *ressentiment* is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race”);<sup>25</sup> nor can it be its expression, even when it is vicious. It is true that vengeance often is vicious, insensitive to and uncaring about the needs of others, even if it is overly sensitive to its own sense of slight or offense. But it is hard to find Nietzschean grounds for an attack on viciousness or a defense of pity. Nobles as masters can be (and sometimes ought to be) cruel, so it is not cruelty as such that Nietzsche abhors. Indeed, although Nietzsche is sometimes suspicious of cruelty as an expression of impotence and resentment (one takes out on others what one cannot express to one’s actual oppressor), he discusses cruel historical spectacles with remarkably little disgust or criticism. Indeed, he even notes that “without cruelty there is no festival” and “to see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle.”<sup>26</sup>

One might argue, of course, that the means that resentment employs in obtaining power are hypocritical: one gains power by denying one’s power and one advances one’s self-interest by appearing to be indifferent to one’s self-interest (for example, by pointing to “the rules” or defending one’s action strictly in the name of some “principle.”) The man of *ressentiment* is devious. “His spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble.”<sup>27</sup> But it is not clear to what extent such duplicity and deception is hypocrisy rather than just smart strategy. Despite its display of indifference and disdain for power, resentment exemplifies the obsession with power. But isn’t this what “the will to power” is all about—or is there supposed to be some further (moral) prohi-

bition, “power, yes, but not by hook or by crook”? Why should we suddenly be so moral about a motive that bypasses or undercuts Morality? And does the fact that resentment is “reactive” rather than “active” carry any critical weight?<sup>28</sup> For all of his harsh comments, I think that our conclusion should be that Nietzsche has grudging respect for resentment as an emotional strategy, thus making his own continuous displays of resentment both more excusable and more interesting.

### Eagles and Lambs: Metaphors of Strength and Weakness

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: “these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?” there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: “we don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Nietzsche’s metaphor of lambs and eagles<sup>29</sup> suggests a brutal distinction: Nobles as masters are powerful. Slaves are helpless victims. Nietzsche does not make a moral judgment here (although he suggests that the lambs do). Nietzsche may despise resentment because of its impotence, but he does not therefore condemn it. It is just pathetic—“bad.” But matters are by no means so stark or clear-cut, and the criteria for strength and weakness are by no means obvious or consistent in Nietzsche. Sometimes, the descriptions in the *Genealogy* suggest that social status and class alone determine strength and weakness; aristocrats, by virtue of their breeding and education, are strong. Because of their servile positions, slaves are weak, whatever physical or spiritual strength they might possess. Sometimes, Nietzsche seems to be using a quasi-medical (“physiological”) criterion; strong means healthy, weak means sickly. But even this, we shall see, is by no means consistent, and some of what Nietzsche says would even imply that it is the slaves who are strong, not the noble masters.

What is strength? What is weakness? It is all too easy to think in Homeric warrior metaphors, the strength of an Odysseus or a Hercules, the broken servility of a captured slave. Of course, there were all of those Christian gladiators and the Jews at Masada, and there were those several generations of effete and all-but-defenseless mutually resentful Roman emperors and aristocrats. (Poison isn’t exactly the weapon of choice for a warrior.) But physical and military prowess is not the “power” that Nietzsche is endorsing, and one of the most effective responses to Roman military might, it turned out, was the rather masterly practice of “turning the other cheek.” In our own times, of course, this is the strategy of “nonviolent resistance” practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Is there any sense in which

this is an expression of weakness? Does the unwillingness to fight indicate weakness or doesn't it rather display great courage and self-certainty, even superiority? Does the refusal to fight indicate the inability to fight, and does it matter whether or not the cheek-turner could physically defeat his or her rival? A popular theme in many a country song and cowboy movie seems to be the final showdown in which the hitherto pacifist hero is forced to beat the living daylights out of his (now often her) tormenter. But, on the interpretation suggested here, doesn't this rather indicate a failure of moral nerve? How does it matter whether the cheek-turning is the expression of an ideology or some deeper strategy or if it is just an attempt to avoid a fight? Is the presence or absence of fear a consideration (and in what amounts)? Does it matter who wins? Are self-confidence and self-esteem the ultimate measures of strength, or is strength ultimately a matter of maintaining one's own sense of integrity? Indeed, isn't "strength" ultimately a *moral* notion?

But as so often in Nietzsche, morality, strength, and weakness get viewed in *aesthetic* terms. In *Birth of Tragedy*, he says that the Greeks were "beautiful" because they had the strength to endure their suffering and render it creative.<sup>30</sup> Thus nobles are not to be thought of as merely privileged, and Nietzsche's descriptions of them in *Genealogy* as spontaneous and self-confident are to that extent highly misleading. What was "beautiful" and "noble" in the Greeks was their "self-overcoming," not their blithe self-confidence. (It is worth noting how much at odds the enviable sense of self-satisfaction described in the *Genealogy* is from the advocacy of self-doubt, even self-contempt and "going under" that marks one of Zarathustra's major moral themes.) Slaves, by contrast, are "ugly" because they are banal and boring. Their demeanor is servile and timid. They protect themselves with humorless, submissive smiles, without character.<sup>31</sup> It is Othello who provides the nobility in the play that bears his name. Iago provides the plot, but only after making himself hateful to the audience. But even as an aesthetic conception, strength cannot simply be beauty and weakness as such is not ugliness. (Lambs are "beautiful"—or at any rate "cute"—because they are cuddly, and they are cuddly because they are weak.)

The measure of strength may have seemed happily straightforward in those mythological days when "men were men" and all struggles and competitions were settled through physical combat. There were no deep thinkers in the *Iliad*. In the most stripped-down scenario, we have the Spartan landscape described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* in his confrontation of "two self-consciousnesses." (So, too, we might think of the meeting of "unencumbered" but fully rational beings in John Rawls's "original position," except that strength in that odd circumstance would lie wholly in one's negotiating abilities.)<sup>32</sup> But once we introduce such messy complications as an already existing society with an established "pecking order" and classes and social status and the ordeals of civility, the measure of strength (and weakness) is by no means so obvious. John Barth's college teacher (Jacob

Horner) asks his students, in *End of the Road*: Who is more free, the person who flaunts the rules or the person who lives within them? We can simply change the word “free” to “strong” and appreciate the paradox that civility imposes on the seemingly natural notions of strength and weakness.

Nietzsche is not defending civility as such, but it is worth noting again that his own list of “the four cardinal virtues”—honesty, courage, generosity, politeness, not to mention the descriptions we have of his own civil behavior from Lou Salomé and others, sound about as civil as one would expect of a nineteenth-century German gentleman.<sup>33</sup> But even in “the state of nature,” two male wolves settling their turf often seem not to notice that one is in fact three times the size of the other and the confrontation is almost always settled by bloodless compromise. And, according to Jane Goodall, alpha male chimps (models of Nietzsche’s “master”?) are not always (or even usually) the strongest or the smartest males but those with the most *chutzpah* (a technical term in primate studies).<sup>34</sup> Again, these potentially vicious animals rarely kill or harm one another and civility (what else would one call it?) rules. Accordingly, Nietzsche rightly insists (though not consistently) that strength is not to be measured by any such confrontation at all, much less by physical strength and prowess, and that strength is an intrinsic and not a competitive quality.

The metaphors Nietzsche most often uses in talking about strength are medical metaphors, health and sickness, “physiological” images. Master morality is healthy; slave morality is sickly. Strength as health is clearly a personal and not a competitive virtue. It has much to do with one’s metabolic fund of energy, expressed in a spontaneity that is not so much thoughtless or carefree as robust. Weakness as sickness is above all a lack of energy, a lethargy caused by exhaustion. But Nietzsche’s vision here is often of a very different kind, and it is not health as such but the response to ill health that is the measure of strength. His famous (but clearly false) comment that “what does not kill me makes me stronger” is emblematic of a certain way of thinking about strength and heroism, now manifested regularly in some made-for-television movie about some brave soul with AIDS or cancer or a child tragically ill with leukemia.

One need not speculate or search very far for the personal origins of Nietzsche’s concern about health and his rather complex conceptions of the proper response to illness. Having sampled the gamut of such reactions ourselves during a weeklong bout with a serious flu, we can easily understand how such mixed and obsessive feelings are possible. But they don’t add up to a consistent criterion of strength, much less a philosophy. That which does not kill me typically leaves me weaker, no matter how noble and stalwart my resistance has been. It is all well and good to desire good health but, as Aristotle noted, health is a presupposition of virtue and not itself a virtue that deserves admiration. It is certainly admirable that Nietzsche defied ill health and insomnia and wrote ten brilliant pages a day, but this is hardly the mark of the spontaneously healthy “master” that emerges

in those pages. The medical metaphor is a rather bewildering place to look for Nietzsche's conceptions of strength and weakness, but I have no doubt that it lies at the personal core of his thinking.

Sometimes Nietzsche seems to indicate that strength lies in one's sense of *independence* (not to be confused with the more Kantian notion of autonomy). Weakness, on the other hand, is identified with dependency, that same dependency that Jean-Jacques Rousseau so despised and opposed to the natural independence he called "freedom." The identification of weakness with mutual dependency, of course, is more obvious in the designation of "herd morality" than in "slave morality," but, again, I think that this raises a great many problems (some of which Nietzsche surely shares with Rousseau). Bernd Magnus has often commented that what Nietzsche intends by his unflattering collective noun "the herd" is what most of us mean by "community," and as soon as one probes the alleged "weakness" of interdependency one discovers, I believe, far more virtues than vices. It is true that a person who is "attached" to his or her friends and loved ones is thereby vulnerable, not only to loss but to moral accusations of being inconsiderate and, at worst, betrayal. But why should such vulnerability be considered to be a weakness, indeed, not rather a strength? In *Genealogy II*, Nietzsche says that one's strength should be measured by how many parasites one can endure. But if parasites, why not also friends, family, and lovers? What is so admirable about so-called independence?

Nietzsche does not dismiss the moral importance of friendships. Indeed, he personally and occasionally in his works gave friendship a place in his ethics comparable only to Aristotle's rich discussion in books 8 and 9 of the *Ethics* (e.g., in *Human, All-too-Human*). But in the *Genealogy* and too often elsewhere the attachments and dependencies of mutual need and affection and are given too-short shrift, and the implication is that interdependency is itself a product of resentment, and therefore servile and degrading. (Lambs like and need other lambs; eagles tend to be singular and prey particularly on those lambs whose misfortune it is to wander off alone.)

However strength and weakness are to be understood, resentment presupposes some *sense* of impotence and vulnerability. Thus it is important to distinguish between any number of more or less "objective" criteria for strength and weakness on the one hand and this personal sense of weakness on the other. It is often thought that Nietzsche's claim is that it is only the weak who feel resentment, but the text of *Genealogy* makes it quite clear that this is not so. The strong feel resentment too, for they too find themselves facing a world that is not always in their control or to their liking. The most illuminating cases of resentment are to be found not in the pathetic digs of the underclass but in the highest rings of power. In the Washington White House, for example, we have seen the spectacle of the most powerful politician on earth seething with resentment, every act expressing a sense of frustration and impotence. Agamemnon was capable of resentment though he would also seem to be a paragon of ancient master moral-

ity. There is also Achilles, sulking in his tent. Napoleon, Nietzsche's timely exemplar of master (rather than noble) morality in the *Genealogy*, was a cauldron of simmering resentment, probably because he was Corsican rather than because he was short (5'7"). Or, to take a more modern example, Pete Rose, once of the Philadelphia Phillies, displayed a sense of bitter resentment even when he was one of the most physically powerful and successful men in America. (It has been pointed out that Rose was quite short in his formative years, and he never lost that sense of defensiveness even when he filled out to size later on.) Resentment, in other words, is based on an original perception of oneself, not—as Nietzsche seems to argue in the *Genealogy*—on any natural or socially objective criterion.

Nietzsche says that the difference between the weak and the strong is not the occurrence of resentment but its disposition and vicissitudes. A strong character may experience resentment but immediately discharges it in action; it does not "poison" him.<sup>35</sup> But it then becomes clear that objective strength or success cannot be the issue; the poison of resentment works only on those who have frustrated ambitions and desires, whose self-esteem depends on their social status and other measures of personal worth and accomplishment. But then it is easy to see the wisdom of the Zen master and the Talmudic scholar who are never poisoned by resentment because they never allow themselves those desires and expectations which can be frustrated and lead to resentment. One also finds great strength and acceptance (not just resignation) among the most abused and downtrodden members of society. (What would Nietzsche have thought of "the blues"?)<sup>36</sup> Here, of course, we remember Nietzsche's bitter criticism—"only the emasculated man the good man"—but it seems to me that this is grossly inappropriate and we need a far more subtle ethics of emotion.

## Masters, Slaves, and the Origins of Justice

As for Duhring's proposition that the home of justice is to be sought in the sphere of the reactive feelings, one is obliged for truth's sake to counter it with a blunt antithesis: the *last* sphere to be conquered by the spirit of justice is the sphere of the reactive feelings!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

One must be careful not to conflate envy and resentment. For resentment is a moral feeling. If we resent our having less than others, it must be because we think that their being better off is the result of unjust institutions, or wrongful conduct on their part. Those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them.

—John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

From the Nietzschean perspective, we are so accustomed to thinking of resentment in its seething, vicious, most nasty embodiment that we fail to see that the same emotion invites a very different sort of interpretation.

(Scheler, for instance, never took Nietzsche to task for being unfair to resentment; he only wanted to insist that Christianity and Christian morality were not necessarily based on this admittedly repulsive emotion.) But resentment is an extremely philosophical emotion. It is aware of the larger view. It has keen eyesight (the more Aristotelian analog of Nietzsche's contemptuous sense of smell). It is quite conscious of not only how things are but of how they might be and, most important, how they ought to be. True, resentment always has a personal touch, one is always to some extent resentful *for oneself*, but resentment has not only the capacity but the tendency to open itself up to more general considerations, namely, those we call compassion (literally "feeling with," not just empathy) and justice. It is a harsh and unfair analysis indeed that insists that the camaraderie of the resentful is only of the misery-loves-company variety.

Resentment is commiserative, but it can also be mutually supportive. And conspiratorial. Resentment involves a sense of oppression, and oppression, in addition to suggesting weakness, also connotes injustice. Resentment may be nothing other than a reasoned but burning dissatisfaction with the way the world is, but it is also resentment that lies at the heart of democracy—Nietzsche was right about that—but it is not impotent resentment, not weakness, not slave or herd mentality. It is the will to power, not as mere "reaction" but as a keen sense of injustice, which is, in turn, the foundation of our sense of justice.

On the positive view, resentment is not just a selfish emotion, though it always has its self-interested element. It depends on compassion, the sense of sharing one's misfortune with others. This is much more conceptually elevated than "herd mentality," which is unthinking, unreflective, imitative rather than compassionate. At the same time, I think that we should be cautious about concluding that this compassion amounts to a sense of community—I think that the notion of community is much more structured and less individualistic, though that isn't a crucial point here. But compassion lends itself to empathy, in that awareness of one's own suffering makes one prone to recognize suffering in others, and this in turn encourages (but does not guarantee) the recognition that other people are even worse off than ourselves.

One may feel resentful just for oneself and for some slight offense or failure of recognition, and, indeed, we usually consider this to be petty, selfish and mean-spirited. However—and this is the crucial point—it is not the resentment that we so criticize, but its pettiness and limitation. We do not so criticize personal resentment for some great offense or oppression; indeed we empathize with it, agree with it, perhaps support it and praise it as noble. So too we do not so criticize resentment when it is in the name of a much larger group. Cesar Chavez would not be a national folk hero if he had loudly proclaimed his own resentment about the way he was treated by employers. To the contrary, the predictable answer would have been, "Why do you think that you are different from anyone else?" But the grand



scope of his resentment—and the political skills that go along with this—make the case very different. It is not resentment as such that is discredited, but merely a personal, petty, disproportionate approach to the world.

Our emotions betray our philosophies, petty, pathetic, and narrowly self-serving or expansive, compassionate, principled, and bold. What makes a slave a slave, according to this picture, is not vulnerability or resentment but pettiness, “a slave to details.” What gives a master nobility is not personal strength or status so much as it is the scope, the grandeur, of his or her concerns. But resentment can be grand as it can be petty, and what constitutes mastery or servitude can be a distinction *within* the bounds of “the reactive feelings.”

Thus I want to reexamine Nietzsche’s famous dualistic and oversimplified *Beyond Good and Evil* typology of “two moral types: master and slave.” Even sticking to Nietzsche’s own descriptions, there are a variety of ways of characterizing the two types. There is, first of all, the initial, quite biased description, which so readily lends itself to envy of the original masters and disgust with slave morality. According to this portrait, masters are self-assertive, creative, and self-confident. They have all the advantages of birth, good breeding, good upbringing, power, and wealth. They enjoy themselves, think well of themselves, and they do great things. Slaves, by contrast, are miserable, threatened, and forced to do the bidding of others. They are impoverished, often unhealthy, cowardly, inhibited, and mutually dependent. We picture them pathetically huddling together, plotting and scheming. They are not too bright but bitterly vindictive. They reject those desires they cannot hope to satisfy and plot against those who do satisfy them and call both the desires and those who satisfy them “evil.” Nietzsche’s contrast between the noble bird of prey and the pathetic little lambs makes the picture quite graphic. Notice, of course, Nietzsche’s conflation of master morality with social superiority and all of the advantages of power. Slave morality, on the other hand, is not just a moral perspective but the entirety of a miserable, pathetic life. Who among us, then, would choose to be a slave?<sup>37</sup>

Even in the context of ancient history, however, this portrait is simple-minded and inaccurate. Anyone who keeps up with the news or is a regular viewer of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* will not be surprised to hear that the powerful are often uncreative, belligerently undereducated, shallow, pathetically dependent, defensive, and narcissistic. Should we really believe that Sardanapalus was otherwise? And in the ancient world, the best educated were more often than not the slaves who shared, rather than rejected, their masters’ way of life. But, of course, this isn’t the point of Nietzsche’s caricature; the point is simply that master morality—what now would probably be recognized as self-actualization—was first and unproblematic, while slave morality could come into existence only as a *reaction* based on resentment, the resentment of some slaves, not all, and then originally only of the most clever and resentful among them. But this raises the question,

with regard to these ingenious rebels, whether they deserve to be identified with the herd or, rather, to be celebrated as champions of the downtrodden, and whether resentment, accordingly, should be recognized as nothing less than the basic heroic promptings of a general sense of injustice.<sup>38</sup>

So here is a very different description. Master morality is represented by those who had the good fortune to be born well and raised with many advantages, not the least of which is that self-confidence bordering on arrogance that, at its best, breeds bold achievement but, not even at its worst, expresses itself in that unearned, typically pompous posture of superiority that one expects to see through the windshield of any Corvette. Masters pursue their own desires, and their satisfaction, and they treat most inhibitions and prohibitions as something quite foreign, not applicable to them. They are not particularly ambitious, for ambition is already a sign of insecurity and lack of mastery. They may think of themselves as superior as a group, but this shared sense is about all that there is of their sense of community. Masters do not think much about justice, both because they lack the motive and because any reasonable standard of justice makes them uncomfortable, at least. I think it would not be far-fetched to say that such beings, quite the contrary of some proto-*Übermensch*-ly ideal, come rather closer to Christopher Lasch's description of contemporary narcissism.

Consider, then, the so-called slaves, those who are group oriented, mutually dependent, ambitious but frustrated by obstacles not of their own making. The slave has an ideal image of the world—perhaps even an ideology—that (not surprisingly) emphasizes some of one's own (perceived) virtues and raises general (rather than merely personal) narcissism. They have legitimate, justified complaints about the state of the world and their own position in it, complaints with systematic features (if not universal principles) that include others who may be much worse off than themselves. Consequently, they become envious, rebellious, and resentful. They *react* against a world that they did not make, which is not just, which is ruled by people who—even by the standards they themselves espouse—do not deserve their advantages. Like Camus's Sisyphus, they continue in their duties, now made tolerable by "scorn and defiance." But they recognize not the absurdity but the *injustice* of their situation. Their resentment is through and through a moral emotion, not the motive of morality but the very stuff of morality as such.

Many philosophers, including not only Nietzsche but Socrates too, have contrasted resentment and vindictiveness with justice. But resentment plays a spectacular role in both the evolution of justice and the recognition of injustice. Granted, resentment always begins with a sort of self-absorption if not outright self-interest, as well as some bitter sense of disappointment or humiliation, but it then tends to rationalize and generalize and so project its own impotence outward as a *claim*—even a theory—about injustice in the world. It is from this sense of being unfairly treated, along with a consequent feeling of vengefulness and, one hopes, a countermanding sense of

compassion and other more generous sentiments, that our overall sense of justice—based on a prior sense of injustice—develops. Indeed, even Rawls, who works so hard to make justice out as a matter of practical reason, acknowledges the significance of resentment in the psychological origins of justice. He notes that resentment is already the recognition that someone else's "being better off is the result of unjust institutions, or wrongful conduct on their part," and he presents that emotion as if it already contains within it the demands usually leveled against philosophical argument: "Those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them." I think that "must" is out of place there; resentment as such is not under any particular academic or conversational obligations. But it is true that resentment, in its urge to generalize and project itself and in its aim to undermine the status quo, tends to be quite articulate and outspoken, full of reasons if not reasonable or rational in the usual sense of dispassionate objectivity.

Of course, there are those people whose sense of justice is almost wholly obsessed with resentment, whose sense of "oppression" far outweighs any sense of compassion and eclipses any possible empathy with "the oppressor." And there are those for whom the slightest slight and most minimal offense is cause for petty *ressentiment* (it *does* sound more sarcastic *en français*). But even then, resentment rarely remains mere personal bitterness and almost always thinks of itself in terms of some larger injustice, not only to oneself but, typically, to an entire group of fellow sufferers. This is not to say that resentment has embodied within it any principles of justice, but it certainly may contain such principles and, in any case, it involves some appeal to expectations or implicit standards of fairness. These may be as simple and concrete as (in the case of my two sibling puppies) "That's for me, not you!" or as complex and abstract as "No one should get an ambassadorship on the basis of party politics alone" (when I, a foreign service professional, have just been passed over.)

Resentment always has a personal basis, though not a person focus or personal scope. One always feels somehow deprived or slighted oneself (or feels this *for* someone else), but the focus of one's complaint is the nature of the slight rather than just the slight itself and the scope of the complaint is, at least in articulate "rational" animals such as ourselves, the whole class of deprivations and slights that have been instantiated here in this one. Resentment, one might say, is the class action suit among the emotions. Thus resentment, even if self-absorbed, typically becomes a social emotion, embracing others under its claws. One might say that it is resentment, not misery, that loves company. And with enough company and a little bit of courage, it can even start a revolution. It often has.

Nietzsche's attack on the familiar sense of justice was an attack on the purely vindictive, "reactive" emotions by which the weak and incompetent tried to "get at" those who were strong and successful. Justice for Nietzsche—though not what most of us would call "justice"—is that superior

sense of being “above” all slights and beyond vindictiveness. Justice as we tend to understand it tends to turn on such notions as “getting even” and making sure that each person gets his or her due. But a sense of justice properly understood, according to Nietzsche, is very much akin in its expression (though not in its motivation) to the Christian virtues of mercy and forgiveness, not because one does not feel the right to judge or punish or because one ought to appeal to some greater court of justice, and emphatically not because one is afraid of the consequences of one’s actions, but rather because one has much more important things to do with one’s life than worry about the past and about those whom Nietzsche refers to with his usual flattering vocabulary as “parasites.” As for the worry that each person should get his or her due, Nietzsche insists that justice is not primarily the defense of the weak (though he even allows that those who are more fortunate have a “duty” to help them), but rather the cultivation and expression of one’s own virtues.

One might draw a cautious parallel between Nietzsche’s very elitist view of justice and the view that one finds today in some libertarian writings, such as Robert Shaeffer’s *Resentment against Achievement*, where the author distinguishes between a “morality of achievement” and a morality of “resentment against achievement.” Of course, Nietzsche would have little tolerance for the obsession about “rights” that preoccupies so much of libertarian thinking, and he would be the first to point out the bitter resentment of many such authors against those who supposedly “resent achievement,” but Nietzsche’s emphasis on personal excellence and his condemnation of reactive mediocrity would strike a sympathetic chord in many modern thinkers. Those who cannot handle Nietzsche’s style but are sympathetic to such ideas often end up with the styleless prose of Ayn Rand.

What Nietzsche ignores—in part because of his own sense of biological determinism but also, I expect, because of his own sense of rootlessness and social impotence—is the legitimacy of the felt need to change the world. The sentiment of resentment may often be a legitimate sense of *oppression*. It is not the voice of mediocrity or incompetence but the passion of justice denied. None of this is to say that resentment isn’t nasty. Of course it is. It is vindictive. It wants to change things. It looks enviously at those who are on top, who have the power. It wants to pull them down. But to pretend that this is always or even usually mediocrity undermining excellence, the losers greasing the path of the winners, has no plausibility at all. Nietzsche separates justice from the “reactive emotions,” defending justice as a rare and unusually noble sentiment. He also makes it clear that a keen sense of injustice—expressed through resentment—is the touchstone of morality for most of us. But we need not therefore disagree when Nietzsche objects to the abuse of justice as the facade for the defense of one’s own interests, whether in the name of “rights” or equality, and the consequent “leveling” effect of enforced mediocrity. What we call “justice” is too often hypocrisy. In the name of “justice” we adopt an egalitarian standpoint, for instance,

but only in one direction. The French bourgeoisie during the French Revolution only looked up at the aristocrats they wanted to replace, but they never looked down at the rest of the “third estate” who were much worse off. Justice always begins with the self and the personal passions, but it need not therefore be selfish. Justice may begin with resentment but resentment need not be petty or opposed to a noble sense of generosity and compassion. Indeed, given that we are not Nietzsche’s much fantasized *Übermenschen*, wholly satisfied and in charge of our world, it is hard to even imagine what justice—and for that matter morality—would be without resentment. Eugen Dühring was right: the home of justice *is* to be sought in “the sphere of the reactive feelings.”<sup>39</sup>

# Chapter 5

## NIETZSCHE'S AFFIRMATIVE ETHICS

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She told me herself that she had no morality,—and I thought she had, like myself, a more severe morality than anyone.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

The mad dog image of Nietzsche, snarling at the world—is not so different in its malicious intent, nor further wrong in its interpretation of Nietzsche, than a good number of scholarly works. This is indeed the traditional portrait: the unconsummated consummate immoralist, the personally gentle, even timid, arch-destroyer. Of course, Nietzsche himself made adolescent comments about his own destructiveness not infrequently—“I am dynamite” in *Ecce Homo*, for example. Nevertheless, these give a false impression of his intentions as well as of the good philosophical sense to be made of his works.

Nietzsche described himself and some of his works as “untimely,” a rationalization, perhaps, for the fact that his books did not sell and attracted negative reaction. But Nietzsche must surely be the most historical and even “timely” of authors. He has come to define the turn to the twentieth century. He captured, as few philosophers did, the new sensibility that was just emerging. But just as important, he perfectly culminated the long Western tradition in philosophy, a fact recognized by Martin Heidegger but then grotesquely twisted to suit Heidegger’s own philosophical prejudices. It was a fact also acknowledged by Alasdair MacIntyre, who saw Nietzsche bringing to a close the “Enlightenment project” in ethics and marking the degeneration of an ethical tradition that dated back to Plato and Aristotle. But where both Heidegger and MacIntyre take Nietzsche to bring the Western tradition to a close in a quite negative sense—a sense captured by the word *nihilism*, I take Nietzsche to culminate the tradition in a very different, “affirmative” sense, recapturing what is best in Western ethics (and, not coincidentally, bringing it closer to several of the most illustrious Eastern ethical traditions as well.)

To talk about Nietzsche’s “affirmative” philosophy is to begin, above all, with his sometimes near-hysterical emphasis on *life-affirmation*. Rejecting

Schopenhauer's pessimism, which represented one of the most egregious versions of nihilism, Nietzsche insisted instead that *life is not meaningless*. Life is good, even if it is filled with suffering. The Greeks knew this. That is why, in Nietzsche's words, "they were so beautiful." There are serious questions about what Nietzsche actually means by "life-affirmation" and whether he actually succeeded in adopting such an attitude. Contrasted with the images of the "Dionysian" he so often presents, it must be said that Nietzsche cuts a not very convincing gay figure. His laughter often seems forced, and his cheerfulness the reach of a desperate man. From all evidence, until his final madness he was incapable of even the uptight version of dancing propounded by his Zarathustra, and his playfulness seemed largely limited to the scholarly joke. Lou Andreas Salomé once described him (in 1882):

A light laugh, a quiet way of speaking, and a cautious, pensive way of walking . . . He took pleasure in the refined forms of social intercourse. . . . But in it all lay a penchant for disguise. . . . I recall that when I first spoke with him his formal manner shocked and deceived me. But I was not deceived for long by this lonesome man who only wore his mask as unalterably as someone coming from the desert and mountains wears the cloak of the worldly-wise.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be both blind and cruel to dismiss Nietzsche's genuine efforts to be life-affirming as no more than a rhetorical counter to Schopenhauer or the desperate attempts of an unhappy man. I think that we should take Nietzsche's affirmative philosophy seriously, and in this and the remaining chapters I will try to do just that. Whether or not he convinced himself (in any more than an intellectual fashion) of life's worth, the question is rather what we can make of his challenge to see life with all of its unhappiness face-on while at the same time managing to *love it*. And rather than seeing Nietzsche's ethics as inconsistent and intermittent bursts of enthusiasm and contempt, we can understand Nietzsche as being very much a part of the Western ethical tradition and perhaps even as a serious ethical "theorist."

## Nietzsche in the Tradition: Nihilism For and Against

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?  
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

It is decidedly *within* the philosophical tradition, typically traced in misleading linear fashion back to Socrates, that I want to try to understand Nietzsche's ethics. His reputation as arch-destroyer and philosophical outlaw has so enveloped Nietzsche, largely at his own bidding, that the kernel of his moral philosophy—and I do insist on calling it that—has been lost. But

there is in Nietzsche, unmistakably, an ethics that is much more than nihilism or polemics or playfulness, an ethics that is very much part of “the tradition.” It is, however, a brand of ethics that had been all but abandoned in the wake of Kant and rationalism and Mill and utilitarianism in ethics. It is this other brand of ethics, for which Nietzsche quite understandably failed to find a name (“master morality” is certainly misleading, “noble morality” is not much better) that I would like to defend here.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of Nietzsche as an “affirmative” philosopher is blocked by the common association of Nietzsche’s name and “nihilism.” *Nihilism*, obvious etymology aside, does not mean simply “accepting nothing.” Like most philosophical terms raised to an isolated and artificial level of abstraction, this one actually does its work in particular contexts, in specific perspectives. It often functions as a kind of accusation, a bit of abuse. Some traditional but much-in-the-news Christians use the term as a more or less crude synonym for “secular humanism,” on the (false) assumption that a person without God must be a person without Christian values as well. (The hysterical argument by the increasingly mad Ivan Karamazov, “if there is no God, then everything is permitted,” is often quoted in this context.) But note that I say “Christian” values, for the accuser might well allow, indeed insist, that the nihilist does have values, subjective, self-serving and secularly narrow-minded though they be. (Ivan’s no-account brother Mitya had values, something along the lines of *money, wine, and women*. Nevertheless a good Christian would say that Mitya was just as much a nihilist as his brother Ivan.) Similarly, an orthodox Jewish friend of mine calls “nihilists” any people without a self-conscious sense of tradition, assuming that others must lack in their experience what he finds so essential in his own. Marxists use the term (sometimes but not always along with “bourgeois individualism”) to indict those who do not share their class-conscious values. Aesthetes use it to knock the philistines, and my academic colleagues use it to chastise anyone with “looser” standards and higher grading averages than themselves. Stanley Rosen attacks nihilism at book length without ever saying exactly what’s wrong with it, except that it falls far short of his search for Hegelian absolute truth.<sup>3</sup>

The term itself was of recent origins when Nietzsche picked it up toward the end of the nineteenth century. The classic characterization of the spirit of nihilism comes from Ivan Turgenev, a contemporary and one-time ally of Dostoyevsky. Turgenev popularized the term “nihilist” in his novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862). There, young Arkady describes his friend Bazarov as a “nihilist,” as a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle is enshrined in. As it stands, this characterization captures the spirit of the entire Enlightenment from Descartes to Kant. We would take it as a statement of healthy skepticism. Nevertheless, when the novel was published in Russia it caused a furor, and Turgenev was forced to flee. So



by the time Nietzsche picks up the term, it already has a rich polemical past.

Unlike Descartes or Kant, however, Nietzsche would turn to neither God nor reason in his search for values, and so his rejection of “authority” is considerably more radical than theirs. But nihilism is not just a skeptical philosophy. It is, as the term developed and became widely used, a cultural experience, a profound sense of disappointment, not only, as some ethicists would have it, in the failure of philosophy to justify moral principles, but in the fabric of life as such, the “widespread sensibility of our age” sympathetically described by Camus half a century later in his *Myth of Sisyphus*. It is also, Nietzsche keeps reminding us, a stance to be taken up as well as a phenomenon to be described. Zarathustra, in one of his more belligerent moments, urges us to “push what is falling” and, in his notes, Nietzsche urges to promote “a complete nihilism,” in place of the incomplete nihilism in which we now live.<sup>4</sup> Here again we note Nietzsche’s self-conscious “time-liness,” and, curiously, his devotion to a tradition dedicated to completeness (albeit perverse) in ethics. But Schopenhauer, in particular, was not so much describing the world as projecting his own bleak vision upon it.

But if Nietzsche has made us aware of anything in ethics, it is the importance of perspectives, the need to see all concepts and values in context. (This has been the concern of all of the preceding chapters.) How odd, then, that many of the key concepts of Nietzsche’s own philosophy have been so routinely blown up to absolute status, that is, nonperspectival, valid independently, and even devoid of context. Nihilism, in particular, is an accusation always made in context, presupposing a perspective. Outside of all contexts, it is nothing (which, of course, leads to some quaint and cute Parmenidean wordplay.) But as Maurice Blanchot has written, nihilism is a particular achievement of a particular sort of society.<sup>5</sup> It becomes a world-hypothesis only at the expense of losing what is most urgent and cleansing in Nietzsche, the attack on the transcendental pretension of understanding the world “in itself” on the basis of our own limited and limiting moral experience. For Nietzsche, nihilism is a concrete cultural experience, not an abstract metaphysical hypothesis.

In the pseudo-book of Nietzsche’s collected notes, *The Will to Power*, there are many indications about the scope and nature of the nihilism he describes. But perhaps the most important point is this one: for the most part, Nietzsche describes nihilism as a concrete cultural phenomenon rather than endorsing it as a philosophy. So I want to bracket the above uses of nihilism (“push what is falling” and the urge to promote “a complete nihilism”) as more Nietzschean hyperbole, for as his texts make perfectly clear, Nietzsche’s aim is to overcome nihilism, not promote it. And this in a particular setting, Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus when Nietzsche announces, “Nihilism stands at the door” (no doubts inspired by Marx and Engels’s spectacular opening of their *Communist Manifesto* of 1848), he

makes it pretty clear that this is a local and timely phenomenon, and the door is *our* door. So, too, when he defines nihilism as “the radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability” he goes on to make it clear that this is a matter of interpretation that is very contemporary (in science, in politics, in economics, in historiography, in art and romanticism in particular) and it is “rooted” in the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. When Nietzsche again defines nihilism as “that the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why’ finds no answer,” he comes quite close to the abstract notion of “the Absurd” that Camus would describe some sixty years later, but Nietzsche, like Camus, should be understood as describing a “widespread sensibility” and not a metaphysical truth. When he further defines “radical nihilism” as “the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence” he makes it quite clear that this is not a position he endorses but is itself a “consequence of the cultivation of ‘truthfulness’—and thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality.”<sup>6</sup>

Taken philosophically, Nietzsche’s nihilism stands as an accusation within the context of traditional ethics. It points to a tragic or at any rate damnable hollowness in “the moral point of view,” which we might anticipate by asking why moral philosophers ever became compelled to talk in such a peculiar fashion. Indeed, it is part and parcel of the whole history of ethics that Morality is emphatically not just “a point of view”; it is necessary and obligatory. Such talk already betrays a fatal compromise; “perspectivism” and Morality are warring enemies, not complementary theses. What is Morality, that it has been forced and has been able to hide behind a veneer of pluralism, to search for “reasons” for its own necessity? As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, there is a great deal in contemporary ethics that is very much on the trail blazed by Nietzsche, and it stands quite at odds with the “absolute” ethics of Kant and the Judeo-Christian moral tradition.

In his *After Virtue*, MacIntyre attacked Nietzsche and nihilism together, as symptoms of our general decay (“decadence” would be too fashionable and thus too positive a term for our moral wretchedness).<sup>7</sup> But in doing so, he has also rendered Nietzsche’s own thesis in admirably contemporary form; morality is undone, hollow, an empty sham for which philosophers busily manufacture “reasons” and tinker with grand principles if only to convince themselves that something might still be there. What philosophers defensively call “the moral point of view” is a camouflaged retreat. It serves only to hide the vacuousness of the moral prejudices they serve. Morality is no longer a “tablet of virtues” but a tabula rasa, for which we are poorly compensated by the insistence that it is nevertheless necessary. But MacIntyre errs, I want to say, insofar as he puts Nietzsche on the wrong side of this problem, on the side of the Enlightenment (as the author of its final collapse) rather than on the side of the tradition that can provide an alternative to this. Nietzsche is no nihilist but (as he himself declared) the an-

swer to nihilism. But to understand this is to understand how Nietzsche (like MacIntyre) importantly changed the very nature of ethics.

## Nietzsche, Kant, and Aristotle

Aristotle is important to the contemporary philosopher most of all because he does not share exactly our immediate concerns in moral theory.

—Terence Irwin, preface to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

It has always seemed to me perverse to read Aristotle and Kant as engaged in the same intellectual exercise of presenting and promoting a theory of morality. They were, without question, both moralists; that is, they had the “moral prejudices” that Nietzsche discovers beneath every philosophical theory. This, of course, would not bother them (except perhaps the word “prejudices”). They were both also, Nietzsche would be the first to argue, reactionaries, trying to prop up with an ethics an ethos—an established way of life—that was already collapsing. To do so, both ethicists appealed to an overriding (if not absolute) *telos* of reason and rationality, the suspicious status of which Nietzsche deftly displays vis-à-vis Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*.<sup>8</sup> Both philosophers, too, saw themselves as defenders of “civilized” virtues in the face of the nihilists of their time, though Aristotle displays ample affinity with Protagoras and Kant had no hesitation about supporting Robespierre. But, nevertheless, there is a profound difference between these two great thinkers that too easily gets lost in the need to sustain the linear tradition that supposedly begins with Socrates, ignoring the dialectical conflict that is to be found even within Socrates himself. Aristotle and Kant represent not just two opposed ethical theories, “teleological” and “deontological” respectively, synthesized by the *telos* of rationality. They represent two opposed ways of life.

Aristotle may be a long way from the Greece described by Homer, but the form of his ethics is still very much involved with the Homeric warrior tradition. The virtue of courage still deserves first mention in the list of excellences, and pride is still a virtue rather than a vice. It is an ethics for the privileged few, though Aristotle, unlike Nietzsche, had no need to announce this in a preface. But most important, it is an ethics that is not primarily concerned with rules and principles, much less universal rules and principles (i.e., categorical imperatives.) Indeed, Aristotle’s much-heralded discussion of the so-called practical syllogism in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which something akin to principles universal in form (and as ethically invigorating as “eating dry foods is healthy”) is quite modest—hardly the cornerstone of his ethics, as some scholars have made it out to be.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle’s ethics is not an ethics of principles, categorical or otherwise. It is an ethics of practice, a description of an actual ethos rather than an abstract attempt to define or create one. Ethos is by its very nature bound to a culture; Kantian ethics, by its pure rational nature but much to

its peril, seems not to be. Of course, any philosopher can show how a practice is really a rule-governed activity, and proceed to formulate, examine, and criticize the rules.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one might even show that children playing with their food follow certain rules, but to do so clearly is to misdescribe if not also misunderstand their activity.<sup>11</sup> But what is critical to an ethics of practice is not the absence of rules; it is rather the overriding importance of the concept of excellence or virtue (*arete*). What Aristotle describes is the ideal citizen, the excellent individual who is already (before he studies ethics and learns to articulate principles of any kind) proud of himself and the pride of his family and community. He is surrounded by friends; he is the model of strength, if not only the physical prowess that was singularly important to Achilles (who was far from ideal in other virtues). He may have been a bit too “civilized” already for Nietzsche’s Homeric fantasies, but he represents a moral type distinctively different from that described by Kant, two thousand years later. His ethics are his virtues; his excellence is his pride.

Kant, on the other hand, is the outstanding moralist in a very different tradition. The warrior plays no role and presents us with no ideal; individual talents and the good fortune of having been “brought up well,” which Aristotle simply presupposes, are ruled out of the moral realm from page one.<sup>12</sup> Kant’s ethics is the ethics of the categorical imperative, the ethics of universal rational principles, the ethics of obedient virtue instead of the cultivation of the virtues. It is an ethics that minimized differences and begins by assuming that we all share a common category of “humanity” and a common moral faculty of reason. The good man is the man who resists his “inclinations” and acts for the sake of duty and duty alone. This extreme criterion is qualified in a number of entertaining ways: for example, by suggesting that the rule that one should cultivate one’s talents is itself an example of the categorical imperative and that one has a peculiar duty to pursue one’s own happiness, if only so that one is thereby better disposed to fulfill one’s duties to others.<sup>13</sup> But for Kant rationality means rules (“the Moral Law”) and ethics is first of all an a priori discipline, not bound to context or culture. (“Nothing would be more of a disservice to morality than to derive it from examples.”)<sup>14</sup>

What I want to argue here should be, in part at least, transparent. Nietzsche may talk about “creating new values,” but, as he himself often says, it is something of a return to an old and neglected set of values—the values of masterly virtue—that most concerns him. There are complications. We do not have the ethos of the *Iliad*, nor even the tamer *ethé* of Homer or Aristotle, nor for that matter even the bourgeois complacency of Kantian Königsberg with its definitive set of practices in which the very idea of an unconditional imperative is alone plausible. There is no context, in other words, within which the new virtues we are to “create” are to be virtues, for a virtue without a practice is of no more value than a word without a language, a gesture without a context. When Nietzsche insists on “creating

new values," in other words, he is urging us on in a desperate state of affairs. He is rejecting the mediocre banality of an abstract ethics of principles, but he has no practice upon which to depend in advancing his renewed ethics of virtue. No practice, that is, except for the somewhat pretentious and sometimes absurd self-glorification of nineteenth-century German romanticism, which Nietzsche rebukes even as he adopts it as his only available context.<sup>15</sup> This is no small point: Nietzsche is not nearly so isolated nor so unique as he needs to think of himself. Dionysus, like "the Crucified," is an ideal only within a context, even if, in *der Fall Nietzsche*, it seems to be a context defined primarily by rejection.

Nietzsche's nihilism is a reaction against a quite particular conception of morality, summarized in modern times in the ethics of Kant. Quite predictably, much of Judeo-Christian morality—or what is often called Judeo-Christian morality—shares this conception. It, too, is for the many, not just a few. It, too, treats all souls as the same, whether rational or not. It, too, dwells on abstractions, whether such categorical imperatives as "the Golden Rule" or the universal love called *agapé*, which applies to everyone and therefore to no one in particular. Hegel was not so wrong when, in an early essay, he had Jesus on the Mount deliver a sermon taken straight from *The Critique of Practical Reason*.<sup>16</sup> Nor was Kant deceiving himself when he looked with pride on his moral philosophy as the heart of Christian ethics, interpreting the commandment to love as well as the desire to be happy as nothing more nor less than instantiations of the categorical imperative, functions of practical reason rather than expressions of individual virtues and exuberance for life.<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle and Achilles versus Kant and Christianity. It is not a perfect match, but it allows us to explain Nietzsche's aims and Nietzsche's problems far better than the overreaching "revaluation of all values" and the presumptuousness of "Dionysus versus the Crucified." On the other hand, it is not as if Kant and Nietzsche are completely opposed. It is Kant who sets up the philosophical conditions for the Nietzschean reaction, not only by so clearly codifying the central theses to be attacked but also by conceptually undermining the traditional supports of morality. The Enlightenment attack on authority ("heteronomy") and the emphasis of "autonomy" by Kant is a necessary precondition for Nietzsche's moral moves, however much the latter presents himself as providing a conception of morality that precedes, rather than presupposes, this Kantian move. It is Kant, of course, who so stresses the importance of the Will, which is further dramatized (to put it mildly) by Schopenhauer and which, again, Nietzsche attacks only by way of taking for granted its primary features. (Nietzsche's attacks on "the Will," especially "free will," deserve special attention in his regard. "Character" and "will to power" are not the same as "willpower.") It is Kant who rejects the support of morality by appeal to religion—arguing instead a dependency of the inverse kind—and though Nietzsche's now-tiresome "God is dead" hypothesis may be aimed primarily at the traditional thesis, the bulk

of his moral arguments presuppose the Kantian inversion—religion as a rationalization, not the precondition, of moral thinking.

## The Meanings of Morality

Every naturalism in morality—that is, every healthy morality—is dominated by an instinct of life. Anti-morality—that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached—turns, conversely, against the instincts of life.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, “Morality as Anti-nature,” *Twilight of the Idols*

It was Kant, too, perhaps, who best exemplified the philosophical temptation to suppose that “Morality” refers to a single phenomenon, faculty, or feature of certain, if not all, societies. Moral theories and some specific rules may vary, according to this monolithic position, but Morality is that one single set of basic moral rules that all theories of morality must accept as a given. This is stated outright by Kant at the beginning of his second Critique and in his *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>18</sup> Every society, one might reasonably suppose, has some “trump” set of rules and regulations that prohibit certain kinds of actions and are considered to be absolute, “categorical.” But it does not follow (as Aristotle is sometimes taken to argue on happiness) that there is some single set of rules and regulations that serve as “trump” for everyone. So philosophers will argue whether there is a single rationale behind the variety of rules (a “utility principle” or some principle of authority) or some single logic or form of practical reason.

Some philosophers will also challenge the alleged universality and disinterestedness of such principles, but the idea that Morality is ultimately everywhere the same, in form if not in content, or at least in intent, is a tempting possibility. It satisfies our craving for simplicity and unity, and it answers in a stroke that nasty question about ethical relativism. If in fact there is no ethical pluralism, then the urge to conclude that different codes of ethics are incommensurably different has little hold on us. Indeed, even Nietzsche, in his later works, is tempted by the monolithic image; his pluralistic view of a “tablet of virtues hanging over every people” is explained by his familiar exuberant account: “It is the expression of their will to power!” In his repeated “campaign against morality,” he, too, makes it seem too much as if Morality is a monolith rather than a complex set of phenomena whose differences may be as striking as their similarities.

What is Morality? This, perhaps more than any other question, guided Nietzsche’s ethics, but it also confused his answers. In his rejection of the rather particular Judeo-Christian-Kantian conception of Morality, Nietzsche too often made it sound as if he were rejecting *all* morality. But Nietzsche frequently talks about *morality*s, in the plural, and his thesis should therefore be characterized as the rejection of one peculiar conception of morality, not as the rejection of *all* morality or morality as such. But it is this specialized conception of morals, or let us call it by the Kantian name Morality

(*Moralität*), that intrigues Nietzsche: How morals and moralities ever became reduced to Morality, or how slave morality—one peculiar twist on morality became Morality, the one and only. So, too, how did the virtues (plural) ever get melted together into the shapeless form of Virtue?

There are as many meanings of *morality* as there are different modes and conceptions of morals. One of the meanings of *morality* that preoccupies Nietzsche, and which I shall be employing here, is the definition provided by Kant: a set of universal, categorical principles of practical reason. *Morals*, on the other hand, is a term much less precise, and I shall be using that term much as Hume used it in his *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*: morals are those general customs and acceptable ways of behaving that are generally agreeable in a particular culture and characterize a good person—leaving quite open the all-important nonconceptual question of what is to count (and in what context) as a good person. Ethics, finally, I take to be the overall arena in which morality and morals and other matters concerning the good life and how to live it are located. Morality in its Kantian guise is not essential to ethics, however hard Kantians may strive to claim hegemony for their concept. One might formulate Nietzsche's concern by asking how the broad subject of ethics has so easily been converted into Moral Philosophy, that is, the philosophical analysis of Morality à la Kant rather than the somewhat pagan celebration of the virtues à la Hume (which is not to suggest that Nietzsche would have felt very much at home with the jolly Scot either, however impressive their philosophical affinities).

What is in question and what ethics is about, according to moral philosophers since Kant, is the *justification* of moral principles, and along with this quest for justification comes the search for a single ultimate principle, a *summum bonum*, through which all disagreements and conflicts can be resolved. The question "What is morality?" usually gets resolved in a few opening paragraphs or pages; but the search for an adequate answer to the more troublesome justificatory challenge, "Why be moral?" becomes the main order of business and often fills whole books. The question, however, is not entirely serious. "But there is no reason for worry," Nietzsche assures us, "Things still stand today as they have always stood: I see nobody in Europe who has (let alone promotes) any awareness that thinking about morality could become dangerous, captious, seductive—that there might be any calamity involved."<sup>19</sup> Thus today we find a nearly total moral skepticism (nihilism?) defended in such centers of Moral Standards as Oxford and Yale, under such nonprovocative titles as "prescriptivism" and "emotivism." But, whatever the analysis, these folks still keep their promises and restrain themselves to their fair share of the high table pie. The quest for justification is not a challenge to the monolith; it is only an exercise.

In fact, it is the phenomenon of Morality itself that is in question. More than half a century before Nietzsche issued his challenge to Kant, a more sympathetic post-Kantian, Hegel, attacked the Kantian conception of "morality" in terms that would have been agreeable to Nietzsche, had he been

a bit more receptive to the German *Geist*. Hegel too treated the Kantian conception of morality as a monolith, but he also saw that it was surrounded by other conceptions that might also be called “moral” and which were, in the telos of human development, both superior and more “primitive.” One of these was *Sittlichkeit*, or the morality of customs (*Sitten*).<sup>20</sup> It is what we earlier called a morality of practice, as opposed to a morality of principles. Hegel proposed not just a different way of interpreting and justifying moral rules (though this would be entailed as well); he defended a conception of morals that did not depend upon rules at all—in which the activity of justification, in fact, became something of a philosophical irrelevancy, at best. The need to justify moral rules betrays an emptiness in those rules themselves, a lack of conviction, a lack of support. Since then, Hegel has mistakenly been viewed as lacking in his concern for the basic ethical question, leading several noted ethical commentators (Popper, Walsh)<sup>21</sup> to accuse him of a gross amorality, conducive to if not openly inviting authoritarianism. It is as if rejecting the Kantian conception of morality and refusing to indulge in the academic justification game were tantamount to abandoning ethics—both the practice and the theory—altogether.

That, of course, is how Nietzsche tends to be read as well, as rejecting Kant and the Judeo-Christian tradition and therefore an amoral nihilist, having abandoned ethics altogether. But Morality is not all of ethics, and it can be viewed not only as a distortion of ethics but as anti-ethics, particularly if (like Aristotle and Nietzsche, but also like John Stuart Mill and the utilitarians) one insists on *naturalism* in ethics and the priority of the notion of *the good life* in ethics. This is not to claim that Morality is antithetical to the good life (although Nietzsche sometimes holds that strong view) but rather that, at the very least, insofar as Morality is justifiable, it must be conducive to the good life. One of Nietzsche’s most common objections to morality is precisely this, that it is “anti-Nature” insofar as it runs counter to the natural human pursuit of the good life, whatever that may be—the pursuit of pleasure, as in Mill, or of excellence, as in Aristotle. Nietzsche will obviously side with Aristotle, but the point here is that rejecting Morality in pursuit of the good life is by no means abandoning ethics.

If we are to understand Nietzsche’s attack on Morality, we must appreciate the limited conception of Morality that falls under his hollow-seeking hammer. We can thus appreciate the “affirmative” side of Nietzsche’s moral thinking, the sense in which he sees himself as having “a more severe morality than anybody,” by understanding the utter importance of ethics in his thinking, the pursuit of the good life, the *best* life, in the best possible way or ways. Nietzsche’s own language makes this most unclear. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he boasts, “*We immoralists!*— . . . We have been spun into a severe yarn and short of duties and *cannot* get out of that—and in this we are men of duty, we too . . . the dolts and appearances speak against us saying, ‘These are men without duty.’ We always have the dolts and appearances against us.”<sup>22</sup> But to write about Nietzsche as a literal “immoral-



ist” and the mere destroyer of Morality is to read him badly, and to conflate the Kantian conception of “duty” (bound as it is to the whole of Kant’s universalist, rational system) with the broader concept of duty in which duty follows from one’s roles and choices in life is to confuse some very different (and only verbally similar) concepts. In short, to think of Nietzsche as anti-ethics is to be a “dolt.”

For Nietzsche, as for Hegel, and as for Aristotle, morality consists not of principles but of practices. It is doing, not willing, that is of moral significance, an expression of character rather than a display of practical reason. A practice has local significance; it requires—and sets up—a context; it is not a matter of universal rule; in fact, universality is sometimes argued to show that something is not a practice. (For example, sociobiologists have argued that incest and certain other sexual preferences are not sex practices because—on the basis of their alleged universality—they can be shown to be genetically inherited traits.)<sup>23</sup> Some practices are based upon principles, of course, but not all are; and principles help define a practice, though they rarely if ever do so alone. Hegel and Aristotle, of course, emphasize collective social practices, in which laws may be much in evidence. Nietzsche is particularly interested in the “genealogy” of social practices in which principles play a central if also devious role, but he too quickly concludes that there is but one such “moral type” and one alternative “type,” which he designates “slave” (“herd”) and “master” moralities, respectively. In fact, there are as many moral “types” as one is willing to distinguish, and to designate as “master morality” the historical and anthropological gamut of relatively lawless societies is most unhistorical as well as confusing philosophically. We need only add that for Nietzsche character and mastery need not be on display at all but rather refer to the “inner” integrity of one’s own rich experience.

The monolithic image of Morality, divorced from particular peoples and practices, gives rise to a disastrous disjunction: either Morality or nothing. If Nietzsche often seems to come up emptyhanded, obscurely calling for “the creation of new values,” it is because he finds himself rejecting principles without a set of practices to fall back on. If only, like his predecessor Fichte, he had a world like the world of the French Revolution where he could say, “Here is where we can prove ourselves!” But what Nietzsche finds instead is the hardly heroic world of nineteenth-century democratic socialism and his own lonely life traveling from one Alpine town to another. In the absence of such heroic practices, Nietzsche celebrates “life,” and turns coping with his own personal suffering into a kind of heroic campaign. And in the absence of any community in which he could play a useful role with others, he often ends up defending a crude notion of self-assertion, generalized to all Nature as “the will to power,” reducing the popular view of Nietzsche’s ethics to a combination of aggressive banality and energetic self-indulgence. (Would it be unfair to again mention Leopold and Loeb here? They were not the least literate of Nietzsche’s students.) What we find in appearances,

accordingly, is not an “affirmative” philosophy at all. Assertiveness and aggression are not “affirmative.” Rejecting Morality in favor of *life* is not yet an affirmative philosophy.

But morality is not Morality, and there are all sorts of *ethé* left over once Morality has been investigated and found wanting. Moreover, moral philosophy need not be primarily—or even secondarily—the quest for justification. Rather, the apparent need for justification may itself indicate something unconvincing and thus lacking in ethics. Aristotle, for instance, did not endeavor to “justify” his ethics. He simply assumed that anyone brought up well and enjoying the enormous benefits of Athenian society would accept what he described without question—that is, without any challenge asking “Why should I be ethical?” A proper ethics, properly described and presented, needs no justification. And Nietzsche, in his rejection of Morality, turns out to be very much like Aristotle in his pursuit of an ethics.

### Virtue Ethics: Nietzsche and Aristotle

Nietzsche or Aristotle?  
—Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre gives us a choice, *enten-eller*: Nietzsche or Aristotle.<sup>24</sup> There is, he explicitly warns us, no third alternative. MacIntyre sees Nietzsche’s philosophy as purely destructive, despite the fact that he praises the arch-destroyer for his insight into the collapse of morals that had been increasingly evident since the Enlightenment. MacIntyre chooses Aristotle as the positive alternative. Aristotle had an *ethos*: Nietzsche leaves us with nothing. But Nietzsche is nevertheless the culmination of that whole tradition—which we still refer to as “moral philosophy” or “ethics”—which is based on a tragic and possibly irreversible error in both theory and practice. The error is the rejection of *ethos* as the foundation of morality with a compensating insistence on the rational justification of morality. Without a presupposed *ethos*, no justification is possible. Within an *ethos*, none is necessary. And so after centuries of degeneration, internal inconsistencies and failures in the Enlightenment project of transcending mere custom and justifying moral rules once and for all, the structures of morality have collapsed, leaving only incoherent fragments. “Ethics” is the futile effort to make sense of the fragments and “justify” them, from Hume’s appeal to the sentiments and Kant’s appeal to practical reason to the contemporary vacuity of “meta-ethical” theory. Here is the rubble that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra urges us to clear away. Here is the vacuum in which Nietzsche urges us to become “legislators” and “create new values.” But out of what are we to do this? What would it be, “to create a new value”? If the early Hebrews did so (in reaction against their aristocratic betters) what

would be the target of our reaction? Wouldn't this be another version of slave ("reactive") morality? Isn't the virtue of Nietzschean ethics precisely its individualistic and fragmentary nature—its pluralism?

MacIntyre, by opposing Nietzsche and Aristotle, closes off to us the basis upon which we could best reconceive morality: a reconsideration of Aristotle through Nietzschean eyes. Nietzsche, of course, encourages the antagonistic interpretation. But the opposition is ill conceived, and the interpretation is misleading. MacIntyre, like Philippa Foot, takes Nietzsche too literally to be attacking all morality. But quite the contrary of rejecting the ethics of Aristotle, I see Nietzsche as harking back to Aristotle and the still warrior-bound aristocratic tradition he was (retrospectively) cataloging in his *Nicomachean* ("Neo-McKeon") *Ethics*. Whatever the differences between Greece of the *Iliad* and Aristotle's Athens, there was a far vaster gulf—and not only in centuries—between the elitist ethics of Aristotle and the egalitarian, bourgeois, Pietist ethics of Kant. Nietzsche may have envisioned himself as Dionysus versus the Crucified; he is better understood as a modern-day Sophist versus Kant, a defender of the virtues against the categorical imperative.

Julius Moravcsik used to begin his lectures on Aristotle with a comparison to Nietzsche. They were two of a kind, he said, both functionalists, both naturalists, both "teleologists," standing very much opposed to the utilitarians and Kantians. Moravcsik did not follow this through, but his casual seminar remark has stuck with me for all of these years. The more I read and lecture on both authors, so different in times and tempers, the more I find the compassion illuminating. Nietzsche was indeed, like Aristotle, a self-proclaimed functionalist, naturalist, teleologist, and, I would add, an elitist, though on both philosophers' views this would follow from the rest. Nietzsche's functionalism is most evident in his constant insistence that we evaluate values, see what they are for, what role they play in the survival and life of a people. He never tires of telling us about his "naturalism," of course, from his flatly false declaration that he is the first philosopher who was also a psychologist (MacIntyre here substitutes sociology) to his refreshing emphasis on psychological explanation in place of rationalizing justification. Nietzsche often states this in terms of the "this-worldly" as opposed to the "other-worldly" visions of Christianity, but I think that this is not the contrast of importance. Indeed, today it is the very "this worldly" activity of some Christian power blocks that is a major ethical concern, and there is much more to naturalism (as opposed, for example, to Kant's rationalism) than the rejection of heaven and hell as the end of ethics. (Kant, of course, would agree with that too.)

Nietzsche's teleology is at times as cosmic as Aristotle's, especially where the grand *telos* becomes "the will to power." But on the strictly human (if not all too human) level, Nietzsche's ethics, like Aristotle's, can best be classified in introductory ethics readers as an ethics of "self-realization." "Become who you are" is the slogan in the middle writings: the *telos* of the

*Übermensch* serves as an ideal from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on. Indeed, who is the *Übermensch* if not Aristotle's *megalopsychos*, "the great-souled man" from whom Nietzsche even borrows much of his "master-type" terminology. He is the ideal who "deserves and claims great things." He is the man driven by what Goethe (the most frequent candidate for *Übermensch* status) called his "daemon" (the association with Aristotle's *eu-daimon* is not incidental).

Aristotle's teleology begins modestly, with the *telos* of the craftsman, the physician, the farmer. Each has his purpose, his own criteria for excellence, his own "good." But such modest goods and goals are hardly the stuff of ethics, and Aristotle quickly turns to "the good for man," by which he means the ideal man, and the "function of man," by which he means man at his best.<sup>25</sup> There is no point to discussing what we banally call today "the good person," who breaks no rules or laws, offends no one and interests no one except certain moral philosophers. There is no reason to discuss the *hoi polloi*, who serve their city-state well and honor their superiors appropriately. It is the superiors themselves who deserve description, for they are the models from whom the vision of humanity is conceived. What sort of insanity, we hear Aristotle and Nietzsche asking in unison, can explain the egalitarian notion that all people are of equal value, that everyone and anyone can serve as an ideal, as a model for what is best in us? With leaders like Pericles, why would we need the categorical imperative? ("What are morals to us sons of God?") With leaders like our own, no wonder we are suffocating with laws and mediocrity.

But again, to reject egalitarian ethics and dismiss the banal notion of "the good person" as of minimal ethical interest is not to become an "immoralist." It does not mean breaking all the rules. It does not result in such inability as once suffered by moral philosopher Richard Hare, a temporary incapacity to morally censure Hitler for any rational reasons.<sup>26</sup> Or, if we want an "immoralist," he might be at worst the sort of person that André Gide created in his short novel of that name, a man who senses his own mortality and luxuriates in his own bodily sensations, amused and fascinated by the foibles of people around him.<sup>27</sup> This is not, of course, the man whom Aristotle has in mind. The Stagirite was concerned with statesmen, philosopher-kings, the flesh-and-blood *Übermenschen* who exist in actuality, not just in novels and philosophical fantasies and Zarathustra's pronouncements. But Nietzsche too, when it comes down to cases, is concerned not with a phantom but with real-life heroes, the "great men" who justify (I use the word advisedly) the existence of the society that created them—and which they in turn created. The rejection of bourgeois morality does not dictate cruelty but rather places an emphasis on excellence. The will to power is not *Reich* but *Macht* and not supremacy but superiority. Nietzsche urges us to create values, but I believe that it is the value of creating as such—and having the strength and the sense of purpose to do so—that he most valued. Though Nietzsche may shock us with his elitist and warrior language, the *Übermenschen* near to his heart are his aesthetic comrades,

“philosophers, saints, and artists.”<sup>28</sup> The unspoken but always present thesis is this: It is in the romantic practice of artistic creativity that modern excellence can be achieved and in an exquisite sense of personal taste and experience that it is realized.

Elitism is not itself an ethics. Indeed, I think both Aristotle and Nietzsche might well object to it as such. It is rather the presupposition that people’s talents and abilities differ. It is beginning with what is the case. (Compare John Rawls: “It is upon a correct choice of a basic structure of society . . . that justice . . . depends.”)<sup>29</sup> The purpose of an ethics is to maximize people’s potential, to encourage the most and the best from all of them, but more by far from the best of them. From a cultural and artistic point of view, this means that we should be concerned only with the very few (although it is by no means evident from the outset who these will be). But this is not a sign of Nietzsche’s callousness or ruthlessness. It is the simple recognition that true talents (and the cultures that encourage their development) are very rare. It is also the recognition that any universal rule—however ingeniously formulated and equally applied—will be disadvantageous to someone, especially if it is the development of artistic talent and not politics that we have in mind. It is also an enormous waste as well as unfair (both authors worry more about the former than the latter) for the strong to be limited by the weak, the productive limited by the unproductive, the creative limited by the uncreative.

It will not do to mask the point by saying that elitism does not treat people unequally, only differently. It presumes inequality from the outset and defends it by appeal to the larger picture. Aristotle does this by appeal to the well-being of the city-state and the natural order of things, Nietzsche by a more abstract but very modern romantic appeal to human creativity. Of course, Nietzsche refuses to be so Kantian as to appeal to “humanity” as such, and so he appeals to a step beyond humanity, to *über*-humanity. But what is the *Übermensch* but a projection of what is best in us, what Kant called “dignity” but Nietzsche insists is “nobility.” The difference, of course, is that Kant thought that dignity was inherent in every one of us; Nietzsche claims to recognize nobility in only the very few. (Here I hope that it is especially clear that he is adopting an aesthetic and not a political viewpoint.)

What is essential to this view of ethics—let us not call it elitist ethics but rather an ethics of virtue, *areteic* ethics—is that the emphasis is wholly on excellence, a teleological conception. The virtues are both conducive to and constitutive of rich, aesthetic experience, and it is such experience that justifies both the virtues and the life that embraces them.

What counts for much less is obedience of rules, laws, and principles, for one can be wholly obedient and also dull, unproductive, unimaginative, and a philistine. Once again, this does not mean that the “immoralist”—as Nietzsche misleadingly calls him—will kill innocents, steal from the elderly and betray the community, nor even, indeed, run a car through a red light. The artistic *Übermensch* is perfectly willing to act “in accordance with mo-

rality," even, in a qualified way, "for the sake of duty," that is, if it is a duty that fits his character and his *telos*, that is, if it meets the high standards of his exquisite taste. (I suppose that one might consider this one of those "duties to oneself" that Kant worries about.) In a much-debated passage, Nietzsche even insists that the strong have a "duty" to help the weak, a statement that is utterly confusing on either a Kantian reading or the nihilist interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics.<sup>30</sup> But there is a different sense of "duty," one that is familiar to Aristotle and has to do with one's station and responsibilities in (public) life, and one might take Nietzsche to be arguing a similar, entirely empirical concept of duty having to do with one's aesthetic outlook and responsibilities in life. What the *Übermensch* aspirant does not recognize are categorical imperatives, commands made impersonally and universally, without respect for rank or abilities or taste. But in terms of his feelings and his awareness of his role in the world (one might say, as a system of hypothetical imperatives useful to his purposes) the *Übermensch* might be as moral as anyone else.

MacIntyre's diagnosis of our "tragic" fate turns on his recognition that the singular *ethos* upon which a unified and coherent ethics might be based has fragmented. We no longer have a single culture with established customs and an agreed-upon system of morals; we instead have pluralism. (I'm afraid that Nietzsche, too, in his strict demands for artistic merit, too easily tends to an aesthetic monism.) And according to MacIntyre, our consequent insistence on tolerance and our emphasis on rules and laws are a poor substitute for a genuine *ethos*. Pleas for tolerance and an emphasis on rules and laws are symptoms of our malaise rather than cures. But many of us are horrified by the idea of a unified and coherent ethics or culture based just on tradition. We have seen all too often what such a culture comes to. And are there ever such unified cultures, or is their very possibility something of a myth? (Think of the fiction of ethnically pure Japan, or look at how readily unified religions slip into warring sects.) In a multicultural, irreducibly pluralist world, rules and laws may be utterly necessary, but tolerance, including aesthetic tolerance, is one of the most important virtues. Too bad that Nietzsche, the great pluralist, didn't have more to say about it. It might make the choice *MacIntyre or Nietzsche* much more plausible.

### Aristotle's *Polis*, Nietzsche's Problem

Now as Zarathustra was climbing the mountain he thought how often since his youth he had wandered alone.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Nietzsche is something more than the pathologist of a dead or dying morality. He is also the champion of that sense of integrity that MacIntyre claims

we have lost. The question is, "How is integrity possible in a society without an *ethos* or, in more positive terms, in a pluralist society with many *ethé*?" Does it make sense in such a society to still speak of "excellence," or should we just award "achievement" and recognize limited accomplishments in cautiously defined subgroups, contexts, and professions? It does not seem to help at all if we try to gloss over all differences by postulating some atavistic urge to excellence, for instance, "the will to power." The problem is, how we should define such pluralistic integrity.

In Aristotle, two convening ideals made possible his powerful teleological vision: the unity of his community and the projected vision of the *telos* of man (which not incidentally coincided with the best images of his community). We no longer have that unified community—although its half-hearted pluralism is not the reason Nietzsche rejects bourgeois morality. In fact, whether or not it was generally true in the late nineteenth century in Nietzsche's part of Europe, it was certainly true for him. He was a member of no community and at best a familiar outsider in several. But it is not difficult to see Nietzsche's provocative ethics as the expression of a different kind of community, distinctive but rather ill-circumscribed, namely the community of disaffected academics and intellectuals, the people he writes for (whether or not they read him). Perhaps this was a poor base for Nietzsche's rather extravagant claims for a new ethics, and it must be said the general population whom Nietzsche has affected has not yet lived up to his aspirations for "higher men" and "philosophers of the future." Nevertheless, Nietzsche, like Aristotle, held onto the vision of such a community, defined by an overriding *telos* of excellence. And despite his sarcastic comments about the "improvers of mankind," Nietzsche embraced an enormous sense of human potential.

It is this emphasis on "self-realization" that draws Nietzsche and Aristotle together and defines their keen interest in the virtues. But where Aristotle could appeal at every turn to "the way the best men think about these things," namely, the aristocrats of his own community, Nietzsche is quite understandably at a loss when it comes to any such question of appeal to community. Moreover, although Aristotle retained and talked about the warrior virtues, most of his virtues are distinctively those of the good citizen, concerned with justice and friendship and getting along together. There is little of the fire and ice that Nietzsche talks about, certainly no emphasis on cruelty and suffering. Aristotle was not the lonely wanderer in the mountains and desert whom Nietzsche sometimes resembled and celebrated in Zarathustra. And this, to be sure, is a profound difference between them. However aristocratic they may be, Aristotle's virtues seem too genteel, too much in the spirit of party life to be comparable to Nietzsche's severe moral strictures (see Zarathustra's "party" in part IV). It would be an unforgivable historical mistake to call Aristotle's virtues "bourgeois," but, nevertheless, they lack the cutting edge of Nietzsche's pronouncements. Aristotle is the good neighbor and good citizen. Nietzsche is the no-

mad and occasional stranger. Their virtues and their conception of the self to be realized differ accordingly.

Aristotle conceived of a neat-sounding criterion for the virtues, "the doctrine of the mean" or "the mean between the extremes." (I will briefly discuss this in the next chapter.) But it is widely accepted that Aristotle's criterion fails, with regard to many of his virtues, and his list of virtues, accordingly, looks rather ad hoc (at least so far as his criterion is concerned). But this is no problem for him, since what he is really doing is a bit of anthropology or sociology, describing his own society and what people in general (at least among the aristocrats) accepted as *their* virtues. Nietzsche's problem, accordingly, is that he has no such community or context to draw on, and so his affirmative ethics all too often looks as if it is without substantial content. It is all well and good to talk about the glories of solitude, but it is far from clear that solitude is either a virtue itself or a possible ground of virtues, as Aristotle's *polis* surely is.

Moreover, the status of Nietzsche's solitude is by no means all that clear. His letters show us that he lived very much in the small and scattered community constituted by his friends, and sometimes he defines himself in terms of them. Zarathustra, Biblical bluster aside, spends most of his time looking for friends. "Who would want to live without friends?" asked Aristotle rhetorically in his *Ethics*. Surely not Nietzsche. And he was, by all accounts, a good friend, an enthusiastic friend. And if he remained lonely, that is a matter for psychiatric, not ontological, diagnosis. As for Nietzsche's warrior spirit, the cutting edge of cruelty, the fire and ice, there is little evidence that Nietzsche either displayed or admired them, Lou's description of the glint in his eyes notwithstanding. Nietzsche's own list of virtues included such Aristotelian virtues as honesty, courage, generosity, and courtesy.<sup>31</sup> And, at the end, didn't he supposedly collapse while saving a horse from a beating?

There seems to be little question whether Aristotle lived up to his own virtues (although there was that reputed incident with Alexander's girlfriend Phyllis).<sup>32</sup> But Nietzsche leaves so much unsaid, and gives us so much hyperbolically, that an ad hominem analysis is not at all beside the point in trying to understand either his ethics or his moralistic exhortations. Even those who do not sympathize with Nietzsche at all grasp the *struggle* with loneliness, morality, and rebellion that is going on in the man, so often expressed in the irresponsible (albeit brilliant) language of an adolescent. But if Nietzsche doesn't live up to his warrior images, we should just remember that there are different kinds of warriors for different times. Achilles suited the *Iliad*. Our warriors today are Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Nietzsche's warriors would have been Beethoven and Goethe.

But Nietzsche's isolation and lack of community give rise to another problem, one suggested by his late attempt at a "revaluation of all values." From his distant perch, he views the whole Judeo-Christian tradition and the Morality that goes with it as a single, virtually all-embracing historical



entity, against which there is no clearly conceived alternative. Had he lived in the Athenian *polis* (which is what one suspects he rather dreamed of doing), the fantasies he would have had about a plausible future would have been well grounded (even if, as so often, they would turn out to be false). But instead, he finds himself both caught with and suffocating from the historical context in which he finds himself, and the alternatives, accordingly, seem far-fetched indeed. Consequently, Nietzsche gives us two very different prescriptions for our fate, which includes the moral collapse that has been so systematically described by MacIntyre. First, he urges us to recapture a sense of “master” morality, a morality of nobility, as if such nobility were still possible after two thousand years of Christianity. The war-torn pre-*polis* world of the *Iliad* is gone, and so is Aristotle’s *polis*. But nobility requires a context, and it is never clear in what context Nietzsche thinks a modern nobility would be possible. Democracy and socialism have rendered the aristocratic virtues unacceptable and fomented mass culture, which Nietzsche sees as the very antithesis of the culture he wants to encourage. The foundation is gone; human equality has become something of an a priori truth (“we hold these truths to be self-evident . . .”). And the life that Nietzsche wants to encourage us to lead has, accordingly, become something of an endangered species.

That is on the one side—an impossible nostalgia, not unlike the American (and European) fantasy about the American West, “where men were men,” John Wayne and the Marlboro Man (who were in fact a multitude of unwashed and hungry refugees eking out a difficult living.) But if there is no warrior ethos to which we can return, then what? “The creation of values!” Nietzsche says. But what is it to “create a value”? Not even Nietzsche suggests one—not even one! What he does is to remind us, again and again, of old and established values that can be used as an ethical Archimedean point, to topple the professions of a too abstract, too banal morality that fails to promote the virtues of character and high culture. He appeals to weakness of will (not by that name) and resentment—what could be more Christian vices? He charges us with hypocrisy—the tribute that even “immoralists” pay to virtue. He points out the cruelty of Tertullian and other Christian moralists. He chastizes the Stoics for emulating wasteful nature. He attacks Spinoza for being too in love with “his own wisdom.” He attacks Christianity as a whole as a “slave” morality, driven by a “herd instinct” detrimental to the progress of the species as a whole. But what new values?

Ethics is an expression of an *ethos* even if that *ethos* is the scattered romantic sensibility of a few hundred brilliant and not-so-brilliant misfits scattered around the hills and lakes of Europe. There is no such thing as “creating new values” in Nietzsche’s sense. It is not like declaring clam shells as currency and it is not, as in MacIntyre’s excellent example, Kamehameha II of Hawaii declaring invalid the “taboos” whose function had long ago been forgotten. Nietzsche does not reject morals but rather only one version

of Morality, which has as its instrument the universalizable principles formalized by Kant, the ancestries of which go all the way back to the Bible. But, as Scheler says in defense of Christianity, the diagnosis is not complete. Indeed, it would not be wrong (as Lou Salomé observed) to see Nietzsche as an old-fashioned moralist, disgusted with the world around him but unable to provide a satisfactory account of an alternative and unable to find a context in which an alternative could be properly cultivated.

None of this is to deny that Nietzsche is, as Kaufmann calls him, a true moral revolutionary. Nor does it cast any doubt on our claim that he has an affirmative ethics. Nietzsche is indeed after something new and important, even if it is also very old and considerably less ambitious than the creation of new values. Nietzsche is, as MacIntyre puns, *after virtues*, even if he would prefer to think of them in Homeric rather than Aristotelian form. And in his writings and his letters, the focus of that alternative is as discernible as the larger concept of Morality he attacks. It is Aristotle's ethics of virtue, an ethics of practice instead of an ethics of principle, an ethics in which character, not duty or abstract poses of universal love, plays the primary role. "To give style to one's character. A rare art."<sup>33</sup> In that one sentence, Nietzsche sums up his own affirmative ethics far better than in whole books of polemics and abuse.

# Chapter 6

## NIETZSCHE'S VIRTUES

### *What Would He Make of Us?*

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Give style to your character, a great and rare art.  
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

A person of superior *de* [virtue] does not get *de*,  
That is why he has *de*.  
—*Tao Te Ching*

Nietzsche called himself an “immoralist” (although it is doubtful that he ever did anything truly immoral in his life), and his rejection of what was typically called “morality” was certainly caustic and contemptuous. He declared Judeo-Christian morality and even the ethics of Socrates “anti-life.” He considered Kant’s second *Critique* something of a subtle “joke,” and he thought that utilitarianism was simply “vulgar.” But Nietzsche’s “immoralism” consisted of something other than unethical behavior and the rejection of Morality. He advocated a very different way of thinking about ethics, one that encouraged living life to the fullest and cultivating a rich inner life. Today, Nietzsche is not alone. Ethics has shifted away from the Kantian rational willing subject and the utilitarian attention to hedonistic consequences toward a renewed attention to the character and integrity of the individual, his or her *virtues*. What is ultimately good, according to this viewpoint, is virtuous character, a person with the right virtues, a person with integrity or what Nietzsche calls “nobility.” Even Kant and Mill have been reinterpreted as virtue ethicists.<sup>1</sup> Thus the central questions of ethics become: What kind of character? Which virtues?

That is the question that I plotted as the guiding theme of this book, “What would Nietzsche make of us?” Now we are ready to start answering that question in some detail. The answer, as I have indicated, should be couched in terms of the virtues, those traits of personal character that are particularly admirable. But admirable to whom? And according to what standard? It is not as if Nietzsche gave us a simple prescription, like Aristotle’s “mean between the extremes,” or a coherent “list” of virtues. Nor does

there seem to be any pattern to the multitude of virtues he praises (getting a good night's sleep, being true to our friends, being strong, being "hard," not universalizing but nevertheless "legislating values," having a sense of humor, being creative, taking chances, and so on). And then there are the familiar dead ends: We should not expect too much from Zarathustra's pontifical posturing or from his attention-getting concept of the *Übermensch*. Nor should we try to squeeze more meaning from the much-discussed idea of eternal recurrence or the rather unfortunate and greatly overplayed notion of "the will to power." But there is a great deal of material to be drawn from what I would consider the more morally concrete and insightful books of Nietzsche's "middle" creative period, that is, from *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak to Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Genealogy*. The themes to be found there are rarely so exciting as the (empty) promise of the *Übermensch*, but they constitute, taken together, a more or less coherent if not entirely consistent philosophy of life, a philosophy of virtue that might best be summarized in the good advice "to give style to one's character" and whose result is that exquisite inner life that Nietzsche pursued for himself.

I began this book by saying that I was not so much interested in an analysis of Nietzsche or Nietzsche's philosophy as I was motivated by the question above, namely, *What would Nietzsche make of us?* What I have done so far in this book is to lay the groundwork for an answer to that question that the best undergraduates always ask, usually couched in semischolarly terms as "what would an *Übermensch* be like?" (Would he get married? Would he major in philosophy? Would he care about getting As?) But what they really mean to ask, of course, is "What should we be like? To what should we aspire? How does Nietzsche think that we should transform ourselves? How do we 'become who we are,' and how do we know what or who we are or should be?"

Many of Nietzsche's more obvious answers to these questions are negative: don't be resentful. Don't listen to other people instead of your own instincts. Don't be servile. Don't allow yourself to be too "soft." Don't be negative. Don't be judgmental. Don't get so caught up in pity and compassion that you sacrifice your ideals. Don't be self-righteous. Don't put your faith in the otherworldly. Don't believe the priests. Don't try to "improve" on human nature. And so on. But in chapter 5, I argued for an "affirmative" view of Nietzsche, and this requires an uplifting set of virtues and not just a list of "don't"s that spells out a set of Nietzschean vices. To be sure, this is not the usual list of vices, but it will not do to simply assume that the "opposites" of those vices—say, callousness as opposed to pity—must be Nietzsche's virtues. To be sure, Nietzsche has more tolerance than usual for the various vices and "sins" that characterize the human comedy, but the question of what Nietzsche positively values cannot be gleaned simply from the vices that he criticizes. And all of this is made much more complex, of course, by the fact that Nietzsche also insists that we are in some sense born with and stuck with our characters, slavish or noble, and so all aspira-

tion to change and “improve” oneself is thrown under a dark shadow indeed. (I will tackle this seeming paradox in the next chapter.)

So, how would Nietzsche want us? What would he make of us? What are the virtues he defends, and how should we understand and realize them? When Alasdair MacIntyre insists that we must choose “Aristotle or Nietzsche,” he strongly implies that the choice is either the virtues or nothing, that is, the nihilism of the post-Enlightenment failure to found ethics on abstract, universal rules. But both Aristotle and Nietzsche are philosophers concerned with personal virtues, with personal integrity, character, a sense of nobility. Nietzsche even defends the importance of tradition in *Zarathustra*. There are dramatic differences, of course, but I think that a good place to start the inventory of Nietzsche’s virtues would be with Aristotle’s virtues (and Nietzsche’s understanding of them).

There is much they share in common, beginning with the warrior culture that Aristotle lived in and Nietzsche fantasized through his reading of the Greeks. Thus courage, for both of them, is the chief virtue, the one that provides something for all of the others. Another critical shared feature, natural to the Greek *arete* but lost in the translation to German *Tugend* or English *virtue*, is the linkage between virtue and excellence, that is, extraordinary achievement rather than merely appropriate behavior. Nietzsche, like Aristotle, is interested in the “great-souled man,” the hero-aristocrat, not just “being a good person.” Philosophically, what is of particular interest is that neither of their accounts of the virtues makes very much use of the supposedly basic distinction between “moral” and “non-moral” virtues. Wittiness is one of Aristotle’s virtues, as good humor is of Nietzsche’s. Both took friendship to be a virtue, in fact, one of the highest virtues. It is true that Aristotle assumed a coherent *polis* in his writing about the virtues, thus emphasizing the social amenities essential to getting along, but he also nourished the ideal, inherited from Socrates, of the contemplative life, a life which, as in Nietzsche, we might characterize as a “rich inner life” (although for Aristotle the term *inner* makes even less sense than it does for Nietzsche).

But Nietzsche insists that each of us must find our own way, “become who [each of us individually] is.” This theme permeates *Zarathustra*: “If you would go high, use your own legs.”<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche even suggests (again in *Zarathustra*) that every virtue is unique, and even by being named it thereby becomes something *common*. That would make the very idea of a general account of the virtues, especially the Nietzschean virtues, impossible. Ultimately, it would seem, the portrait will be nothing but a mirror that each of us holds up to ourselves. No virtues can be named, or compared, or analyzed. But this, of course, is foolish, another Nietzsche hyperbole regarding another point well-taken, that we should not be too quick in assuming that one person’s or one culture’s virtue is exactly like another’s. And to make things even more complicated, Nietzsche, like Socrates, did not believe that virtue could be taught. But if each of us must find his or her own way,

that would mean producing a portrait, or a number of portraits, for each of us, individually, differing from culture to culture, social class to social class, person to person.

Moreover, we should not be too quick to assume (along with Aristotle and most ancient defenders of the virtues) that the various virtues are compatible. Thus our portrait might well be a *cubist* portrait, displaying different facets and alternative possibilities of ourselves that are nevertheless incompatible. One cannot be a good soldier and a free thinker at one and the same time. We are manifold, full of possibilities, and though these must in some sense be “given” to us, it is we who must choose among them and ultimately determine, through hard work and discipline, who and what we will be.

### After Virtue (“The Revaluation of Values”)

Virtue is a word that finds no echo among the thoughts of teachers and students, a musty word at which people smile—and woe to you if you fail to smile, since that makes you a hypocrite!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*

What is a virtue? Let’s just say that a virtue is an admirable or desirable state of character. In fact, this says very little (and what it says can be challenged). But even accepting such a banal claim, virtues might be interpreted as interpersonally derived (as when Hume suggests that they are “pleasing” to self and others), or they might be taken to be (in a sense to be refined) “good in themselves” (as in Michael Slote’s “agent-based” ethics)<sup>3</sup> or they might be action tendencies that are aimed toward an independently justified set of values (e.g., Christine Swanton’s “value-centered” ethics). These differences are considerable for a meta-theory of the virtues, but they will not much affect our project here. If we want a more thoroughgoing definition of virtue, one that seems particularly appropriate for Nietzsche, I would suggest we follow Swanton, who defines a virtue as “a trait—specifically a human excellence whose possession tends to enable, facilitate, make natural the possessor’s promoting, expressing, honoring, and appreciating value; or enhancing, expressing, honoring or appreciating valuable objects or states of affairs which are valuable.”<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on excellence is important, for not any “good” trait will do. And the stress on value is important because I would read Nietzsche as insisting that no virtue is good “in itself,” but only as it contributes to something else of value, such as personal style and character, the production of beauty, an ecstatic personal experience, or the cultural enrichment of society. In that sense, Nietzsche embraces a generalized utilitarianism, so long as we insist only on a “noble” interpretation of what is to count as “good consequences” and not the petty pleasures and contentment of Mill’s “fools satisfied.”

A plausible interpretation of “good consequences” would be something along the lines of Aristotle’s “flourishing,” although—as in Aristotle—this should not be taken in an overly individual way. Nietzsche is well known for his “great man” conception of society, a primarily cultural perspective in which a society is of world-historical value only by virtue of its “highest specimens,” in other words, its greatest artists, poets, and other cultural heroes. But it is not their individual flourishing that makes these world-historical individuals significant; it is their contribution to the culture as a whole. Indeed, Nietzsche is a sufficiently orthodox romantic to believe deeply in the “suffering artist” who is personally quite unhappy but out of his or her unhappiness produces great works or great deeds. The values promoted by Nietzsche are primarily artistic or aesthetic values, and the virtues he praises are those that express, promote, honor, appreciate, and realize these values.

But what or which values and virtues are these? One might tie the values of the virtues to specific cultures (as Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, suggests) or there might be “non-relative virtues” (as Martha Nussbaum argues in a fairly well-known paper and elsewhere).<sup>5</sup> One might well argue that there is not a single dimension to the virtues any more than there is a single “moral” dimension of an act or a work of art, and it is by no means clear that there is any single set of aesthetic or personal values that will serve as the standard for the virtues. One problem is that pretentious Nietzschean effort called “the revaluation [*Umwertung*] of values,”<sup>6</sup> which certainly does make it sound as if there is some foundational set of values that underlies all proper values and serves as an ultimate standard for them. I am not sure, especially in Nietzschean terms, what this would mean. Sometimes, the attempt sounds as if it aspires to step outside of *all* values—outside of every “perspective”—to value (evaluate) all values, or to value “value” itself. This is nonsense, and it is doubly nonsense in a Nietzschean reading. Indeed, I have questioned even Nietzsche’s seemingly more perspectival (but no more modest) insistence that we “create new values,” that is, invent new perspectives. This is what the “philosophers of the future” are supposed to do. But if we are looking to Nietzsche himself, it does not seem as if he encourages anything “new.” Indeed, the values he defends are in general very old, pre-Christian, pagan, heroic, and aesthetic virtues (although these were deeply woven into the fabric of nineteenth-century romantic culture as well). He defends courage, honesty, generosity, and courtesy. Hardly “new values!”

Perhaps we could solve this problem if we take the “revaluation” in a limited and strictly negative sense, as Walter Kaufmann does in his classic work on Nietzsche. That is, the “revaluation” calls for an evaluation and ultimately for the rejection of Judeo-Christian values, but it does not pretend to evaluate *all* values. But this, I think, is much too limited, and there is no reason why Nietzsche would rename and announce as an entirely new project the task he had already completed in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the

*Genealogy*. True, the one book of the projected “revaluation” actually completed and published was *The Antichrist*, but I think it would be a mistake to think of Nietzsche’s grand project as epitomized by that one problematic book. Thomas Brobjer<sup>7</sup> suggests two other interpretations of the “revaluation,” which we might summarize as “reversal” and “return.” “Reversal” means defending values “opposite” Judeo-Christian values, namely “master” values. “Return” means a return to historically older values, that is, aristocratic values. But, again, this seems to be merely harking back to Nietzsche’s earlier work, not looking ahead to something brand-new, the revaluation of all values and the invention of new values. And it is not clear that masterly aristocratic values are so obviously “opposite” slave values (although Nietzsche, to be sure, opposes them), nor is it clear (as Rousseau also objected) that “going back” to earlier values is any kind of real possibility. And that leaves what Brobjer calls the “utopian” interpretation of the revaluation, the invention or discovery of really new values, unlike anything we have had before or have now. And, again, this leaves us utterly without a clue.

Thus I have suggested that we should take Nietzsche’s “new values” to refer not to literally new values but in fact to very old values and their personal realization as virtues, reconfigured to fit our times. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that although Nietzsche clearly wants to defend aesthetic and artistic values and virtues, he so enjoys warrior-like metaphors that his perspective is easily lost or misread as something brutal and cruel. But to insist on being “hard” as an artist is very different than insisting on being “hard” as a politician or a boss. It is his aesthetic emphasis that is, I think, most valuable and important in Nietzsche’s ethics, but this is too easily eclipsed by his military rhetoric. But more generally, Nietzsche defends a conception of ethics that has not (and had not) been adequately appreciated, either in contemporary ethics or in nineteenth-century German philosophy. And that is an ethics that focuses on the virtues and excellence, and the aesthetic virtues and excellences in particular. In defending such a concept of ethics and excellence, he defends both a concept of virtue and several virtues that are at odds with current moral norms, and no doubt were much more so when he first presented them.

## Virtue by Example

There are those who call it virtue when their vices become lazy. . . .

And there are others who are like cheap clocks that must be wound: they tick and they want the tick-tock to be called virtue. . . . Then again, there are such as to consider it virtue to say, “virtue is necessary.” But at bottom they believe only that the police is necessary.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

What should we do with Nietzsche’s insistence that each of us has his or her own “unique” virtues? Like Kierkegaard before him and Heidegger after



him, it is evident that Nietzsche is after a sense of authenticity (*eigentlichkeit* or “own-ness”), and like Kierkegaard and Heidegger he juxtaposes this against the “herd” mentality of anonymous sociability. Authenticity has to do with what truly individuates a person, his or her “style.” But I think that we can respect Nietzsche’s insistence on authenticity without invoking the absurd restrictions he suggests on naming and sharing virtues, namely that each virtue as well as each individual is unique, and even giving the virtues names makes them “common” and so distorts them. To be sure, my trustworthiness will not be the same in all details as your trustworthiness, and there may be only a “family resemblance” between them. Nevertheless, neither your nor my authenticity is compromised by identifying both of us as “trustworthy.” Indeed, some of Nietzsche’s most important virtues are precisely those that we use to *define* authenticity, such as the courage of one’s convictions and the curious but essential Nietzschean virtue of solitude.

We can get a large set of clues as to Nietzsche’s conception of the virtues by looking at his critical and sometimes scathing portrayals of his contemporaries and other philosophers. I suggested that it is a mistake to assume that virtues and vices are opposites (as all of those neat lists made by tea-shop moralists might imply), but, nevertheless, Nietzsche’s condemnations of others (or of whole cultures or schools of thought) can give us considerable insight into what he found valuable and praiseworthy and what he did not. In this, his personal ad hominem attacks on others are of particular value, and it is in the context of virtue ethics that ad hominem arguments are not fallacies that miss the point (of the other philosopher’s works and ideas), but instead get right to the heart of the matter. What should one be like? It is not as if one’s own virtues are strictly one’s own in the sense that one cannot use them as standards of comparison to criticize others. So, too, one can criticize oneself by comparison with others. The virtues may admit of many individual variations but it is clear that Nietzsche does not shrink from applying a complex set of values and virtues to others even if he is only occasionally as self-critical as he clearly believes he should be. (I take Zarathustra’s frequent self-doubts and evident failures as a masked expression of Nietzsche’s own self-doubts and suspected failures—including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* itself.)<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche insisted that a philosopher should be, above all, *an example*. This already marks a return to ancient “heroic” ethics, which is exemplary rather than rule-governed or action-guiding. Ethics, on this archaic model, might be simply summarized as “Be like him!”<sup>9</sup> Examples, accordingly, provide the basis of much of Nietzsche’s moral philosophy, that is, his virtue ethics. Unfortunately, the positive examples are comparatively few and far between. But fortunately, those examples are for the most part examples of creative men, artists and poets, not military heroes or tyrants. (Thus one should put into its proper ironic context his references to such figures as Caesar Borgia.) The most prominent of his examples is Goethe, who is lav-

ishly praised for “creating himself” and making himself “into a whole man.” Even Goethe, however, is subject to Nietzsche’s sharp pen. There are also some positive words about Schopenhauer, Wagner, Socrates, even Jesus, even if they are drowned out in a chorus of subsequent criticism. Even heroes turn out to be human, all too human. There are occasional good words about Ralph Waldo Emerson, Heinrich Heine, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, to name a few more, although the personal details are scant at best. Perhaps such writers—for they are virtually all writers—enjoyed the anonymity and safety of distance because Nietzsche never knew—or never bothered to know—much about them. But even when Nietzsche praises himself, that praise is often undermined by ridicule, notably in his autobiographical work, *Ecce Homo*.

The negative examples, on the other hand, are to be found in great number throughout the Nietzschean corpus. We have already mentioned quite a few of them. “In his relation to the state,” writes Nietzsche, “Kant was not great.” He adds a barb against his entire culture and its thought: “German decadence as philosophy . . . the final exhaustion of life.”<sup>10</sup> Socrates, of course, is a continuous target for ridicule, from the fact that he was “ugly” to the fact that he (personally) “turned reason into a tyrant.”<sup>11</sup> Euripides gets a drubbing early on, the church fathers get their worst later. The English are a favorite butt for Nietzsche’s wisecracks, second, perhaps, only to the Germans. Morality was the product of servile and herdlike thinking, the morality of slaves, an expression of *ressentiment*, and Nietzsche goes on at considerable length criticizing those who betray their resentment in what would seem to be their most pious and moral opinions.<sup>12</sup> Priests betray a spectrum of vices, from hypocrisy to cruelty, and philosophers (in general) seem to suffer from a variety of personal infirmities, self-deception, and self-denial. (A few years later, Freud would diagnose his own view of the neuroses of philosophers. Taking the German romantics as his examples, he diagnosed a form of *Weltschmerz*. Today, given the methods in favor with analytic philosophers, he would probably render a diagnosis of compulsion neurosis. Indeed, one would like to hear his views on some of the movers and shakers of the American Philosophical Association.) One can only imagine what harsh words Nietzsche would add to the contemporary “Heidegger Crisis,” given Heidegger’s hardly heroic stance vis-à-vis National Socialism.<sup>13</sup> But, anyway, the point is that Nietzsche is readily willing to find fault with his fellows, and from these faults we can infer (with considerable caution) some virtues.<sup>14</sup>

With Nietzsche, unlike Aristotle, we should not expect an analysis of the various virtues but rather a spotlight on various examples, both personal and general, both real and literary. We should not expect any attempt at a single standard, such as “the mean between the extremes,” but rather just a lot of observations and reflections. But from these, I think that we can get a good idea of Nietzsche’s conception of the virtues, the virtues that he particularly admires, and so, too, *what he would make of us*.

## How Are We Virtuous? Let Me Count the Ways

*The good four.* Honest with ourselves and with whatever is friend to us; courageous toward the enemy; generous toward the vanquished; polite—always; that is how the four cardinal virtues want us.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

One of the obligatory chores in virtue ethics seems to be the making of a list of the virtues. Aristotle offered us a neat list of virtues as well as this supposedly precise criterion (never mind that the list and the criterion don't fit together, giving the whole project an overtone of the ad hoc). But the entire *Ethics* is essentially the fleshing out of his list: courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, pride, good temperament, friendliness, truthfulness, wittiness, shame [a "quasi-virtue"], justice, plus the various virtues of practical reasoning and intellectual life. Aristotle's teacher Plato was also a virtue ethicist (as was his teacher Socrates), and Plato also provided us with a concise little list of virtues in *The Republic*: wisdom, courage, temperance, justice. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle's eventual and quintessentially medieval pupil, gave us a series of formulaic neo-Aristotelian lists, in particular his lists of cardinal and theological virtues: prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice, and faith, hope, and charity.

Just to make sure we don't get overly ethnocentric, Confucius and the Upanishads, on the other side of the world, had their more or less concise conceptions of the virtues as well. Confucius provided several lists of virtues, but the most common mentioned were *jen*, *li*, *yi*, *xiao*, *an*, *chung*, and *shu* (humanity, ritual engagement, appropriateness, filial piety, tranquility, loyalty, and respect). From the *Upanishads* equanimity, compassion, self-control, wisdom-wakefulness, diligence, openness to one's higher self, and contentment-self-acceptance. If we want to get a bit more practical, perhaps we could add some South Pacific (Polynesian) virtues, such as the Maori "eight openings of the heart" (*e waru nga pu manawa*), that is, the eight qualities of an exemplary *rangatira* [warrior-chief]: Industriousness (in obtaining food), ability to settle disputes, fearlessness, leadership, expertise at carving, tattooing and at ornamental weaving, hospitality, cleverness at house-building and canoe-making, and having knowledge of boundaries of tribal land.<sup>15</sup> In ancient times, and across the globe, virtue ethics was about the only game in town. (A qualified exception was the ancient Hebrews, whose tribal ethics was a fascinating combination of virtues and the Law, thus setting up the scenario that Nietzsche so polemically exploits in his *Genealogy*.)

Nietzsche himself offers us two short lists of virtues, one in *Daybreak*: "Honesty, courage, generosity, politeness," the other in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Courage, insight, sympathy, solitude."<sup>16</sup> We should not be surprised that they are not consistent (with each other or with what he says elsewhere in his work), for he penned them at different times (and no doubt in

different moods). And, as always, it is not clear how serious he may have been on either occasion. I am sure he did not intend either list to be complete and exhaustive. The only virtue that is included in both lists is courage. As I said, I think this is the key virtue for both Nietzsche and Aristotle, although (as I shall argue shortly) courage had different meanings for the two of them. Several items on the lists demand extended commentary, but, for the moment, let me restrict my comments to three.

Politeness is not usually thought of as a very Nietzschean virtue, even though it is well known that in his own social engagements Nietzsche was scrupulously courteous. Its inclusion in his early list strongly suggests, therefore, that his personal behavior was indeed a reflection of his ethics (and vice versa), as opposed, for instance, to his ferocious condemnation of pity and compassion while being himself a hypersensitive, empathetic, and compassionate individual.

But this should really make us prick up our ears at the second list, where *sympathy* gets an honorable mention. Sympathy! But we should note that the word Nietzsche employs here is *Mitgefühl*, not the *Mitleid* that is variously translated as “pity” or “compassion.” Is Nietzsche hedging his bets here, gently giving back with one hand what he has so brutally snatched away with the other? What is the difference between *Mitgefühl* and *Mitleid*? I think the difference that matters most is that Schopenhauer used the latter to refer to his basic principle of ethics, usually translated as “compassion.” But in light of his “boot in the face” reputation with regard to the notion of “pity,” Nietzsche’s highlighting of sympathy as a virtue is welcome indeed.

Solitude as a virtue? Aristotle, to be sure, would not have understood this. Nor will it do simply to attribute this to Nietzsche’s own lack of roots and loneliness. I will discuss solitude as a virtue shortly, but let it suffice to say here that Nietzsche not only considers it to be a necessity for someone like him—in part because of his awkwardness in social situations, in part as a way of avoiding the “herd,” but also, one finds, because he himself was so overly prone to influence from others (Kant’s “heteronomy”). But Nietzsche does not just consider solitude a precondition for virtue. He insists that solitude is a virtue, an excellence in itself, and not merely an aid to realizing excellence. Nor is it merely compensation for an awkward personality.

But the two lists are not one, and their differences should serve as a warning. We should not pretend to be able to isolate a small number of virtues, such as Nietzsche himself does in those two short lists. And despite the important “philosopher as an example” theme, we should distinguish between those virtues Nietzsche preached and those he exemplified in his writing. But preaching is itself an indication of a person’s character, and disdainful preaching, prophetic preaching, ironic preaching, may be quite distinctive and relevant to the question of who the preacher is. A philosopher who ponderously insists on being careful and serious, let’s repeat,

careful and serious, and is extremely careful to say this any number of times, quite seriously, surely shows us something important not only about his or her work (which will insist on caution and seriousness) but about the person as well.

So, too, when Nietzsche tells us, with multiple exclamation points and italics, with frequent references to the classics and theology, with rhetorical questions and harsh insults, that Christian morality is a “slave” morality, we rightfully conclude not only that he does not think particularly well of Christian morality but also that he is personally indignant and contemptuous about this, that he envisions himself as in some sense “above” or beyond it, and (not least) that he thinks of himself first and foremost as a learned elitist. The fact that he endorses this intentionally effete, indignant, contemptuous, offensive, and polemical style says a good deal about his own view of himself as prophet—better, I would suggest, than his casting of his alter ego as a real prophet in *Zarathustra*. It is a lot more Jeremiah than Zoroaster. The perspectival view of history that Nietzsche employs also indicates a distinctive personality, who clearly emerges from that particular style of presentation, one who eschews consistency in favor of the brilliant (if momentary) insight. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that Nietzsche’s catalog of the virtues is an unwieldy mess, full of inconsistencies. And if we find many variations of styles in Nietzsche (as when one reads a handwritten letter in which the style changes with each line or sentence), this, too, indicates something quite illuminating about character. (Ask any handwriting analyst.) Thus Nietzsche’s virtues are to be found not only in what he says but also in how he says it and what this reflects about both who he is and who he thinks we should be. We should remind ourselves, as Nietzsche’s occasional hero Emerson warned, that inconsistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.

Thus, for the rest of this chapter I would like to suggest a not-at-all simple list of more and less plausible candidates for a catalog of “Nietzsche’s virtues.” I offer these in three groups: first, what I call “Aristotelian” virtues, those that appear on Aristotle’s very respectable list of pagan virtues. Second, a set of peculiarly “Nietzschean” virtues, although this list is hardly without its internal conflicts and contradictions. These are virtues that cannot be imagined on Aristotle’s list, and not just because he did not think of them. Finally, a “problematic” list, a mismatched set of Nietzschean “crypto” virtues that invite discussion and analysis and raise fascinating questions about the very nature of virtue and the virtues.

## Nietzsche’s Aristotelian Virtues

To begin with, a somewhat traditional list (that is, pretty much in accord with Aristotle). But traditional or not, all of these require some commen-

tary, for it should not be assumed that what Nietzsche means by these virtue names is what other philosophers, including Aristotle, mean by them.

courage  
generosity  
temperance  
honesty  
honor/integrity  
justice  
pride (*megalopsychos*)  
courtesy  
friendship  
wittiness (a sense of humor)

### *Courage*

I have already suggested that courage, for Nietzsche as for Aristotle, serves as a key virtue and something of a prototype for all of the virtues. But for Nietzsche as for Aristotle, courage is not limited to or for that matter mainly concerned with the battlefield bravery that both of them take as their apparent paradigm (or, in Nietzsche's case, as his most prevalent source of metaphors). There is, as I mentioned, the courage of one's convictions, which in the case of iconoclast Nietzsche was certainly more of a challenge than for good-old-boy Aristotle. There is the courage of facing up to life, again, much more of a challenge to sickly, sleepless, pain-wracked Nietzsche than to Aristotle, who as far as we know was in pretty good health (and took good health to be a precondition for *eudaimonia*). I don't know that Nietzsche would endorse the overly sentimental "fatal illness of the week" TV movies that command our attention these days, but there is certainly something of that conception of courage in Nietzsche. The desperation with which he urges us to say "Yes!" to life suggests that personally, for all of his military metaphors, Nietzsche most admired the mundane courage of just *going on* in life and getting something of value done.

But what is courage? Aristotle gives us an analysis, and, indeed, it is his exemplary case for his criterion of the virtues as "means between the extremes." Aristotle distinguishes the virtue of courage from two vices, its two "extremes," cowardice and recklessness. (This trinity should give us fair warning against construing virtues and vices as "opposites.") For Aristotle, the consideration both vices and the virtue share in common is the presence of fear. Cowardice is the presence of too much fear. Recklessness, by contrast, is the absence of (or at any rate too little) fear. Courage, in contrast to both of them, is exactly the right amount of fear, neither too much nor too little. Obviously, this account is best suited (as Aristotle presents it) to the battlefield, where a soldier is expected to stand his ground in the frightening face of the enemy. It is less convincing when applied to the courage

of one's convictions or one's willingness to go on in the face of pain and illness. But let's take the battlefield as our example, too, and see whether Nietzsche would agree with Aristotle's analysis.

For Nietzsche, it seems that having courage means not so much overcoming fear (the standard account) or even having "just the right amount" of fear (the overly quantitative Aristotelian account). Rather, as in so many of his conceptions of virtue, Nietzsche's model (or metaphor) is "overflowing." In the case of courage, I would suggest, it is overflowing with a sense of mission, even duty (but emphatically not in the Kantian sense). It is a sense of something-to-be-done no matter what (within the bounds of the appropriate context), in the face of obstacles to be overcome, no matter what (within bounds). In war, there may be very few such bounds. In civilized life, the bounds of appropriateness (even morality) may be considerable and complex. But this overflowing sense of mission, something-to-be-done, overwhelms (rather than the bland "overcomes") fear. One imagines one of Homer's Greek heroes, surging with patriotism, vengeance, warrior gusto, or machismo (or whatever), who, driven by that motive, charges through whatever fear he may have.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the amount of fear is all but irrelevant. So, too, the inspired artist or philosopher passionately and singlemindedly pursues his or her ideas despite the dangers of failure and ridicule or, perhaps worse, being utterly ignored. Or, the cancer patient pursues the risky experimental treatment, pushing aside her perfectly understandable fear of the probable side effects and more than likely failure, utterly resolute to do whatever can be done.

Consider an example that would have been dear to both Aristotle and Nietzsche, the scene of Achilles' revenge in *The Iliad*.<sup>18</sup> Achilles, enraged by the death of his friend Patroclus, crashes onto the battlefield outside of Troy with vengeance ("justice") on his mind. There is no fear. There is no room for fear in the midst of all of that well-directed murderous fury. To call Achilles "courageous" in such a state would seem rather an understatement, if not absurd. Our own understanding of courage may or may not be in line with Aristotle, that is, courage in terms of the amount of resistance or fear that it has to overcome. But if we view the scene as Nietzsche (and Homer) did, fear and courage are not complementary but rather opposed, and it is Achilles who is courageous, not the poor soldier with the shaking knees who "forces himself" to stand his ground. (The word *brave* once carried with it this meaning, except insofar as it has also been infected with the Aristotelian understanding of *courage*.) Courage, in other words, is not overcoming fear. It is an overflowing of determination, constituted by an overwhelming and yet skillfully directed cascading of emotion. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle makes note of certain men who fight "like wild beasts" and without a sense of honor. But the "overflowing" constitutive of courage incorporates rather than (as Aristotle suggests) excludes one's sense of honor. Indeed, it is one's sense of honor that (in many cases) is what is "overflowing" (Achilles' subsequent bad behavior notwithstanding).

## Generosity

One can give the same sort of analysis of generosity (which in *Zarathustra* is called “the gift-giving virtue,” in Aristotle “liberality”). It is not mere giving, nor the habit of giving. Consider generosity in the context of one familiar charity plea that says, “give ‘til it hurts!” One can imagine the donor, struggling against the pain of his or her own miserliness, weighing the burden of conscience against that case of Chateau le Poeuf on sale at the wine store down the street. Finally, generosity overcomes resistance, and the virtue is admirably displayed. *But*, notice, first of all, that the more one has to struggle to give, the *less* generous, not more, one is. Thus Aristotle rightly insists that, as with all virtues, being generous is actually pleasurable, not painful, and this itself is a test of one’s virtuousness. This also requires giving to the right people at the right time, the right amounts, depending on one’s means. Giving to the wrong people is a vice of a different kind, at the wrong time still another. Most important, of course, is that one gives for the sake of “nobility” rather than for any reward or recognition one might get in return.<sup>19</sup>

One can see how Aristotle’s criterion of “the mean between the extremes” would work in this case too, perhaps in several different ways. Aristotle’s own treatment specifies the vices of excess and deficiency as prodigality and meanness, suggesting that the primary consideration in generosity (like fear in courage) is a sense of financial responsibility, weighed with compassion, or, more accurately, sympathy, in the specific sense of wanting to help those less fortunate than oneself. (This is a much more modern interpretation than Aristotle’s own, which turns on the sense of nobility.) Then the vice of deficiency would be a lack of sympathy, “meanness,” resulting in a less than generous spirit. The vice of excess would be irresponsibility, or even the irrational desire to give it all away, “prodigality.” This might be a virtue in Christian thought—as in the case of Thomas à Beckett, who gave all of his worldly goods to the poor, but not for Aristotle, for whom this would indeed be irrational. (A humorous illustration of the paradoxes excess generosity breeds is John Cleese’s *Monty Python* skit of the Robin Hood-like Mr. Moore, who “robs from the rich and gives to the poor” until the poor become richer than the rich, at which point he throws up his hands and exclaims “this redistribution of wealth business is more complicated than I thought.”) Aristotle comments, however, that “prodigality” tends to cover a multitude of vices, and so he does not fix his analysis too closely to it. He also notes that meanness is clearly the “greater evil,” if only because people are more likely to err in that direction. But, reversing the picture, one might also say that the emotion serving in the pivotal role is something like possessiveness, the desire to hold on to what one has. In this case the vice of excess would be miserliness, a too-strong desire to hold onto what one has, while the vice of deficiency would be a kind of indifference to what one has, a virtue again, perhaps, in Christian, Stoic, and ascetic



thought, but not for Aristotle, for whom this would constitute a special kind of irresponsibility. At the very least, it would mean that one can no longer afford to be generous.<sup>20</sup> On either interpretation, we can see how excess and deficiency can be employed to account for the nature of generosity (liberality), according to Aristotle's criterion.

Suppose, however, that one's generosity consisted of what one might simply call one's "overflowing" nature. This is, in fact, how Aristotle describes one sort of liberal man, who simply overflows with wealth, most likely inherited. But Aristotle expresses grave qualms about this, and it is clear that the nobility of liberal behavior is compromised by its potential for irresponsibility. But, then, perhaps the answer is having more money than one "even knows what to do with." This is the way, I hear, that Rolling Stone Mick Jagger behaves on tour. Having more money than he (or anyone) could possibly know how to spend, Jagger simply allows it to flow freely, somewhat indiscriminately, to recipients and causes both just and frivolous. Now, to be sure, the lack of discrimination would mark this a vice, according to Aristotle. But even Aristotle insists that generosity is a state of character rather than any specifics about the giving. So one might imagine that Jagger's abandon and lack of concern represents true generosity, and the personal struggle against deprivation that characterizes both meanness and most accounts of generosity is not really generosity at all. To be sure, it is quite elitist to say that generosity involves a kind of indifference that can only come with great wealth, but Nietzsche, like Aristotle and quite unlike most accounts of Christian virtue, has no hesitation in saying this. But, of course, it is not money that concerns Nietzsche (which is not at all to say that it was a matter of indifference to him!) There is also generosity with one's time, one's energies, one's talents, and here the Nietzschean examples manifested in Zarathustra become quite meaningful. Generosity is the "overflow" of a great-souled spirit, of one who has an abundance. Thus Nietzsche's Zarathustra is overflowing with the need to share his wisdom and his insights. So, too, as every good student knows, a great teacher does not just have knowledge and skill but is rather overflowing with the need to share that knowledge and skill.

### *Temperance*

So, too, the other virtues emerge as "overflow" of a great-souled spirit, of one who has an abundance. To object that the virtues are not this, but rather a sense of duty in contrast to self-interest and personal need, is to fall back into what Nietzsche would consider a pathetic model of the virtues, the model that emerges in Kant and in Christianity, where it is the poor and not the rich in spirit who become the focus and the examples. Aristotle, writing for the aristocracy, would have fallen somewhere in between. But, indeed, what constitutes a Nietzschean virtue is first of all a kind of fullness,

a sense of oneself on top of the world. One need not get hung up on money, prestige, and power to adopt such an ethic. Nietzsche, impoverished, passed over by his intellectual peers, and poor in health, nevertheless writing (on his better days) as if he had the fate of the whole world in his hands, might serve as just such an example.

But temperance seems to be a different kind of virtue. Aristotle quite explicitly discusses temperance in terms of “the pleasures of touch” and “the virtues of the irrational parts.” And here we hit an obvious problem when we are talking about Nietzsche. On the one hand, Nietzsche is, at least in his imagination and in his writing, the great voluptuary, and it is a curious consequence of the widespread knowledge of Nietzsche’s rather constricted sex life that the many sexual and erotic references in his works tend to be ignored or overlooked. But, on the other hand, Nietzsche’s sex life was quite constricted, and whether or not recent hypotheses to the effect that Nietzsche was gay turn out to have any real plausibility, it is clear that his love life was restrained even by the standards of the Victorian era. Of course, the pleasures involved in temperance are not only sexual. Aristotle talks at some length about temperance and self-indulgence with regard to food and eating, but even the briefest reference to Nietzsche’s even more restricted eating habits—when he could eat at all—makes it evident that self-indulgence for him was hardly an option.

Therefore, in matters of temperance and self-indulgence we had better restrict ourselves to what Nietzsche thought and wrote, and there, I think, his voluptuous tendencies provide a fairly clear picture of what this virtue might mean for him. In an earlier chapter, I suggested that we try to understand Nietzsche in terms of what I called the *passionate life*, what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian. There is no question but that the Dionysian is erotic and unrestrained. (It is a mistake, I think, to treat what Nietzsche calls the Apollonian as a corrective constraint to the Dionysian. They are more Yin and Yang, complements rather than correctives.) At least in the context of his writing, Nietzsche considers *sexuality as such* as a virtue. This is, of course, very much against the grain of the entire philosophical tradition, West and East, where sexuality is generally considered (at best) a distraction from the eternal verities. Nietzsche, showing Schopenhauer’s influence, rather conceives of sexuality and eroticism as something akin to reality itself (without, except in a few notes, invoking anything like Schopenhauer’s metaphysics.) This is an overstatement, of course (typical for voluptuaries). But it makes quite clear that Nietzsche’s view of temperance, if only he were physically and temperamentally up to it, is that it is not a virtue of moderation. It is a virtue of self-mastery, somewhat akin to surfing on the torrent of one’s desires. Otherwise, it becomes just a subtler form of asceticism. In the Dionysian realm, there is no such thing as self-indulgence, so long as it is the life-affirming passions that are being indulged. There, there is only “overflowing” and its masterful expression.

## *Honesty (Truthfulness)*

The virtue usually known as “honesty” might better be called “truthfulness.” There are various reasons for this, but first and foremost we might mention that that is the name that Aristotle gives to this virtue. Also, “truthfulness” has built into it (as “honesty” does not) the image of fullness and therefore of overflowing. One might think of honesty as an “overflowing” of the truth or, more cautiously, of one’s most heartfelt opinions, but more often it is considered the opposite of and a constraint on lying, which is *morally wrong*. But this is not what Nietzsche has in mind. “Overflowing” with truth much better characterizes Nietzsche’s own writings, and it is exemplified by Zarathustra, who is “overflowing,” to put it mildly. He cannot wait to tell what he has learned to the townspeople of Motley Cow. So, too, an excellent teacher, to generalize the image, is not someone who dollops out bits of knowledge, prodded on by duty (or the need to keep his salary). An excellent teacher bounds into the classroom hardly able to restrain him or herself, “overflowing” with knowledge and opinions. (One hopes the opinions are disciplined by taste, not always evident in Nietzsche.) This makes me question Nietzsche’s otherwise sage observation, “you should give education only to one who *needs* it.” Truthfulness is not primarily service to others. It is first of all self-overflowing.<sup>21</sup>

Nietzsche’s truthfulness is much more than Aristotle’s truthfulness, and it is radically different from any prohibition against lying that might be derived from the “categorical imperative.” Telling the truth is not so much an obligation as it is a powerful “inclination.” And needless to say, it has little to do with the “greatest good for the greatest number.” The truth, he says, is *dangerous!* But whatever else Nietzsche may say about truth in epistemology (e.g., “there is no truth” or “all truth is error”) he prides himself, above all, for his truthfulness, his honesty, his unwillingness to hold back even the ugliest truths about life and human nature. It is worth noting that Aristotle pretty much restricts the virtue of truthfulness to telling the truth about one’s exploits. Boasting was alright for the Greeks (it is one aspect of Greek pride) but lying on one’s résumé was not. Nietzsche hardly pays any attention at all to such a concern, and if we discount his irony we note with some amusement that he exaggerated his own importance and achievements extravagantly, notably in *Ecce Homo* (“Why I Am So Clever” and “Why I Write Such Good Books,” for instance). Nor did honesty or truthfulness seem to put any constraints on Nietzsche’s notorious love of hyperbole, granting that exaggerating is not quite the same as lying.

Honesty, by contrast, is perhaps too civilized an emotion for Nietzsche, too much the image of the simple-minded “Last Man,” who blinks and tells the truth. It lacks the fullness and subterranean complexity of a Nietzschean virtue. Being truthful is not blurting out what one thinks, and it is not merely based upon a prohibition against lying. One tells the truth not be-

cause it is an obligation but because one has cultivated truth-telling and one feels one needs to tell the truth. Indeed, Nietzsche sometimes suggests that lies might themselves be the most powerful truths, as he argues in his early and “over-the-top” essay on “Truth and Lie in the Extra-moral Sense.” In terms of aesthetic impact, this may certainly be the case. Unfortunately, Nietzsche often seems to think that a statement is more true (epistemological qualms aside) the more difficult it is to digest (“even plain, harsh, ugly, repellent, unchristian, immoral truth—for such truths do exist”).<sup>22</sup> Thus sometimes the virtue of truthfulness sounds like more an excuse for offending people. But we should not be misled by either Nietzsche’s polemical epistemology or his love of hyperbole. Nietzsche prides himself above all on his truthfulness as philosopher, and more than any other virtue, I would think, truthfulness is the one that he would urge onto us, as well. What would Nietzsche make of us? Truth tellers, first of all, overflowing with the need to know and tell the truth.

### *Honor/ Integrity*

Honor, for Aristotle, has two different meanings. It has to do with honors—public recognition, and then it means something more like “nobility,” which is less concerned with what other people think and more concerned with the unity of the virtues in the virtuous man or what we would call “integrity” (“wholeness,” integration). Since Aristotle did not make much of the “private-public” distinction or think of an individual as distinct from his or her community, the difference between them is not so great, but his point is well made that there is a superficial and contingent sense of honor that depends on the whims and opinions of other people and a more profound and essential sense he says is “the end of all virtue.” Nietzsche may have sought public recognition (even desperately) but he was very clear about the importance of not taking the public (“the herd”) too seriously. Unlike Aristotle, he certainly did make the “private-public” distinction and took it very seriously. It is one’s private (“inner”) life, one’s noble passions and sentiments, that are essential, not one’s reputation or worldly success.

The second and by far more important sense of honor as nobility serves, for both Aristotle and Nietzsche, as a summary virtue. It is not so much a virtue as that with which all of the virtues are ultimately concerned. In our more egalitarian thinking it thus serves the same function as *integrity*, which is not so much a virtue as it is the integration of all of the virtues. (It is important not to confuse having integrity with any single virtue. For instance, being honest. One can be ruthlessly or manipulatively honest in a way that betrays one’s integrity.) Nietzsche singles out integrity, for example, in his elaborate praise of Goethe (in *Twilight of the Idols*). But here Nietzsche betrays an inconsistency that pervades much of his virtue ethics. On the one hand, he praises forging oneself into a unity. (“Our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the neces-

sity with which a tree bears fruit— . . . evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun.)”<sup>23</sup> But on the other hand, Nietzsche makes a point of rejecting the ancient doctrine, forged by Aristotle but shared with almost all of his successors, called “the unity of the virtues.” This is a doctrine variously interpreted.<sup>24</sup> But the basic idea is that the virtues “all hang together,” that is, that the virtues are all compatible and a person who has one virtue tends to have them all. In *Zarathustra*, in particular, Nietzsche argued directly against the thesis, noting that the virtues tend to be at war with one another, each one striving for domination.<sup>25</sup> (They, too, have their will to power.) Thus the Nietzschean self is a dynamic tension between competing instincts and virtues, and integrity (nobility) is what holds them—however tenuously—together.

I had considered listing *autonomy* as one of Nietzsche’s traditional virtues, but that word has been so co-opted by Kant and his followers that I thought it highly misleading, at best. To be sure, the metaphysical sense in which Kant presents the term, as a freedom in which we are “members of the intelligible [or supersensible] world,” is about as far as one can get from Nietzsche’s naturalistic sense of virtue. So, too, the more general idea of “thinking for oneself,” including ascertaining for oneself what is the right thing to do and deciding to do it, is much too reflective for Nietzsche, not to mention that fact that Kant’s autonomy, even if it involves “thinking for oneself,” depends on a conception of universal rationality and, accordingly, universal morality. Nevertheless, autonomy in the sense of *independence* is surely central to Nietzsche’s powerful sense of individuality (versus “the herd”). This is clearly implied in his employment of the master-slave metaphor, which in Hegel was explicitly characterized as the dialectical difference between independence and dependency. But I think that it is better to characterize this independence as integrity or, harking back to Aristotelian master mentality, as nobility, rather than the too-Kantian sounding “autonomy.” Thus integrity, in our way of thinking, typically includes independence of thought, of conscience, of action. And nobility, for Nietzsche, quite explicitly (in *Beyond Good and Evil*) requires a ferocious independence.

### *Justice*

Today, few philosophers would consider justice to be a personal virtue, as Plato and Aristotle did. Justice today is a rational scheme, a virtue of societies, not individuals. But justice for Nietzsche is very much a personal virtue, not a virtue of proportion (as in Aristotle) nor even “giving each his due” (as in Plato), although Nietzsche often makes comments that could be so construed. For one thing, Nietzsche seems far less concerned with “distributive” justice than are either the ancient or contemporary philosophers. In fact, his philosophy is virtually devoid of any suggestions—much less a theory—concerning the equitable distribution of material goods and

honors in distributive justice. He does not even insist on—and sometimes pointedly rejects—the idea that virtues (including aesthetic and artistic virtues) *should* be rewarded. (He even denies that they should be thought of as “their own reward.”) But he is greatly concerned with what is sometimes called “retributive” justice, that is, essentially, the problems of punishment. In short, Nietzsche is *against* punishment. For all of the seeming vehemence and vindictiveness of his writing, he finds punishment demeaning, based on resentment, and therefore a sign of weakness. Punishment is essentially rationalization for cruelty. This may surprise those who are particularly struck by Nietzsche’s frequent discussion—sometimes bordering on an excuse if not a justification—of cruelty. But justice for Nietzsche—which is tightly tied to the equally problematic concept of mercy—is first of all the *overcoming* of the desire to punish, or, even better, having such a large sense of self that no punishment is even desired. Thus mercy is another instance of overflowing, and justice, properly construed, is just this sense of mercy.<sup>26</sup>

### *Pride*

Pride is usually listed as one of the “seven deadly sins” of Christianity. But for Nietzsche, as for the Greeks, it means something more like “deserved self-respect,” which Aristotle celebrates in his *megalopsychos*, the “great-souled man.” Indeed, for Aristotle, pride (magnanimity) emerges as a kind of culmination of the virtues. Thus David Hume, a self-proclaimed “pagan,” took pride to be a virtue as opposed to its “monkish” opposite, humility. Nietzsche talks about pride as an ultimate motive, for example in *Daybreak*, where he analyzes pride as the basis of morality and asks whether a new understanding of morality (*viz.*, his own) will require “more pride? A new pride?”<sup>27</sup> Of course, pride presupposes something to be proud *about*, but the virtue of pride is not reducible to the accomplishments that are its source. The virtue has to do with how one sees oneself and the values one promotes. One might also argue that pride (so construed) is a precondition of great thoughts and great deeds. As both Kant and Hegel once argued, “nothing great is accomplished without passion,” and they might have added *self-confidence*. Furthermore, Nietzsche would say that nothing great ever came out of humility, certain appearances in the history of Christianity not excepted.

### *Courtesy*

For those who entertain the thought of Nietzsche as the great barbarian (or the defender of barbarians), his emphasis on courtesy and politeness may come as something of a rude shock. But Nietzsche certainly saw getting along with others (philosophical polemics notwithstanding) as of paramount importance. In any case, rudeness betrays a lack of style, a lack of self-discipline, and a poverty of perspective.

## Friendship

Reading Nietzsche's letters (not to mention his embarrassing marriage proposals) we get the sense that his conception of friendship was far from a calm amiability. It was rather an explosion of affection, even desperate. Perhaps Aristotle and the gentlemanly David Hume would have insisted that the virtues were easy to live with, that their very nature (for the most part) was conviviality. But Zarathustra's search for friends serves as a fair indication of Nietzsche's own attitudes toward friendship. Whatever his celebration of solitude, Nietzsche clearly agreed with Aristotle: "No one would choose to live without friends."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, his need for friendship, and not just his friendships, tended to be overflowing, not quite to say "gushing," which is the overwhelming impression of many of his personal letters.<sup>29</sup>

When Nietzsche discusses love in a positive light, it is almost always *philia*, not *agapé* or even *eros*, that he has in mind. That is, friendship is his ultimate ideal of love. But like Aristotle, Nietzsche does not see friendship as all of a piece, nor does he see most people's friendships as "true" friendship in the "highest" sense. Aristotle had delineated three sorts of friendship, the most common being the friendship of mutual advantage. Such friendships are contingent on the benefits continuing, and there is an obvious sense in which the so-called friends are actually "using" one another, in Kantian terms, treating each other merely as means instead of as ends. Things are better in the second sort of friendship, the friendship of mutual enjoyment. Here, there is no sense in saying that two friends are "using" one another, but there is still that contingency (often heard where romantic love is involved): the friendship lasts only so long as it is "fun." When the enjoyment goes, there goes love as well. The third and "highest" sort of friendship is the friendship of mutual inspiration. Not just admiration, which might still be the mutual advantage of association or the mere enjoyment of being with someone so admirable. But inspiration is aimed at the future, and the friendship consists primarily in each inspiring the other to perfect himself and be the best that he or she can be. Thus one best becomes who one is in the context of such a friendship, because it is only in such a friendship, not in a friendship of mutual advantage or mutual enjoyment, that the focus shifts to self-improvement (as opposed to self-advantage or enjoying oneself).

Most of us, of course, have all three sorts of friendships. But not Nietzsche. There is no evidence that he ever pursued a friendship with personal advantage in mind, nor did he seem to simply enjoy his friendships. For him, only Aristotle's ideal sort of *philia* would do, and in Nietzsche's letters we often get pleas for just such a friendship (often misnamed "Platonic"). When *eros* is conjoined to *philia*, as in the case of Lou Salomé (and by extension, Paul Rée), there is massive confusion. *Eros* introduces the notion of *need*. Of course, this is often true for most of us, but in Nietzsche's case it is particularly revealing of the meaning of friendship. *Philia*, in the highest

sense, presupposes precisely that independence and masterly manner that Nietzsche praises all the way through his philosophy. Thus Nietzsche paints a picture of masterly friendship as anything but mutual dependence, whether for advantage or enjoyment, but rather as camaraderie in nobility and strength. In (erotic) love, however, strength and independence turn into pathetic dependency, as Nietzsche experienced firsthand with his humiliation at his two best friends' hands.

### *Wittiness (A Sense of Humor)*

Anyone who reads Nietzsche without finding him witty, which is not yet to say humorous, is missing the obvious. Certainly a book could (and should) be written solely on the subject of Nietzschean wit. (A partial attempt to do just this is Kathleen M. Higgins's *Comic Relief*, a study of Nietzsche's *Gay Science*.)<sup>30</sup> Certainly one of the virtues for which Nietzsche sets himself as his own best example is the virtue of wittiness, and even those who do not find him at all "funny" (rather, perhaps, deeply offensive) would not deny that he tries throughout his works to be witty (though perhaps, again, offensively so). But the relation between wit and humor is something worth probing deeply, for the two are not the same and one might well argue that they are actually opposed (as well as opposed to many of the other virtues).<sup>31</sup> Depending on one's theory and one's sense of humor, humor can be visceral and "low" indeed, like Hobbes's "roar of glory" expressed over a beaten rival, or like the silent comedies' many scenes of folks getting hit by two-by-fours and running their cars into a ditch. Wit is distinctively "clever" (or tries to be) and it is almost always verbal. It consists for the most part of wordplay, and the point is to shift the focus back (preferably admiringly) to the speaker. As we know it, Nietzsche's sense of humor—and it is certainly a lively question to what extent he had one—consists almost entirely of wit. (His posing himself and Paul Reé as the oxen pulling Lou Salomé's cart is one of the few possible counterexamples.) He was a deadly serious fellow, not easily capable of laughing at himself (the ultimate test, I would argue, of having a sense of humor). He compensated for this by his extensive employment of witticisms and sophisticated "in-jokes," but there is no doubt but that in so doing he exemplified a virtue he greatly admired. Perhaps it would be better to call it "playfulness" rather than humor, but one cannot imagine Nietzsche—or Nietzsche's philosophy—without it.

### Distinctively Nietzschean Virtues

I have made it quite clear that I think that the metaphor of "overflowing" is the key to Nietzsche's conception of the virtues. It is part and parcel of his vision of life as passionate and dynamic, filled with energy, "Dionysian." This is true of even those virtues, Aristotelian virtues, that would seem to



be quite traditional and otherwise understood, for instance, as the emotional mean between the extremes, a kind of moderation. But Nietzsche would rather seem to anticipate Oscar Wilde's quip that "nothing succeeds like excess." Accordingly, we can assume that excess and overflowing will be especially relevant in analyzing what I call the distinctively "Nietzschean" virtues. They are:

exuberance  
"style"  
"depth"  
risk-taking  
fatalism (*amor fati*)  
aestheticism  
playfulness  
solitude

### *Exuberance*

Exuberance, I would suggest, is not only a virtue in itself (in contrast to such traditional virtues as *apatheia* and *ataraxia*, "peace of mind" and tranquility) but the core of virtually all of Nietzsche's virtues. "Overflowing," according to this view, is a metaphor that is derivative of Nietzsche's celebration of energy, very much in line, not coincidentally, with the new conception of physics that had become very much in vogue toward the end of the nineteenth century. Exuberance is hardly the same as "effervescence," needless to say, and Nietzsche would have nothing but utter contempt for those personalities that, particularly in the United States, are characterized as "bubbly." There is energy and enthusiasm, and then there is Gidget.

Like most virtues, exuberance cannot be taken out of context, that is, the context of the other virtues (however true it may be to say that everyone has his or her own [set of] virtues and whether or not it is true to say that the virtues are "at war with one another"). The virtue of exuberance, in particular, depends upon what it is that is "overflowing." (One can think of all sorts of unacceptable candidates, greed and gluttony, for example.) Thus we come back to the question of values. Exuberance is a virtue insofar as it is enthusiasm on the behalf of values that are actually *valuable*, aesthetic values, for example. It thus also depends on the discipline with which it is expressed, or, one might better say, the style of its expression. Exuberance as a virtue, one might say, is just *passion* and being passionate as virtue, but it is also being passionate about the right things. Ultimately, Nietzsche's exuberance is passion about life itself, and this, I have suggested, is the very core of his philosophy.

### *Style*

Style, while it varies from person to person, nevertheless begins with exuberance, a "yes-saying" to life, enthusiasm, "overflowing." Style, for Nietz-

sche, begins in exuberance on behalf of value; it is thus the (disciplined) overflow of one's personality. Style is not just a way of "dressing" oneself, a way of "coming on." If Nietzsche says that every virtue is unique, then it certainly follows that style, in particular, is or should be unique to a person. Most of what passes for style, however, might better be classified as mere "fashion," that is, the very antithesis of style. Fashion is the attempt to live in conformity with others' expectations, in neglect of one's own virtues. Style, by contrast, is distinctly one's own. One might make the analogy that style is beauty as opposed to glamour.<sup>32</sup> The latter, glamour, is formulaic and "superficial." The former, beauty, is "deep" and reveals the inner soul of a person, his or her values as well as "looks." It is a way of *being* and reflects an essential "inner" drive, sometimes expressed by Nietzsche in terms of the instincts, an obvious carry-over of Schopenhauer's biologism (but without the metaphysical baggage of "the Will"). But style is also or mainly something that is *cultivated*, created by oneself and for oneself. It is style (interestingly enough) that drops out of Jean-Paul Sartre's three existential modes of being, "for-itself," "in-itself," and "for-others," as it does (also interesting) for much of the history of Western philosophy.

Yet Nietzsche belongs to a long line of German thinkers, including Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel, whom Charles Taylor calls "Expressivists."<sup>33</sup> The Expressivists believed that it was human nature (and possibly Nature itself) to have the need to "express" itself by shaping its world in ways that reflected its inner nature. Thus art becomes the most fundamental human project, in all of its forms (including philosophy, of course). For Schelling, the World Spirit (God) is an artist and human artists are its instruments. Needless to say, he greatly appealed to the early romantic movement. For Hegel (as for Aristotle), Spirit (Aristotle's "thought thinking itself") was the ultimate philosopher, using particular philosophers (Hegel, notably) as its vehicle. Marx (following Schiller) was very much an Expressivist, which is why he took work (as opposed to dehumanizing "labor") to be the very essence of human "species being." Work, self-expression, could be "alienated" only at great cost to human experience.

Nietzsche belongs to this tradition, which was very much at the heart of romanticism (but not exclusive to that movement). He does not pursue the general thesis as such (though one might try to include it under the scope of "the will to power"), but he is avidly concerned with it in the individual case. Style is the reflection, the projection, the self-expression of a particular individual human being. I often muse, passing through any of the great art museums of the world, what constitutes a style. I do not mean the movements and fashions that make up art history (whether invented by the artists themselves or by the critics and art historians who claim them), but rather the style of individual artists (who may or may not think of themselves as fitting into some art historical category). What distinguishes a Rembrandt, a Hals, a Vermeer, a Monet, a Manet, or a Cezanne? It is unlikely that Cezanne, for example, ever sat down to paint thinking, "I have

to develop my style” much less “How can I make this look like a Cezanne?” No doubt he thought a great many other things, about what effects he wanted, about the fact that the peaches were rotting, about the money owed him by his dealer, but the style itself *emerged*, a reflection of his unique artistic personality. It was not itself the goal but the manifestation, one might say, the outward expression, except that (and this is the key to the Expressivist philosophy) there is no “inner” truth distinct from that “external” expression. The truth of the work defines not only Cezanne’s exceptional style but Cezanne as an artist. As Sartre said, about a different kind of artist, “the genius of Proust is nothing but the work of Proust.”<sup>34</sup> And what constitutes the essence of Proust, or Cezanne, is their unique and spectacular individual productivity and styles.

But style consists not just of genius. It is not talent as such that constitutes style. Style consists of one’s flaws and failures as well. Nietzsche denies that the virtues “fit” together in any unified way. He nevertheless praises a unity of style, the integration of flaws and weaknesses, the fitting together of virtues and features that normally won’t go together. Thus Napoleon had style, Nietzsche tells us, not only despite a speech defect but *because of* his speech defect. He managed to make it his own and use it to his advantage. His weakness became part of his strength. So, too, we might think of Nietzsche’s conflicted and in many ways contradictory personality, megalomania mixed with shyness, free spirit mixing with a love of military discipline, a thirst for solitude combined with a hunger for intimate friends. Out of this impossible cauldron of personality Nietzsche creates himself.<sup>35</sup> Thus the Nietzsche that emerges in his writings doesn’t just “have style.” He is the very paragon of philosophical style while at the same time having a style that is uniquely and unmistakably his own. (Today’s philosophers, by contrast, are mainly distinguished by their self-conscious *lack* of style. One of my old teachers used to emphasize the importance of “pure form” as the essence of a philosophy essay. The arguments should be convincing, and the thesis might be more or less interesting, but the personality of the author should be nowhere to be seen.)

### *Depth*

“Depth” metaphors permeate Nietzsche’s writings. Sometimes, of course, he is very critical of depth, particularly when he suspects phony profundity. (“The romantics muddy the waters, to make them look deep.”) Profundity, of course, is a cardinal virtue in German scholarship, and Nietzsche cannot resist making fun of it. What makes Nietzsche’s use of the metaphor distinctive is that it refers to the *biological* in us rather than what is usually considered “spiritual,” to what he sometimes refers to as the “lowest” instead of the “highest,” to what is *natural* as opposed to what is academic or religious artifice, cultural pretense, learned sophistication. What is deep is necessarily mysterious, captured in myth and not by reason. Thus I think that the

heavy emphasis on science in explication of Nietzsche's emphatic naturalism is fundamentally off the mark. What is superficial is just what philosophers of the modern period praise most, "clear and distinct ideas," "the light of reason," logic and (as usually conceived) the scientific method. The hallmark of such thinking is that "whatever can be said can be said clearly."<sup>36</sup> One would not be obfuscating Nietzsche, I believe, by suggesting that what is most profound, what most needs saying, cannot be said clearly at all.

### *Risk-Taking*

"Live dangerously" is one of Nietzsche's best known exhortations, although, to be sure, he took few physical risks of the sort that we associate with that phrase today. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Nietzsche took—and saw himself as taking—many risks in his writing. He followed his genius and his insights wherever they would go. His *Birth of Tragedy*, his first "academic" book, was a conscientious flaunting of academic standards: no footnotes, no staid philology, filled with contemporary references, verging on blasphemy in philological quarters in his treatment of Socrates and Euripides. Nietzsche's last books, the *Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo*, border on true blasphemy and mania, respectively. One cannot easily envision Nietzsche driving fast cars or bungee-jumping off of an Alpine ledge, much less charging an army of Trojans alone. But as so often, Nietzsche's physical images are best cashed out in terms of spiritual and aesthetic quests, and it is his soul, not his already illness-pummeled body, that he puts most at risk throughout his philosophical career. Great artists take chances! Not to do so is to fall back into comfortable conformity and give up the quest for greatness altogether.

### *Fatalism (Amor Fati)*

Taking risks requires accepting the consequences, and this sort of fatalism appeals to Nietzsche. I think (and I will argue in the next chapter) that in this he is very much in league with Sartre, who may not have believed in fate but certainly did insist that one must accept the consequences of his or her actions. Fatalism appealed to Nietzsche in his analysis of the ancient Greeks, their acceptance of life and their fate in the face of absurdity and suffering. It appealed to him in considering his own miserable life, the triumph of his genius in the face of his own absurd suffering. "Not just to accept fate," he exclaims, toward the end of his life, "but to love it, *amor fati!*"<sup>37</sup> I will have a good deal more to say about Nietzsche's "classical" concept of fatalism in the next chapter. But taking fatalism as a virtue, it is of a piece with his overall insistence on "life affirmation" and his rejection

of Schopenhauer's pessimism. To accept joyfully rather than bitterly curse one's fate—and Nietzsche surely had a good deal in his life to bitterly curse—is one of life's greatest virtues.

### *Aestheticism*

Fatalism, I will argue, is not a scientific (or antiscientific) but rather an aesthetic thesis. So, too, in an early work (his dissertation of 1868) Nietzsche defends teleology not as a scientific (or an antiscientific) doctrine but as an aesthetic one. Indeed, one tempting way to summarize Nietzsche's entire ethics is to say, like Confucius, that all moral values become aesthetic values, and one should look at one's life, as at the world, through aesthetic lenses, as "a work of art." Thus in *On the Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche famously insists that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that the world can be justified." We can ignore the question "Why need it be justified at all?" in order to appreciate the direction of Nietzsche's claim, aimed, in particular, against Kant and Schopenhauer. The existence of the world cannot be justified by a moral justification (what Kant inherits from Rousseau and passes onto the Romantics). But neither is it without justification, that is, neither is life (and our lives) without meaning. Whatever else one might think of the world and nature and human history, that it is cruel or complicated or idiotic or wasteful, it is nevertheless open to us to see it all as *beautiful*, if only we choose to do so. That this requires considerable effort, perseverance, skill, and selective vision—of that there can be no doubt. But the cultivation of character and style ultimately comes to nothing less than this.

Aestheticism is a virtue that is certainly most pronounced in Nietzsche's early works, but I think that it would be a mistake to conclude with Nietzsche, in one of his (unpublished) prefaces to *Human, All Too Human* (in 1886), that he rejected this perspective (along with metaphysics). What he rejected, I believe, was Schopenhauer's pessimism, and along with this his metaphysics of the Will (incompletely, given his stubborn insistence on "the will to power") and his view that art provides a unique escape from the meaninglessness of life. But the ideal of beauty is one that Nietzsche (like Plato) held onto far more obstinately than most philosophers. He talks about beauty (and its antithesis, the ugly) in all sorts of different ways. Indeed, one would not go wrong in suggesting that it remains one of the primary non-moral evaluative categories of his philosophy. But aestheticism, as I said, requires cultivation and experience. Nietzsche continually praises the aesthetic virtues of refinement and taste (and uses startling metaphors to suggest their absence). To see the world as beautiful, despite suffering, even *because of* suffering, remains one of his most explicit aspirations throughout his philosophy and one that he would certainly urge upon us.

## Playfulness

It is evident enough in his writing style (though it was not, perhaps, in his personal demeanor) that Nietzsche was relentlessly playful, even while he was being indignant or resentful. Playfulness deserves mention as one of the foremost Nietzschean virtues, on a par with exuberance and more or less synonymous with style. But the virtue of playfulness should not be understood in the current rather anemic sense of intellectual self-indulgence that has come to discredit so much of postmodernism (although such verbal fiddling can often be found in Nietzsche). Rather, the playfulness Nietzsche urges on us should be conceived in terms of the rich, buoyant, open enthusiasm of a child. In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche gives us the child as the culmination of "The Three Metamorphoses," representing this exuberant playfulness and fresh openness to the world. Nietzsche was not a fan of innocence or childhood as such, but the wide-eyed, unprejudiced, and honest openness of a child's approach to the world obviously appealed to him. He also saw play as a surrendering as well as an expression of individuality (and in that sense "Dionysian"), a way of becoming both "selfless" and much more oneself. This conforms to Nietzsche's general tendency to praise more "instinctual" (less self-conscious) behavior. It also jives with Nietzsche's general sense of perspectivism, as one can play and pretend many more roles than one could actually adopt in "real life."

The question of "real life" looms large in any discussion of play. Freud made the point that "the opposite of play is not seriousness but reality."<sup>38</sup> But Nietzsche is too epistemologically sophisticated and skeptical to buy into this simple dualism, and it is clear that seriousness is, for him, the very opposite of playfulness, in particular the dreary seriousness of metaphysics, theology, and much of what counts as scholarship. In one sense, however, the unreality of playfulness is clearly a blessing. In *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche points out that in play (including the theater) we can enjoy heroism and tragedy in a way that will not kill us.<sup>39</sup> But instead of dismissing this as "pretense," Nietzsche rightly insists that play is "natural" (whereas seriousness is not) and (anticipating Freud) it is a way of "rearranging the world." It is also instructive in "making do with what you've got," a benign version of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, because in play we learn to "recycle" the furniture of our lives in all sorts of creative ways, experiment with life and with our emotions in all sorts of ways, and transform ourselves in the process.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, much of Nietzsche's own sense of play in his writings is not childish so much as adolescent, designed to shock and outrage, or it is sophisticated display, designed to bring a smile to the lips of only those who recognize his sources and his allusions. Nevertheless, I think that there is no doubt that we can recognize in Nietzsche's attempts to be playful his admiration of that virtue and his hardly hidden agenda of converting phi-

losophers and shifting philosophy away from the weight of “seriousness” toward the spirit of playfulness.

### *Solitude*

Finally, we need to discuss Nietzsche’s repeated celebration of solitude. This reflects more than his own more or less voluntary solitude and the literary example of his solitary Zarathustra. Solitude represents independence and separation from the “herd” in its most manifest form. Think of those old American images of the Marlboro Man, physically alone, utterly self-contained (but ignore what else that image represents). But solitude does not mean just being alone, and it certainly should not be confused with loneliness. Being alone is not a virtue. It is just a fact and, for most of us, a source of insecurity, occasionally a source of relief, sometimes a real liability. Loneliness, by contrast, is essentially a kind of felt deprivation (and we should note that one can feel lonely even in the presence of other people). But solitude is something of an *achievement*. I sometimes give an assignment to my students (with all of the requisite mental health warnings). I ask them to spend twenty-four hours by themselves—no friends, no telephone, no radio, no television, no recorded music, no computers or e-mail or Internet, and no distracting “projects.” They are to remain alone with themselves and their thoughts. Afterward, many of my students tell me that this is the first time they have really been alone in their lives. Most of my students give up after six hours or so, not out of boredom but out of growing anxiety (often rationalized as boredom). It is hard to be alone. It is a virtue to be self-contained, or so, at any rate, does Nietzsche (and American mythology) consider it. Solitude is a true test of independence, or what we might very cautiously call one’s autonomy.

The virtues are often conceived (e.g., by Aristotle, by Hume, and by MacIntyre) as social functions. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a virtue for any of them that exists in a hermit or a person without a country or community. In Nietzsche, by contrast, the virtues are best understood in an extremely individual context. Indeed, many of his traditional virtues (such as courtesy) rather painfully reflect the *necessity* of acting properly in the presence of other people. But this very necessity implies reluctance and a preference that it not be so. Thus we think of courtesy as constrained, constrained by the need to behave ourselves rather than inspired by our love of our fellow human beings and our joy at being with them. Most of Nietzsche’s distinctive virtues, by contrast, are exemplified in solitude, and, sometimes, only in solitude. This is true, I would suggest, even of virtues that might more usually be taken as obviously social virtues. The image of a dancing Zarathustra, for example, is not set in a ballroom or a disco, much less a rave party. The virtues exemplified by dancing are, to the contrary, very much the virtues of a hermit, dancing alone. (Of course, it is not clear that Zara-

thustra ever actually dances. He rather praises dancing, talks about dancing, and “walks like a dancer.” Nevertheless, one can safely assume that, were he to dance, he would not be dancing the tango.)

There is no doubt, of course, that Nietzsche’s insistence on solitude had much to do with his own sense of vulnerability. But I do not think that this should be viewed as a personal weakness on his part. Recent research and argument has thrown suspicion on the very nature of character and virtue, and thus virtue ethics. Several classic studies in social psychology, including the well-known Milgram experiment (subjects administering near-fatal shocks because the authority in question told them to), and experiments by P. G. Zimbardo (separating students into jailers and prisoners and watching them quickly degenerate into sadists and victims) and by J. M. Darley, and C. D. Batson (theology students rushing past a desperate man after hearing a “good Samaritan” lecture).<sup>41</sup> The tentative conclusion, argued into a full-blown philosophical thesis by Gilbert Harman and John Doris, is that we are all extremely vulnerable to outside influences (authority and peer pressure). Therefore the virtue-ethics emphasis on character is quite naive and misplaced.<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche recognized this, and not only in himself. Thus solitude becomes an answer, a way of maintaining one’s nobility and character without the threat of other people.

It is, perhaps, one of the most worrisome problems of Nietzsche’s philosophy, his continuing suggestion (and sometimes more than that) of a deep misanthropy. “Hatred” of humanity and being “weary of man” are not only *other* people’s symptoms of decadence and sickness. Nietzsche betrays them all too frequently. But, then, his account of the virtues and his example of Zarathustra show an uncomfortable bias toward the solitary, if not also a visceral rebellion against common sense and common thought. Perhaps this is what appeals to a good many of Nietzsche’s most admiring followers, but I hesitate to follow them. Herdlike behavior is possible even in isolated individuals. And what Nietzsche calls “the herd” is better known, in non-Nietzschean contexts, as “communities.” Indeed, that is where solitude is not a virtue at all. Nietzsche sometimes recognizes the importance of custom and tradition, but all too often it seems as if it is only by way of rebellion against custom and tradition. In some adolescent interpretations of Nietzsche’s “revaluation of values,” this is understood as following a path that is one’s own, but in fact rebellion against custom and tradition is among the most herdlike of our more dubious contemporary virtues. Solitude may encourage the illusion that one is becoming “who one is” when in fact it presents the danger of becoming no one at all.

## Nietzsche’s Crypto-Virtues

Finally, there are the crypto-virtues. I call them crypto-virtues because they are problematic as virtues. The problem is not their frequency or consis-



tendency of mention in Nietzsche but their status as virtues, for various reasons. Indeed, they throw open again the entire question, "What is a virtue?"

health  
strength  
"hardness"  
egoism  
responsibility

### *Health*

Health, of course, is one of the pervasive themes of Nietzsche's philosophy (not to mention of his personal life). Moralities, religions, entire cultures, and particular ideas are all evaluated primarily in terms of whether they are healthy or sickly, flush with vitality or "decadent," energetic or "weary." Master morality is deemed healthy, slave morality sickly. Nietzsche compares the "prejudice" that equates "moral" with "unegoistic" to "brain-sickness." Priestly aristocracies are unhealthy, and Nietzsche diagnoses the malady as akin to "intestinal morbidity and neurasthenia." The church is "poisonous" as is its primary product, *ressentiment*. We are told of the "ill-constituted, sickly, weary and exhausted people of which Europe is beginning to stink today" as opposed to those "higher men" who are "well-constituted, at least still capable of living, at least affirming life." And, of course, Nietzsche variously refers to those who embrace ascetic ideals as "physiologically deformed and deranged."<sup>43</sup>

To be sure, Nietzsche mainly uses the language of pathology as his preferred language of abuse, and it is not an easy inference from his contemptuous diagnoses to any obvious conception of virtue. It may be straightforward to diagnose an illness, but that is by no means tantamount to saying what health consists of—apart from the absence of the disease or ailment in question. Sometimes, Nietzsche is clearly saying the virtues and vices are the *effects* of health and illness, and so on, but he can also be read as saying something more radical, namely, that health is itself a virtue (and not just indicative of virtue) and illness is itself a vice (and not just indicative of vice). Health, to be sure, is desirable. It is pleasing (to say the least) to ourselves and to others. Illness, by contrast, is undesirable (to say the least), but it is also displeasing both to ourselves and to others. The aesthetic revulsion most people feel in the presence of disease is obvious (however successful their compassionate steps to override their revulsion). But there is also a *moral* revulsion that may be in evidence, particularly when the illness in question can somehow be *blamed* on the patient. Sickness due to overindulgence is an obvious candidate, but our use of the blaming perspective is sufficiently liberal to extend these days to almost any illness that can be attributed to one's "not taking sufficient care of oneself," the insufficiency, of course, established by the fact of the illness. Susan Sontag wrote one of

her best books, *Illness as Metaphor*, while recuperating from cancer, lambasting those who adopt the blaming perspective in such circumstances. Nietzsche, I think, would be of mixed opinions on this issue. Having learned to be meticulous about his own delicate health, he would surely not dismiss such accusations. But, nevertheless, as part of his fatalism he would certainly recognize the fact that the propensity to health and illness, at least, typically comes to one unbidden.

Thus the question is whether good health can sensibly be called a virtue (or illness a vice). The question turns, in part, on the degree to which one believes oneself responsible for good health, and, even then, the health itself might well be understood as the result of certain virtues (e.g., “clean living”) rather than constitutive of them. But more interesting here is a distinction that Nietzsche certainly knew out of the ancient Stoics between “indifferent” or “preferential” goods (including health) and the “true” goods, character and virtue. Needless to say, Nietzsche would not agree with this distinction, and one could read his unrelenting emphasis on health as a flat out rejection of the Stoics. Health, according to Nietzsche, is itself a virtue and a true good, in fact, the ultimate virtue, the ultimate good. At the very least, it is the ultimate criterion for goodness. To see what is wrong with lying, lust, and greed, in other words, one need not appeal to the categorical imperative or any official list of vices. It is enough to see what effects these vices have on one’s health and vitality.

But, of course, there are difficult questions as to what constitutes health and illness. In *Genealogy*, Nietzsche famously writes, “Bad conscience is an illness, but as pregnancy is an illness.”<sup>44</sup> A striking analogy, to be sure, but in what sense is pregnancy an illness at all? If an artist refuses to take care of himself, devoting his every minute to his extraordinary work but ruining his health, is that vice, according to Nietzsche? If one were to live a truly Dionysian life (short though it might be), would that constitute a virtuous life or a vicious one? If one paid close attention to his or her health, as many of our good citizens do, but eschewed any sort of creative uncertainty or stress, in what sense could that be virtuous?

Although Nietzsche is a strict “physicalist” insofar as he rejects any substantial gulf between mind and body and thus would reject any sharp division between mental health and bodily health, it is clear that what Nietzsche is primarily talking about is *mental health*. But here we enter a thicket of controversy. For many years physicians classified homosexuality as an illness. Freud took enormous abuse in his attempt to point out and “demoralize” the sexual behavior of children. Geniuses have often been diagnosed as merely neurotic (and neurotics have not infrequently been mistaken for geniuses). To put it mildly, diagnoses in the field of mental health are only with great difficulty separated from moral evaluations, which, on the one hand, makes Nietzsche’s treatment of health as a virtue quite reasonable. (To say that a trait is a virtue is to say that it is healthy.) On the other hand, it renders the claim virtually trivial. Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s

bringing together questions of virtue and matters of health is refreshing, indeed, contrasted, most notably, with ascetic, Stoic, and many moralistic conceptions of virtue in terms of sheer abstemiousness and constraint. Once again, the message is that morality, properly construed, cannot be separated from good living, flourishing, producing a life that is beautiful and consists of rich and inspiring thoughts and experience.

### *Strength*

Strength (*Kraft*), too, is a pervasive theme in Nietzsche, but the same sorts of questions about constitution and responsibility apply. This is made more confused, of course, by Nietzsche's comments about "natural" strength, as in his striking but discomfiting lambs and eagles parable in the *Genealogy*. If strength is simply something one has, by virtue of one's natural constitution, does it deserve to be considered a virtue? Or is it just a natural advantage? If one develops his or her strength, by contrast, cultivating it and nourishing it, is it the strength that is the virtue or is it the perseverance and discipline? It is hard to think about these issues without becoming fixated on the image of physical strength—the Schwarzenegger as Conan the Barbarian image. But it is clear that Nietzsche does not have physical strength in mind—although we should keep his physicalism in mind—but rather the strength of one's convictions, the virtues of perseverance and self-discipline, one's self-confidence, as well as the wealth of one's talents and one's skills. But there are very real questions about what Nietzsche actually means by "strength" and in what sense strength is a virtue. And again, to what extent does this depend on the extent to which one is *responsible* for one's strength?

And then there are Nietzsche's frequent references to the will to power. It is not at all clear to what extent strength and the will to power are correlated, and Nietzsche presents all sorts of conflicting views about this. His suggestion that "increase in power" is the ultimate motivation of behavior (not to mention his often-quoted but mostly unpublished notes to the effect that everything is *nothing but* the will to power) makes it unclear to what extent we are talking about a state of *character* in any sense. Nevertheless, if strength is taken to be a virtue, it is clear enough why Nietzsche would take it to be such, given his repeated accusations of "weakness" in virtually everything he opposes. The contrast to Christianity ("the meek shall inherit the earth") is obvious, but the idea that strength is a virtue presents us with far more questions than answers. What kind of strength? Strength as good health? Strength as self-discipline? Strength as "will-power"? Strength as spirituality? Perhaps strength is not a virtue at all but rather the *background* or a *precondition* of the virtues. Perhaps the best light to throw on this comes not from Nietzsche but from his contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft: "When strong women practice gentleness, it is a grand, even godly virtue; but when weak women practice it, it is a demeaning, even subhuman vice."<sup>45</sup> And so, too, for the male of the species.

## “Hardness”

Nietzsche's insistence on “hardness,” too, is misunderstood, typically as part of his dubious campaign against compassion and pity. But Nietzsche put a strong emphasis on self-discipline. (A Buddhist proverb: “If a man were to conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and another conquer one, himself, he indeed is the greatest of conquerors.”)<sup>46</sup> Put in contemporary terms, we can readily understand the metaphor “hardness” in terms of its equally material equivalent, “toughness.” Toughness is widely touted as a virtue in business life, for example, and it is now even encouraged as an essential part of parenting (as in “tough love”). But the question is whether Nietzschean hardness or today's toughness is in any way based on callousness and indifference, as the usual unflattering “boot in the face” portrait of Nietzsche maintains, and whether it is even applicable to our treatment of other people (as opposed to one's treatment of oneself).

Today, the word *tough* is typically used by way of admiration, but it can also be a term of reluctant praise (“He's a tough old bastard”). Sometimes, of course, it is simply a euphemism, in place of or in conjunction with various synonyms for a nasty or odious human being. Not infrequently, it means stubborn, impossible, or mean-spirited. But toughness is generally and genuinely perceived as a virtue, albeit a virtue that is often misplaced and misconceived. In the very un-Nietzschean context of bargaining and dealing with other people, for instance, toughness is the name of the game, and its opposite is not so much weakness as incompetence. But toughness in this sense is neither a virtue nor a vice. It is not a character trait so much as it is a skill, a technique or set of techniques, whether cultivated or “natural.”

Toughness also means perseverance. There is such a thing as too much perseverance, which then becomes mere obstinacy or stubbornness. Of course, what seemed like obstinacy to those of little faith may well turn out to be richly rewarded by the results, and what was indeed healthy perseverance may nevertheless turn to failure and then appear to be nothing but obstinacy. Toughness as perseverance means nothing other than having a goal and a purpose, seeing its worthless and pursuing it to the end. What makes it “tough” is facing up to setbacks and obstacles that would discourage lesser beings; indeed, it is only in the face of failure that such toughness is truly tested, for it is no virtue to “persevere” when the world is handing you nothing but success.

But notice that I have said very little here that has to do with the “virtue” of refusing to pity or feel compassion. Sometimes it is necessary to do something painful in order to do what is right. Powerful politicians, of course, face such dilemmas all of the time, giving rise to a substantial literature on the controversial virtue of toughness and “ruthlessness” and the allegedly opposed domains of public and private morality.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes, to reach a higher goal, one must do what one otherwise would not and should

not even consider. Thus I think the right interpretation of Nietzschean hardness or today's toughness is that it means not turning a blind eye to those in need but rather keeping one's priorities straight and realizing that, sometimes, one has to be a bastard to be virtuous.

This is not to say, however—and this cannot be emphasized enough—that such decisions can or should be made without guilt or pain or bad feelings. It does not mean that what one has done is not, despite its necessity, wrong. The chief executive of a large corporation once told me that “downsizing” his company was the most painful thing he had ever had to do. His toughness lay not in callousness or indifference but in his insistence on doing what was necessary even in the face of his overwhelming feelings of guilt. Toughness is a virtue, but callousness and indifference are not, and the two should never be confused, especially in Nietzsche.

### *Egoism*

Egoism is usually considered to be not a virtue but the very antithesis of the virtues. Suffice it to say that for Nietzsche it is, properly understood, not a vice but a virtue. Egoism as a virtue is not egoism as “selfishness” (as in Ayn Rand’s “virtue of selfishness”), nor is it egoism as mere self-aggrandizement (egotism). But Nietzsche refers to the “great self,” which is something different from the petty self. To accusation of egoism, the question Nietzsche asks is, “Whose ego?” What are the values this ego represents, appreciates, promotes, and expresses? The egoism of the resentful scoundrel and the petty gossip is of a very different quality than the egoism of a great artist. What the “ego” needs and wants is very different, and the consequences—in the style of character as well as the product—are quite different too. Nietzsche wants to reconsider the blanket condemnation of egoism, “the prejudice that takes ‘moral,’ ‘unegoistic,’ ‘*disintéresse*’ as concepts of equivalent value already rules today with the force of a ‘fixed idea’ and brain-sickness.”<sup>48</sup> What are the desires and ambitions that *this particular ego* would satisfy? When one of Homer’s heroes or Aristotle’s aristocrats or Nietzsche’s great artists wants to “satisfy himself,” it almost follows of necessity that his satisfaction will be at the same time the enrichment of society (whether the current members of society accept this or not). It is in the very nature of the hero, in Homer, that he acts for the sake of honor. His honor is his self-interest. So, too, it is the mark of virtue, according to Aristotle, that it desires the good. The virtuous man acts out of his own desires, therefore, but it hardly makes sense to call this selfishness. And when Mozart or Goethe feverishly pursue their desires, the result is great music or great poetry and the enrichment of all of our lives.

Perhaps the conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is only that egoism is not necessarily a vice, but not therefore a virtue. Leave it to Nietzsche, of course, to pick the most polemical way of putting the point. But the point is that the evaluation of “self-interested” desires and their

satisfaction must be particularized and nuanced. Self-interest (egoism) is not to be condemned as such. We should note that this is a different point than that often made by moral philosophers when they point out that egoism is not to be confused with “satisfying one’s own desires,” for one’s own desires may well be altruistic or selfless. Nietzsche, at least early in his career, deeply doubts that there are any truly altruistic or selfless acts or desires, but the point is well taken. The fact that it is *my* desire that I try to satisfy does not make me egoistic or selfish. But Nietzsche is saying something more than this. The fact that it is for the sake of *my* self that I act and desire does not as such make my act egoistic in any negative sense. In such cases as above (in Homer, in Aristotle, and in Goethe) one might even say that their egoism, like their pride, is an essential virtue.

But all of this can be put much less misleadingly. What Nietzsche is suggesting, very much in line with Aristotle, is the utter rejection of the contrast between altruism and self-interest. In Aristotle’s great-souled man, his desires and the needs of the larger *polis* are one, as in Homer’s heroes the desire for honor and glory is at the same time the desire for victory and renown for the entire army. In both cases, we might say that the satisfaction of their self-interest is to the benefit of the greater good, or we can say that there is no meaningful distinction to be made between their personal self-satisfying desires and the larger ideals and values for which they stand. One of the virtues of virtue ethics is precisely the fact that it tends to break down the supposed opposition between self-interest and the good (doing what’s right, being virtuous, etc.) To be sure, such oppositions appear on particular occasions. (The Greeks had a name for this: *tragedy*.) But it is an enormous mistake, and one central to the very notion of “Morality” (in Kant, in slave morality), to think that all of human behavior is torn between two very different sets of motives, egoistic motives on the one hand and moral motives on the other. Nietzsche has other reasons for doubting this dichotomy, of course—the falsity of the grounds advanced for non-egoistic moral motives and the dubiousness of supposedly non-egoistic motivation—but the first objection, dating back to Aristotle and the Greeks, is that the supposed opposition does not exist in most human behavior. (Anthony Flew asks in this regard whether his daughters’ eating their [own] breakfast is a “selfish” act.)<sup>49</sup> And in the case of virtuous action, the supposed opposition *by definition* does not exist.

### *Responsibility*

Nietzsche is often listed among the “existentialists,” together with Kierkegaard and Sartre, both defenders of a strong sense of freedom and responsibility. But Nietzsche’s views on freedom are complex and confusing. He rejects “free will” as an illusion. He sees much of what is understood as responsibility—for example, the Kantian sense of obligation—as just another aspect of slave morality. He sarcastically attacks “the improvers of

mankind,” suggesting that many of the causes that responsible reformers engage in are futile. We cannot change ourselves. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to read Nietzsche and not conclude that self-cultivation and self-transformation—“Become who you are!”—is central to his thinking. Nietzsche may express his share of skepticism about many of the conceptual presuppositions of autonomy and free choice, but he properly belongs to that group of philosophers with whom he so often associated, for whom non-self-deceptive individual choice is an essential ingredient in “authentic” existence. (I will discuss Nietzsche’s complex views on responsibility in the following chapter.)

### The *Übermensch*: A Cubist Portrait

Behold! I teach you the *Übermensch*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

So what does this package of the virtues, when assembled, tend to look like? I suggested before we began that it would look a lot like a Cubist portrait: misshapen, “unnatural,” bizarre, but at the same time insightful in a way that a simple snapshot cannot be. Nietzsche’s Aristotelian virtues might seem to form a coherent set (as in Aristotle’s “unity” thesis), but the metaphor of “overflowing” suggests that each of those virtues might leave no room for the others. Many of Nietzsche’s virtues are disjunctive, as many of the Aristotelian virtues are social in nature while those that are uniquely Nietzschean tend to be more solipsistic. But this seems to reflect Nietzsche’s own disjunctive sensibility. In public or with friends he would be civil and courteous and the very model of integrity, but in private, in his writings, he was utterly uncivil, nastily rude, and prone to all sorts of literary excesses. Perhaps this could be dismissed merely as a personal problem or character flaw, but I think that Nietzsche would say that most of us experience no such disjunction in our lives because we fail to be either truly engaged in the world or sufficiently “in” ourselves. Here his critique resembles no one so much as Kierkegaard, who relentlessly nagged at us about our failure to be passionate within ourselves and ridiculed the ease and conformity with which we participated in society. Thus I would interpret Nietzsche’s sparsely drawn portrait of the *Übermensch* as the very opposite of the usual dramatic Conan the Barbarian figure. He (or she) would be the person of exquisite inwardness, who like Kierkegaard’s “Knight of Faith” betrays little of his or her passion and rich inner experience to the casual observer. However flamboyant Nietzsche might appear on the page, I would suggest that his virtues are in fact quiet and subtle virtues, which is not for a moment to deny that they are defined by inner passion and enthusiasm. Thus I read Nietzsche’s writings as not only sometimes profound philosophical experimentation and as an unusual window into a passionate personality but as a relentless nagging to re-think ourselves. Thus the question,

What would Nietzsche make of us? I think that he would have us similarly passionate and enthusiastic, about thinking and the joys of philosophy, about our animal natures and the excitement of just being alive, about the great works of artistic creativity that, even if we are not capable of producing them ourselves, nevertheless enrich our experience and the world and make human life well worth living.

If we understand the *Übermensch* as the ultimate projection of our virtues, then for each of us the *Übermensch* will make its own appearance, with its own proportions, its own dominant virtues. Unlike Aristotle, Nietzsche does not give us a single portrait of the exemplary human being. And unlike Plato, Nietzsche does not argue as if we must in some sense know what we are looking for in order to find it. Nietzsche's is an open-ended creative philosophy, and we create our virtues as we go. We see what we admire and emulate in others. We see what "works" for us, what satisfies us, what frustrates us, what humiliates us, and we evolve our virtues on the basis of "who we are" by a sort of natural selection. Thus Zarathustra keeps coming back to the same advice, "Find your own way," but it is not as if he (Nietzsche) doesn't give us all sorts of pointers along the way. No, the various virtues do not fit comfortably together. We all have to make difficult choices in life. We may never get it all together. But the ultimate aim is to cultivate and mold our various virtues into a coherent character, with style and enthusiasm and exquisite inner experience. For Nietzsche that enthusiasm and the exquisite inner experience that goes with it is what the virtues are all about, and the *Übermensch* simply stands as a Rorschach self-portrait for each of our efforts.



# Chapter 7

## NIETZSCHE'S EXISTENTIALISM

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That one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary. . . . but to *love* it.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

The idea I have never ceased to develop is in the end that a man can always make something out of what is made of him.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, interviewed in the *New Left Review*

When I first started teaching at Princeton in 1966, I was asked to take over Walter Kaufmann's course entitled "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Existentialism." I confess to going into a panic at the idea of teaching Hegel, whom I had studied only briefly and casually, but it gave me a push (as well as a very interesting summer) in a direction that has proved to be remarkably rewarding over the years. I didn't have much of a worry about the other two-thirds of the course. I was already in love with Nietzsche and Sartre, and I slipped in just enough Kierkegaard to be respectable. I didn't really think very much about whether "Nietzsche and Existentialism" properly designated two topics or one, or rather whether Nietzsche belonged with the existentialists or only (as in Kaufmann's course) *along with* them.

Since then, of course, the question has come up many times. Students raise it, and I have long finessed it. I unapologetically include Nietzsche in my courses on "existentialism" (thus prompting the best students to challenge me, conjoined with some strange definition of "existentialism") When pushed, I often simply say, "I love Nietzsche. I try to include him in every course." But this is obviously unsatisfactory. I *do* see Nietzsche as an existentialist, and not just by way of justifying my now solidified syllabus. And yet there are some obvious objections to this, not least of all the fashion-conscious one I heard in Europe recently, that Nietzsche is "hot" but existentialism is *passé*. A victim of the postmodernists, I presume. More philosophically, it can be argued that Nietzsche rejects the main tenets of what used to be called existentialism, at least in its classic formulation by Sartre. That is what I want to look at here.

What is existentialism? First, there is the apparently trivial (but nevertheless significant) description: it is a philosophy that puts the emphasis on

*existence* (in opposition to any number of abstract and impersonal conceptions of meaning and human life). Usually (but not necessarily), *existence* refers to personal, individual existence rather than collective existence, but one could argue that Heidegger, for instance, allows room for a suprapersonal interpretation of *Dasein*. For Kierkegaard, most notably, *existenz* is a distinctively individual and quite honorific term, suggesting a life that is more than just “so-called existence” and defined by such exciting and undergraduate-pulse-pounding concepts as risk, adventure, and passion. (For Kierkegaard, it is a matter of indifference whether or not a passionate life is at all evident from a third-person point of view.)

At its most minimal but most exuberant, “existence” is a celebration of *life*. Here Nietzsche joins Kierkegaard (and, I would add, Fichte and Hegel). But the term *life* is woefully noncommittal. For Kierkegaard it does not matter whether life is happy or melancholy (he speaks for the latter), and what brings “glad tidings to the melancholy” is nothing less than a life *beyond* life, just that sense of the “otherworldly” that Nietzsche most vehemently rejects. For Kierkegaard, life was neither happy nor sufficient, and a “leap of faith” to another realm of existence was necessary for solace. Nevertheless it was *in life* that such a decision (and all such decisions) had to be made. For Nietzsche (at least in his more manic moods) life was a “Dionysian” celebration, and there was nothing beyond life. And life was not, for Nietzsche, mainly a matter of making decisions. (Unlike Kierkegaard and Sartre, Nietzsche talks very little about choice.) But both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche celebrated individual existence to the exclusion of all sorts of abstract theories and notions in favor of the passions of life, and it was this that prompted Karl Jaspers, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to mark the kinship between the two and point out their shared virtues.

In a more secular vein, Sartre’s famous (but borrowed) slogan, “[human] existence precedes essence,” made it clear that abstract questions about human nature are secondary and derivative; descriptions of the concrete situations in which we find ourselves are primary. Despite Nietzsche’s occasional flights of abstraction (mostly confined to his unpublished notes), he would again count as an existentialist in this minimal sense. He is brilliantly concrete and insightful regarding the details and passions of life. (“These small things—nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness—are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far.”)<sup>1</sup>

None of this, I take it, is very surprising, at least in terms of the philosophical taxonomy that is in question here.

But there are deeper philosophical questions here that go far beyond taxonomy, and they have to do with interpreting Nietzsche’s texts and philosophy in a basic way. Like such existentialists as Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre, Nietzsche is a powerful defender of what one might call “the existential self,” the individual who “makes himself” by exploring and

disciplining his particular talents and distinguishes himself from “the herd” and the conformist influences of other people. But Nietzsche also attacks the very concept of freedom and with it the existentialist idea that we are free and responsible to make of ourselves what we will. Furthermore, Nietzsche celebrates precisely those ancient concepts of “fate” and “destiny” that Sartre, in particular, rejects as exemplary of “bad faith.” The question then becomes whether Nietzsche’s many comments and occasional arguments in favor of “the love of fate” (*amor fati*) and against “free will” undermine any interpretation of his philosophy in existentialist and “self-making” terms. I take it that some such conception of self-making or self-creation is central to both Kierkegaard and Sartre, at least, and as such I take it to be the definitive core of that exquisite sensibility called “Existentialism.” I want to argue that Nietzsche’s fatalism and his “self-making” are ultimately two sides of the same coin and not at odds or contradictory. Nietzsche embraces the notions of responsibility—in particular, the responsibility for one’s character and “who one is”—but without invoking “free will.”

### Nietzsche’s Fatalism, Determinism, and Destiny

*What does your conscience say?*—You shall become the person you are.  
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

It is important for us to distinguish between what is commonly discussed in contemporary philosophy as “determinism” and what is archaically referred to as “fatalism.” Of course, the former notion has been interpreted in very sophisticated ways, depending on the causal or scientific paradigm. I do not think that this very complicated literature—which inevitably ends up talking about quantum mechanics—has any bearing on Nietzsche’s case. “Fatalism,” by contrast, has been interpreted in a great many muddled, air-headed, and dismissive ways.<sup>2</sup> It has been taken to be just a variation of determinism.<sup>3</sup> This tends to make it more palatable to contemporary philosophers, but at the expense of what Nietzsche really meant by the term. Fatalism has been taken to be just the tautological thesis “what will be, will be” and it has been religiously interpreted in terms of “God’s will” and “predestination.” This is clearly not what Nietzsche meant by it. It has been interpreted atavistically, mythologically, and as a quaint bit of poetic license. In the analytic literature, fatalism has only occasionally been given its full metaphysical run, as in Mark Bernstein’s impressive 1992 study, *Fatalism*.<sup>4</sup> But in Nietzsche’s case, fatalism is not a metaphysical thesis. It harks back to his beloved pre-Socratic Greek tragedians and their concept of *moira*. It has little to do with modern scientific thinking. I think we might call it an *aesthetic* thesis (following an early unpublished essay of Nietzsche’s).<sup>5</sup> In this aesthetic sense, there need not be any assumption of deter-

minism. There need be no specified causal chain or even one specifiable “in principle.” There is only the notion of a necessary outcome and the narrative that makes it appear to be necessary. Thus Oedipus was “fated” to do the dastardly deeds that he was destined to do, and whatever causal chain he pursued, the outcome was already fixed.

Thus, on the face of it, determinism and fatalism make two quite different claims. The first insists that whatever happens can (in principle) be explained in terms of prior causes (events, states of affairs, inherent structures, plus the laws of nature). The second insists that whatever happens *must* happen, but there need be no effort to specify the causal etiology behind the modal “must.” But it would also be a mistake to interpret fatalism as *excluding* any such effort. To be sure, Oedipus’s behavior and its terrible outcome can be explained, step by step, as one event causing another. But that would surely miss the point of the narrative, which is that the outcome is fated but the path to the outcome is not. On the other hand, to insist that fatalism depends on the whims of the gods or frivolous fates or any other mysterious force is to simply dismiss what was and still is a quite sensible and appealing philosophical thesis. What we need to understand, I think, is just how seriously Nietzsche took the ancient fatalist thesis, and why this is both different from determinism and does not exclude responsibility.

It is important that we neither reduce fatalism to determinism nor oppose the two in such a way that determinism becomes the respectable scientific thesis while fatalism is relegated to ancient mythology and poetry. One way to understand fatalism that is close to Nietzsche and also free of any “spooky” overtones is Heraclitus’s view, a commonplace in the ancient world (as it still is today), that fate is firmly tied to character. He thus declared, “Character is fate,” and Aristotle followed him by including in his theory of tragedy the notion of a “tragic flaw” or *hamartia* in the tragic hero’s character. Thus Oedipus’s tragedy is often “explained” by appeal to his tyrannical arrogance, his obstinacy, and his refusal to listen to either Teiresias or his wife/mother.<sup>6</sup> But whether or not we so explain Oedipus’s fate (and I do not think such explanations in terms of “flaws” are ultimately defensible), it is clear that the narrative is driven by the combination of circumstances and character and the “necessity” is one determined by the plot (combined with the fact that from the very beginning of the play the audience already knows its outcome).

One might try to assimilate fatalism to determinism by restricting one’s focus on “fate” to tangible matters of character and dispositions both to behave in certain ways and to get oneself into certain kinds of situations. But what this gains in scientific respectability it loses in terms of the themes Nietzsche wants to promote, a sense of necessity that is something more than scientific (causal) necessity. On the other hand, one can maintain the distinction between fatalism and determinism (without excluding deterministic accounts) by emphasizing a certain kind of narrative in which fatalism,

in contrast to determinism, begins at the end, that is, the outcome, and considers the outcome as in some sense necessary, given the nature of the person's character. This is not to say that the protagonist does not make any choices and takes on no responsibility in the unfolding of the plot. It is, quite the contrary, to show how the culmination of choices and the accumulation of responsibility have an necessary and predictable outcome.

Consider this: A naughty boy becomes a punk kid, then becomes a juvenile delinquent and turns into a petty, later a "hardened," criminal. The neighbors and some of his family members wag their fingers as they say, "I told you so." It would be daft to deny that character provides a certain necessity, though it would be equally daft to insist that such "necessity" carries with it the strict determination of causal necessity. Could things have turned out otherwise? Of course. Could the causes have been different? Why not? Indeed, a perverse and more practical application of Gettier-type examples sometimes occurs in the blaming perspective, for instance in the prosecution of a despicable person for a crime he did not commit. His conviction is considered in some sense necessary despite the deviant causal chain that leads up to it.

In other words, the *what* of fate need make no commitments to any *how*. This does not mean that determinism is false, of course, since one might and indeed must insist that there is *some* chain of events and causes leading up to the outcome. But though this may well interest the scientist it is not the main concern of the fatalist. Thus the naughty boy who ends up doing hard prison time no doubt has a nasty biography filled with intermediate causes, but for those who "told you so" the important point is that *this* is how he would end up, quite apart from the causal details. The outcome is necessary quite independently of the causal necessity of the outcome. Again, the difference between them is not so much the presence or absence of a causal explanation. The difference between them is the attribution of narrative significance to the outcome.

Consider the matter of life span, always a matter of concern to Nietzsche given the combination of his ambitions and his chronically poor health. ("Die at the right time" is a sadly ironic epitaph for this man who died on the one hand all too early and on the other hand a decade too late.) Thinking about our own lives, it is hard not to contemplate the question, "How long do I have?" This is not just a practical question, nor is it limited to patients with a medical death sentence dangling over their heads or soldiers entering the battlefield. The same question is readily available—and at times unavoidable—for all of us. Consequently it is hard not to think in terms of a certain span of "allotted time." People die "before their time" and these days many people outlive their useful lives by several or even many years (as did Nietzsche). To be sure, a person's mortality and life span can be explained scientifically by a straightforward causal story, but the two accounts, fate and medical science, are not the same.

Why is all of this not just determinism? Because it is *teleological* in form as well as (or even rather than) causal. It is important not to make determinism and teleology into incompatible competitors as modes of explanation, and I think Nietzsche seriously errs when he attempts to do so (e.g., in his analysis of drives as vehicles of the “will to power”). Nietzsche is always—like Aristotle before him—very much the biologist (before Darwinism was definitively severed from teleological thinking). Fatalism is teleological in that it focuses not so much on the causes as on the ultimate *significance* of an event or outcome. This notion of teleology is not to be construed in terms of otherworldly agents behind the scenes, which Nietzsche would clearly reject. But such a fatalistic teleology is clearly captured in those places where Nietzsche dramatically speaks of “*destiny*” (most notably, in *Ecce Homo*, where he considers his own life and career under the rubric, “Why I Am a Destiny”). Destiny is not just a necessary outcome. It is an outcome that is necessary given some larger purpose as well as the character and abilities of the person (or people, as in the rather insidious nineteenth-century American claim to “manifest destiny”). Thus it was Goethe’s destiny to be the first great German internationalist and it was Einstein’s destiny to turn the world of physics on its head. To be sure, one can restate these claims by analyzing how Goethe’s and Einstein’s respective genius resulted in their respective successes. But it is worth noting what is lost thereby. (It is also worth noting that calling their virtues “genius” already embodies something of the teleological viewpoint, at least in the nineteenth-century context.) What gets lost is the results-focused, purposive nature of the narrative. One cannot understand destiny just by understanding how (causally) the outcome came about.

Nietzsche is unclear about the extent to which character is agency. He is also unclear about how character and specific actions are related. But he is, unlike Heraclitus, very clear about this: there are no gods or any other agent who determine our character, but we, whatever we are “given” in our natures, are *responsible* for cultivating our own characters. Not that this is easy. Nietzsche tells us, “Giving style to one’s character—a great and rare art.”<sup>7</sup> But whether rare or commonplace, whether limited to a few “higher men” or something that we all do, cultivating one’s character goes hand in hand with Nietzsche’s conception of fatalism. He is no less adamant than Kant about our responsibility for developing our virtues (although he would not call it a “duty”). And if Nietzsche doesn’t see a role for “free will” in this sense of responsibility, that in no way lets us off the hook or makes us immune to the blaming perspective. Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard and Sartre, insists that our destiny is in our own hands, however set or constrained by fate or circumstances or our own characters. We are neither victims of chance and contingency nor Sartrian “captains of our fate.” (One might say, in line with one of Nietzsche’s best-known bits of euphoria, that we are more like the oarsmen of our fate, capable of heroic self-movement but also swept along in a sometimes cruel but glorious sea.)

## Nietzsche on Freedom and Fatalism: Paradox or Perspectives?

If I have observed correctly, the “unfreedom of the will” is regarded as a problem from two entirely opposite standpoints, but always in a profoundly *personal* manner: some will not give up their “responsibility,” their belief in themselves, the personal right to their merits at any price. . . . Others, on the contrary, do not wish to be answerable for anything, and owing to an inward self-contempt, seek to *lay the blame for themselves somewhere else*.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

In his *Nietzsche*, Heidegger worries at considerable length about the awkward, even paradoxical relationship between *amor fati*, eternal return, and the possibility of freedom and decision (*Entscheidung*). I do not defend Heidegger’s overall approach to Nietzsche, which I find dangerously seductive (his emphasis on unpublished works, his “metaphysical” focus), nor would I take Heidegger as a paragon of existentialist thinking, especially around the time of his writing *Nietzsche*. But I think he raises an important set of issues, whatever my reservations about the appropriateness (or intelligibility) of his answers. In analytic circles, Brian Leiter has taken what he similarly calls Nietzsche’s “paradox of fatalism and self-creation” seriously.<sup>8</sup> But I think that despite protestations to the contrary, Heidegger is suspiciously obscure when it comes to questions of personal choice and responsibility. And I am not all that impressed when Leiter weighs just some of the well-known textual supports for both the “self-creating” and the “fatalism” theses in Nietzsche, concluding that fatalism is Nietzsche’s dominant theme.<sup>9</sup> (Regarding Nietzsche in particular, I do not put much stock in the weighing of quotes on various sides of an issue. George Eliot describes such arguments in *Middlemarch* as “a statistical amount without a standard of comparison but with a note of exclamation at the end.”)<sup>10</sup> I think Leiter misreads the nature of Nietzsche’s “fatalism,” interpreting it as more or less a variant of “determinism” along the lines of the much-mangled “free will” problem, and I think he also gives us a straw man in his depiction of “self-creation.” My own conclusion is that there is no paradox, that Nietzsche is a staunch believer in personal responsibility (even if he rejects such problematic notions as “free will,” “Will,” and *causa sui*), and that he is thus very much in line with Kierkegaard and Sartre’s existentialism (whether or not Heidegger’s). In fact, I would agree with Leiter that “self-creation” (or self-making), rightly understood, presupposes some form of fatalism. As I interpret those theses, they come out to be pretty much identical.

Thus I do not find a “paradox” (that is, some sort of contradiction) between the fatalistic and self-creationist themes in Nietzsche, even taking these at face value. Rather, I see there a deep example of Nietzsche’s famous perspectivism. In fact, if I may summarize a serious methodological point here, I think the key to reading Nietzsche is taking his perspectivism seriously, not just as a thesis or as an “experiment” but as the very essence of

his approach to philosophy. What we are talking about here, I suggest, are not two contrary theses but two basic perspectives on ourselves and on human life. On the one hand, there is our familiar view of ourselves as (more or less) autonomous beings, deliberating, making choices, acting on our desires, sometimes reflecting on and weighing our desires, sometimes conscientiously denying our desires (or refusing to be motivated by them). It is from this perspective that we normally hold people (and ourselves) responsible for their (our) actions and ascribe to them their virtues.

On the other hand, anyone not overly smitten with a vulgarized Sartre or Dr. Joyce Brothers recognizes that we are all “thrown into” our circumstances, born with (or without) certain talents and abilities and physical liabilities and limitations. And we are all products (“victims” some would say) of our upbringing, our families, our culture. One can look at oneself and one’s behavior as the result of one’s past behavior and habits, one’s history of development, as well as any number of environmental, biological, social, and cultural factors and contingencies (especially those bits of bad luck that are not to be so easily included in the *amor fati* stratagem). From this point of view, one’s behavior does not appear to be free at all. We see ourselves as sometimes free, sometimes fated. Even without bringing in spooky words like *fatalism*, we can understand without difficulty the fact that we recognize in ourselves and in others the heavy baggage of our backgrounds and the fact that our choices and our so-called autonomy are both limited and for the most part highly predictable (not quite to say “determined”). We take up one or the other of these perspectives, often sequentially, but I do not see this as a “paradox.” It is rather just “the human condition.” We see ourselves as both free and constrained.

To put the matter bluntly and more explicitly than Nietzsche ever does, there are multiple perspectives through which one can describe and evaluate one’s own agency and behavior and the agency and behavior of others. I noted in chapter 2 that (in terms favored by Bernd Magnus and Richard Rorty) the language of personal responsibility is an *optional vocabulary*. There is any number of ways of describing our behavior (for example, as the product of physio-chemical processes) in which the language of responsibility is inappropriate. But in general, although by no means consistently, Nietzsche suggests that we are responsible for our behavior and the cultivation of our virtues even if he rejects, in Kant’s words, the idea of “Will as a kind of causality” or the “standpoint” of “thinking of oneself as free” or considering ourselves “members of the intelligible [or supersensible] world.”<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche has a strong sense of agency, even if he rejects the exaggerated notions of freedom that Kant and some existentialists attach to it. His whole philosophy is couched in terms of “tasks” and difficulties to be overcome.

Whatever else it may be, self-creation is not a human version of what Nietzsche thinks is impossible even for God, namely creation *de nihilo*. We cannot act as a *causa sui*, “bootstrapping” our way into selfhood. Nor does it require or involve any break from natural laws, like Kant’s noumenal



subject, the target of many of Nietzsche's most ferocious attacks. Self-making, which is ultimately a kind of self-cultivation, is by no means independent or separable from one's native talents, one's "instincts," one's environment, the influence of other people and one's culture. It is not a matter of "making oneself" on a basis of absolute ontological freedom (as Sartre famously insists) but of "becoming who you are." This strongly suggests that self-making ("becoming") already embraces fatalism ("who you are"). Self-becoming does not involve "free will," but, nevertheless, Nietzsche, like Sartre, remains a staunch believer in personal responsibility, even if he also offers us options (such as his discussions of psychology in terms of physiology) in which that vocabulary is no longer appropriate.

Once we have put to the side such contentious notions of free will as well as the optional vocabularies that Nietzsche keeps reminding us of but does not consistently use, there is no "paradox" or contradiction between the fatalistic and self-creationist themes in Nietzsche. It is the oddity of the first-person standpoint, that we see ourselves both "from the outside" and "from the inside," that constitutes a remarkable asymmetry that has driven much of modern philosophy. From the first-person standpoint, it is impossible to deny our powers (however limited) as agents. From the impersonal third-person ("omniscient") standpoint, it is as if we disappear from view altogether. At most we are the zero-point of the perspective from which the world is viewed. With just a touch of mischievousness, one might liken Nietzsche's so-called paradox to Kant's third and most famous antinomy (B 480), which has the *appearance* of two contradictory claims but which on examination (and with the help of Kant's formidable analysis) turn out to be the expressions of two different "standpoints." (There is no reason to press the "two worlds" interpretation of Kant, which Nietzsche so explicitly rejects.) I would also liken it to what I take to be the key move in Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological ontology in *Being and Nothingness*, where he describes in great detail the phenomenological peculiarities of the first-person standpoint and puts "out of play" those scientific and other perspectives that do not presume this standpoint. (The complex ways in which Sartre thus follows Kant but rejects one of Husserl's key tenets is outside of the focus of this book.)

## Nietzsche's Classical Fatalism

[Zeus:] Fate has it that Sarpedon, whom I love more  
Than any man, is to be killed by Patroclus.  
Shall I take him out of battle while he still lives . . . ?  
—Homer, *Iliad*

In ancient tragedy, a staggering variety of curses and wars were usually due to the intervention of gods and goddesses. Thus ancient fate and destiny are straightforwardly teleological, that is, they serve the (often whimsical) purposes of the Olympians. In Christian "predestination," similarly, the outcome is determined by God according to His purposes, mysterious though

they may be. But in the ancient world, fate was something nevertheless distinct from the gods, and the gods are often depicted as themselves bound by though not usually the victims of fate. And though fate is clearly presented as necessity, it is by no means clear that it involves anything like agency or anyone's purpose. (Only occasionally is fate personified as "the Fates," usually as three old women—Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos<sup>12</sup>—in which case both agency and purpose can be presumed.) So, too, in much of Christian thought fate and fatalism are pointedly opposed to free will, which is defended as the hallmark of the Christian worldview, certain famous paradoxes notwithstanding.<sup>13</sup> So the teleology of ancient fatalism is by no means simply reducible to the purposive behavior of divine agency.

Let me now distinguish fate and fatalism, although most conceptions of the former imply the latter. Belief in the Judeo-Christian God, for instance, sometimes involves a version of fatalism (for example, in the notion of "God's will"), but such belief is distinctively opposed to the notion of fate (that is, of any agency or ultimate significance of what happens apart from God.) So, too, in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophy *karma* does not imply a distinctive agent but it is firmly connected to a person's actions (as their "residue.") To put the distinction simply, fatalism is the thesis that what happens *must* (in some sense) happen. This does not require any universal thesis to the effect that *whatever* happens *must* happen. It more plausibly applies to more or less specific actions and events (what Dennett dismissively calls "local fatalism").<sup>14</sup>

Fate adds to fatalism some notion of quasi-agency, at the one extreme the conspiracies of the Olympian gods or the Will of God Himself, at the other extreme some virtually agentless notions of responsibility such as the Chinese "Mandate of Heaven" and south Indian *karma*, in which it is only the person's own actions that account for his or her fate. (Heraclitus's "character is fate" plays a somewhat ambiguous role, as it is left unsaid to what extent character is agency and how character and specific actions are related. It is also left unsaid whether character is the doing of the gods or any other agent—including, perhaps, oneself, a possibility of paramount importance in Nietzsche's philosophy of "self-creation.") Fate thus involves a more anthropomorphic belief than fatalism, as it makes some attempt to *account for* the necessity in question. But even fate, so conceived, need not be considered a merely "primitive" or archaic form of thinking. Indeed, it would be a rare human being, even in this age of quantum theory and virtual reality, who never felt its appeal.

The greatest Western text on fate, Homer's *Iliad*, makes many striking observations that surely influenced Nietzsche's thinking on these matters. Fate, for Homer, cannot be gainsaid. Not even the gods—nor even Zeus himself—can countermand fate. Nevertheless, Zeus, at least, seems to have ample "elbow room" with regard to fate. There is a remarkable passage (quoted in the epigraph) where Zeus is contemplating saving Sarpedon, one

of his favorite sons, despite the fact that fate has it that he will be killed by Patroclus. Hera, “her eyes soft and wide,” replies aghast,

Son of Cronos, what a thing to say!  
A mortal man, whose fate has long been fixed,  
And you want to save him from rattling death?  
Do it, but don't expect all of us to approve.

She then warns that there will be considerable resentment, and “other gods will do the same.” And so “The Father of Gods and Men agreed / Reluctantly.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the extent to which Zeus is “bound” by fate—as opposed to the clear “binding” of mere mortals—is left ambiguous. Usually, however, the gods and goddesses act to make sure that things do turn out as fate has decreed. Thus Poseidon saves Aeneas from certain death at Achilles' hand: “For it is destined that Aeneas escape / And the line of Dardanus not be destroyed.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless it seems that the gods are not necessarily bound by fate's necessity.

There is no such wiggle room for mortals. Achilles, grieving over the death of Patroclus, tells the Myrmidons,

We two are fated  
to redden the selfsame earth with our blood,  
Right here in Troy, I will never return home.<sup>17</sup>

Hector, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, has made a similar speech, to the effect that no one shall send him to Hades before his time, though to be sure he is fated like all the others.<sup>18</sup> Fate is most at issue when it comes to the question of the timing of men's deaths. But it also has to do with men's actions, which is more to the point, of course, when considering Sophocles' Oedipus. But in both the *Iliad* and in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, fate—or the actions of the gods—does not make men do what they would not do. Rather, fate (or the gods) arranges circumstances such that what a man would “naturally” do determines the inevitable outcome, for example, when proud and hotheaded Oedipus encounters Laius on the narrow crossroad near the foot of Parnassus. Sometimes, however, fate (or the gods) does not so much provoke as moderate a man's aims and desires, forcing moments of deliberation upon what would otherwise be rash action. For instance, when Achilles is about to strike Agamemnon in rage, at the very beginning of the *Iliad*, Athena, sent by Hera, makes him a little speech, “I came to see if I could check this temper of yours.” Achilles responds,

“When you two speak, Goddess, a man has to listen  
No matter how angry. It's better that way.  
Obey the gods and they hear when you pray.”  
[With that] he ground his heavy hand

onto the silver hilt and pushed the great sword  
back into its sheath.<sup>19</sup>

The *Iliad* speaks often but rather noncommittally about the nature of fate and does not distinguish fate from fatalism. *Oedipus*, by contrast, takes up fate (by way of Laius's curse) as the main theme and engine of the plot. Nietzsche, in line with these ancient models, talks frequently of fate (as in *amor fati*, "the love of fate") but really refers only to fatalism. That is, he urges us to appreciate the necessity and significance of outcomes without reference to any mysterious agency. Here he clearly sides with Heraclitus and he might be argued to be equally opaque with regard to the extent to which character is agency and regarding how character and specific actions are related. One might say that, for Nietzsche, character *is* agency and thus embodies both freedom and necessity (a position that is associated with David Hume as well).<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Nietzsche goes out of his way to avoid agency talk even regarding intentional action. Thus his fairly frequent "quantum of energy" talk,<sup>21</sup> where the metaphor of a quantum that "discharges itself" can be assimilated to the more commonsense picture of character as the underlying force that manifests itself in any number of actions (in which conscious purposes may be irrelevant or merely secondary). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of that "granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision," thus rendering even decisions as fatalistic and not clearly matters of agency.<sup>22</sup> At the far extreme of Nietzsche's thinking, he comments in the *Nachlass* (and I always suspect the status of anything that is only in the *Nachlass*), "everything has been directed along certain lines from the beginning."<sup>23</sup> This is, indeed, not only fatalism but a victimized way of thinking about the utter pervasiveness of fate.

But "directed" *by whom?* No gods or God, to be sure. Here Nietzsche has surely gone beyond his ancient mentors suggesting not that *some* acts, events, or outcomes are necessary but rather that *all* are. And the vulgar teleology here is not a matter of aesthetic perspective but instead seems paranoid. I am tempted to simply dismiss this as one of Nietzsche's more outrageous and unsuccessful (and unpublished) thought experiments, except that it highlights in its extremity a sensibility that is evident throughout the mature Nietzsche, and its source is not hard to find. The sensibility is that there is some agency "behind" the conscious agency of our actions. For Schopenhauer, of course, this mysterious agency was the impersonal and irrational Will. From Nietzsche, it is attributed to more scientifically respectable processes, notably "instinct," "drive" (*Trieb*), and other biological "agencies," much as Freud would do several years later in *his* later works. (I would not want to push this point, but I think that both Freud and Nietzsche would be horrified at the mechanization of these concepts in what is now sometimes called "psychic determinism" or, in Nietzsche, various deterministic revisions of his so-called will to power.)

## “Become Who You Are”

Popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind the doing, effecting, becoming; the “doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Nietzsche’s watchword is “Become who you are.” (Thus the subtitle of *Ecce Homo, Wie Man Wird, Was Man Ist.*) This short phrase captures Nietzsche’s position in a nonparadoxical way. One *is* insofar as one has predetermined and limited possibilities—one’s talents, abilities, virtues, disabilities, limitations. A child at an early age (perhaps almost from birth) displays a real talent for music, for language, for special relations, for gymnastics, for dancing, for leadership. But it is perfectly obvious that these promising possibilities are no more than that, that they require development, encouragement, training, practice, dedication (or at least some measure of these).

One *becomes* what one is. And if one believes—as I think anyone not blinded by an excessive egalitarianism must believe—that we are all talented and virtuous in different ways (including what we might call our meta-virtues, such as self-discipline, which have to do with our ability to foster our virtues), then it more or less follows that we are free to develop our virtues (free, that is, insofar as we have the virtue) but we are not free regarding what virtues we have and, therefore, what virtues we might choose to develop. I say “more or less” here because of a number of pretty obvious qualifications: most people have more than one virtue and are therefore free to choose among them, and the development of any virtue can be thwarted by any number of external and internal factors, such as lack of opportunity, the absence of adequate role models or exemplars, a paucity of praise and encouragement or (worse) an excess of discouragement and even ridicule, or a debilitating mishap or accident.

What’s more, the notion that virtues are “given” and not chosen admits other complications as well. We might say that one cannot simply choose to have a virtue, but one does not always know whether or not one has a virtue, and in most disciplines one can develop some approximation of virtue even without it, and one can certainly choose between one talent and any number of other competing virtues. Internal blocks to development may consist of a clash of virtues and an inability to choose between them. It may also consist of a refusal to recognize that one has a virtue. But the most interesting difficulties in cultivating a virtue are due to what I just called a “meta-virtue,” a talent for pursuing one’s virtue(s). What is self-deceptively called writer’s block is a painfully familiar example.

As many literary aspirants will testify with a wince, writer’s block and literary talent are by no means contraries. Indeed, they may even be positively correlated. But, of course, the real question is whether writer’s block

should be classified as a *block*, that is, as some psychic obstacle that is quite independent of agency or the will. As a meta-virtue, the ability to pursue one's talents despite obstacles might be seen either as a given or not. If it is given, it is like any other talent; it cannot simply be chosen. If it is not, it may be open to choice. Sometimes, writer's block seems to be sheer inability to put together a true and interesting sentence, or the embarrassing absence of anything to say. But sometimes, it may be the obstinate unwillingness to shift one's work habits, to read and gather information instead of stupidly staring at a blank piece of paper or a computer screen, to abandon one's current dysfunctional project or switch projects in favor of something that might better engage one's abilities. In other words, even if one's writing talent is given and cannot simply be chosen, there is often an uncritical presumption that one's meta-talents are in some sense one's own responsibility.

There is some question whether the invocation of meta-virtues leads to an infinite regress. That is, if we have virtues that govern the exercise and development of our "first-order" virtues (whether or not these are chosen or simply discovered), does that not imply that we might (must) have higher-order virtues governing the exercise and development of our meta-virtues, and this in turn implies still higher level virtues for governing our meta-meta-virtues, and so on. I confess that this metaphysical conundrum too has always left me cold.<sup>24</sup> When philosophers became obsessed with the notion of justification, with such metaphors as "grounding," "foundations," and "securing," the anathema of infinite regress became understandable. But not all philosophy is justification, and in the existentialists in particular the quest for justification is typically turned on its head ("An act is grounded because I choose it, not because of a principle, which is justified by some further principle, etc.") But in cases such as this one the limit to regression is not logical or conceptual but simply human, all too human. We are capable of only so much recursion or level hopping. There are, indeed, instances of meta-meta-virtues—indeed, self-discipline may well provide such an example. We do sometimes resolve not only to develop a virtue but to "work on" our ability to develop our virtues, for instance by subjecting ourselves to other disciplines. But there is a limit to how far "above" ourselves we can or are willing to go, not least because of the confusion of "levels" that inevitably arises in any real life (as opposed to merely formal) attempt to provide such a "theory of types." For all practical purposes, it is enough to insist that in addition to our desires and virtues we have meta-desires and meta-virtues, desires and virtues concerning how and how well we put our desires and virtues into action.

Nevertheless, it should not be thought that getting one's desires and virtues in line with one's meta-desires and meta-virtues is always or even usually a matter of mere self-discipline. The desperate attempts of an addict or an alcoholic to overcome his or her accursed fate is an extreme illustration only in that it obviously involves physiological as well as psycho-

logical dependency. Clinical and more low-grade depression presents a similarly painful picture. But whether it is addiction or depression or simple “writer’s block,” there is a singularly insensitive response: “Get over it.” But what is insensitive, as so often in Nietzsche, may also be good, solid advice, “tough love” in the current vernacular. And this underscores Nietzsche’s existentialism. His sharp critical tone is not just an expression of contempt. It is also, throughout his works, an attempt to jar us into that sort of self-recognition that tells us to “get over it,” whether “it” is the death of God, the pervasiveness of “slave” or “herd” morality, the philosophical traps of metaphysics, or our propensities to pity. We can “become who we are” only with some help and guidance, and Nietzsche is rightly recognized as among the very best existential guides we have found. But this is in no way at odds with his also being one of the most powerful promoters of modern fatalism.

### Making Good Sense of Fatalism

The Moving Finger writes, and having writ, Moves on:  
nor all your Piety nor Wit, Shall lure it back  
to cancel half a Line, Nor all your Tears  
wash out a Word of it.

—*The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*

Heraclitus’s notion of “fate as character” allows us to make good solid sense of fate and fatalism, one need not bring in any fancy philosophical technology or fanciful metaphysical machinery (and discussions of fate and fatalism are much too often couched in such machine imagery). The notion that someone will very likely “turn out” in such-and-such a way is a perfectly commonsense notion, denied only by those who have such an exaggerated sense of “free will” (or are so unscrupulous in their pursuit of self-help best-seller status) that they would argue, most implausibly, that “anyone can do anything, if only they try hard enough.” But it would be daft to deny that character provides a certain necessity, though it would be equally daft to insist that “necessity” refers to it the hard determinism of philosophers. When people speak of fate they are not talking in terms of causal necessity and determinism. They are trying to make sense of their lives, trying to rationalize why things happen to some people and not to others, and at the limits of life and philosophy, they are trying to make sense of the seemingly senseless.

Life and death, the circumstances of our birth (including not only the obvious—our parents, our family situation, our citizenship, our place in history, our genetic constitution, our health, our “natural abilities”—but perhaps also the more exotic and esoteric circumstances of the orientation of the stars and the planets, the phase of the moon) and the way we die, are the most obvious sources of concern regarding the possibility of something other than chance or “luck.” We would like to find some reason for

the initial and continuing course of our lives, and this has nothing to do with tricks concerning the truth status of future events or the nature of time. We all find ourselves in circumstances not our choosing, starting with our temperament, in many ways set (though not fixed) at birth. Babies are born happy, somber, or fearful. True, we can do something, even dedicate our lives, to trying to change, but it is undeniable that this fate precedes any acts of will, and it remains to be seen whether there is some larger explanation or narrative in which it makes some sense. So, too, what befalls us in life, whether expected or not, is often independent of any conceivable decisions we have made. We do not only have to play the hand we are dealt; life deals us face cards that may be an agonizing surprise.

Many of us now face the painful discovery that we must care for our aging parents. This is a bit of Chinese virtue (*xiao*) that most of us had never contemplated before. We did not choose our parents, we may have lived a long time away from them, and we have little to do with their current state of health. But whatever our relationship, and however difficult or inconvenient the situation, here is a clear example of a “fate” that we cannot deny. It is an essential part of the narrative of our lives. And again, to dismiss this as “just luck” (good or bad) or as a matter of chance is to deny the meaning of such narratives. To be sure, these are not scientific explanations and are not intended in any sense to replace them. But between causal necessity and random chance the narrative of human meaningfulness unfolds before us. Why insist that science must be at odds with this?

Thinking of the ancient agrarian world, it is easy to imagine why the notions of fate and fatalism would become a natural part of the human imagination. Consider the inevitability of change in nature, the cycles of the seasons, the “passages” of human development, the sacraments, the cycles of life and death. Ancient conceptions of time and existence as a wheel or a circle are quite reasonably based on such evidence, long before the linear arithmetic of Christianity and the complex calculations of Einstein were on the horizon. In our own urbanized, increasingly global and “virtual” world, it is easy to lose sight of the obvious. Nietzsche’s great thought experiment, “eternal recurrence,” is based on such a conception, abstracted and then personalized as an “existential imperative.”<sup>26</sup> Our sense of time (and here I am not referring to what philosophers or physicists may think about time) is built around our projects, our aspirations, finishing college, law school, internship or residency, and only secondarily do we tend to think in terms of generations and the suprapersonal cycles of life and death. But thinking beyond the bounds of one’s own life, it is hard not to think of the tumbling of generations, the epochs of evolution, the larger narratives within which our lives are embedded. In the context of these larger narratives, it is difficult to avoid revising our personal narratives and seeing our lives under the auspices of a certain sense of necessity, which is quite differ-



ent from holding that the events of our lives (and our deaths) have a causal explanation.

The Chinese point with some reason to the fate of the individual in the context of the times (*shi*, or *shi ming*—what Hegel captured in his notion of *Zeitgeist*). A quick look at the awesome expanse of Chinese history, with its various “periods of warring states” and churning upheaval makes it quite clear that *when* one is born has an overwhelming effect on the life one lives. Just think of the twentieth century, from Sun Yat-sen’s revolution that created the republic to the Japanese invasion in the 1930s to Mao’s revolution in the 1940s to the horrors of the “Great Leap Forward” and the Cultural Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. (Zhang Yimou’s brilliant movie *To Live* traces the fate of a single family through these tempestuous years, making it brutally clear how personal initiative is bound and geared to larger necessities.) In such circumstances, it is virtually impossible to avoid thinking of one’s life as bound and determined by forces much larger than oneself, however one may rail against that fate or resolve to make one’s way in the face of it.

But even in our considerably more stable and secure existence the truth about *shi ming* becomes self-evident along with the more localized notion of opportunity (*jie*). Think of the difference between what Tom Brokaw calls “the greatest generation” that fought (willingly) in World War II and the generation that fought (bitterly, resentfully, regrettably) in Vietnam. And then think of the present generation of college students, for whom Vietnam is “just history.” Think of the opportunities enjoyed by my generation (college and university positions for the asking in the largest expansion of higher education since Confucius, lifetime employment in corporations without a hint of “downsizing”) or that slim window of opportunity exploited by fortunate Internet entrepreneurs at the very end of the 1990s.

Being born into wealth and privilege as opposed to hardship or poverty was considered definitive of one’s fate by the ancient Chinese, although such a notion today runs into serious political obstacles and abuses. (We no longer dismiss poverty as unavoidable, as most people did until the late nineteenth century, and there are obvious enticements to the spirit of charity implicit in the “there but for the grace of God go I” mentality.) But “being in the right place at the right time” (like “being in the wrong place at the wrong time”) is not necessarily a matter of luck—that is, inexplicable chance. It is also—or it can be viewed as—a matter of fate, given the narrative so long as this is not taken as a feeble excuse to do nothing.

Thus the notion of fate gains respectability in our modern world, not as the expression of any mysterious agents or as an inexplicable necessity but as the larger narrative in which we see our lives. But within that narrative too is our powerful notion of existential responsibility, which is manifested in Nietzsche in his declarations that philosophers should “invent new values” as well as “revalue all existing values.” I am not sure that the best

way to express these demands is in terms of “self-creation,” but it does seem plausible that it is by way of the cultivation and to some extent the invention of one’s self that new values will be invented and old values revalued. And it is in the creation of one’s self—not in opposition to it—that Nietzsche’s fatalism and his sense of responsibility take hold on us.

## What Is Self-Creation? (Does It Require “Free Will”?)

The unfree will is mythology; in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

I do not think that one can read Nietzsche at any phase of his career without being swamped with the impression that, as my students would put it, “He tells us how to really live!” Of course, my students are also stymied by the question, “*What* is Nietzsche telling us about how to live?”—as are we more seasoned commentators. I have tried to provide some kind of an answer in this book, but let me say again that the seeming lack of specificity in Nietzsche’s proposals (ignoring, that is, the many bits of very detailed advice he gives us about all sorts of things) does not mean that his is not first and foremost an existential, one might even say moralistic philosophy. Whether or not he (or his alter ego Zarathustra) ever “tells us what to do,” it seems overwhelmingly clear to me that his whole mission, his tone, his sense of urgency and indignation, is based on the idea that we should be shocked into self-scrutiny and self-transformation, both individual and collective.

To be sure, such provocation is often mixed with prophecy, declarations about how things really are or how they will or must be. And the whole sermon is undergirded by a ferocious sense of fatalist resignation and biological determinism that accepts each of us as defined and limited by our individual (and human) natures. But I reject the idea that some form of fatalism *as opposed to self-creation* is the “dominant theme” of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s fatalism is both a goad and a challenge to become who we are, to discover, explore, and develop our talents, to scrutinize ourselves and suffer through the agonies and humiliations of “going under,” to realize our “destinies” through courage, intelligence, hard work, and discipline. In short, Nietzsche tells us to “create ourselves” and with that “invent new values,” but always *in accordance with* our inborn abilities and limitations.

The notion of self-making or self-creation admits many variations. At one extreme, there is the Kantian (some would say Sartrean) “bootstrapping” version that would have it that we create ourselves *de nihilo*, by sheer will or decision. We act as an original cause for which there are no prior determining causes, presuming that “there are in the world causes through freedom.”<sup>27</sup> Regarding any such detached and metaphysically suspect sense

of self-creation, it is clear that Nietzsche has no tolerance for it. But I see no evidence that even the most gung-ho advocates of Nietzschean self-creation, Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty, for example, entertain any such position. At the other extreme, there are those hard determinist interpretations, to the effect that all that is meant by “self-creation” is the development or “unfolding” of the self, with no suggestion of agency much less of free choice. Just as an acorn grows into an oak, albeit within the determining network of life-supporting factors in the environment (water, weather, soil quality, surrounding flora, marauding fauna), a person’s character manifests itself in actions, subject to the action-determining factors of the environment. (Some of these factors will be conventional rather than causal, that is, determining what a bit of behavior “counts as” rather than what effectively brings it about.) Thus self-making means just the development of the self, nothing more.

The Kantian conception of the noumenal self is too extravagant, and the determinist account of self-creation too stingy, to capture either the conceptual complexity of self-creation or the richness of Nietzsche’s proposals. I think a large part of the problem is due to the fact that the self-creation issue is too often conflated with the notorious free will problem. The purported analyses of self-creation track one or another of the “determinist-compatible-libertarian” resolutions of the free will problem, and this leads to the entire issue getting sucked into the black hole of the very metaphysics Nietzsche so clearly denounces. Now, I too have always had my doubts about the free will problem (which is not to say that I have ever formulated my own version of a solution to it). Rather, I have always accepted the commonsense vision, summarized in Goethe’s simple but elegant phrase, that we are “free within limitations.” The metaphysical paradoxes surrounding the *causa sui* have never jolted my philosophical conscience, but I have always been attracted to the Kantian thesis, which I think lies at the heart of Sartre’s theory too, that “every being who cannot act except under the idea of freedom is by this alone—from a practical point of view—really free.”<sup>28</sup> And it is, of course, from a “practical point of view” that Nietzsche’s account must be understood. Advocates of a single or “absolute” truth in philosophy have always objected to this “two standpoint” formulation of the “antinomy,” impatiently demanding, “Which is it, freedom or determinism?” But any advocate of perspectivism, and I think Kant in his fashion was one, will find no fault with such a view.

When we take ourselves to the doctor, we view ourselves under the rubric “physiological system in distress,” in other words straightforwardly under the rubric of Nature. But most of the time, when we are deliberating and deciding what to do, in particular, we take our bodies for granted as “instruments” and “we act under the idea of freedom.” To do so is in no way to reject the truth of determinism.<sup>29</sup> All of this gets terribly confused when the determinism in question involves such social and psychological issues as one’s upbringing and “influences” or such issues as victimization,

but the supposed paradox or contradiction, *determinism or free will?*, seems not to be either a paradox or a contradiction at all, just one more manifestation of the phenomenologically curious fact that we are not just objects in nature but agents conscious of ourselves and our role in nature and society.

I do not think that “free will” (construed as some sort of metaphysical or ontological claim) is necessary for freedom, nor especially for self-creation. All that we need is a robust concept of agency. But agency is by no means a simple concept, and the literature on this subject has become as technically complex as the literature on free will. (Indeed, for obvious reasons, the two tend to overlap and mutually refer to one another.) But I would suggest that here, as so often in philosophy, there is no single concept of agency, and the concepts of agency employed depend on a number of different contrasts, for example between something being imposed and something being chosen, between an action being coerced and an action “freely” (that is, noncoercively) chosen, between behavior that is habitual or “automatic” and behavior that is the result of deliberation. As an abstraction, I am not sure that “agency” means much of anything, except as a general contrast with, say, the natural processes described in physics, physiology, and chemistry or in contrast with the “behavior” of a computer. Nietzsche writes, “Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator . . . ?”<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, there is an entire range of autogenous processes that might be thought of as “self-creating” without invoking anything whatever akin to “free will.” For instance, Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine has long argued that even physical systems may be self-organizing and self-sustaining. There is an obvious sense in which a great many biological processes are self-creating. But, of course, physics and biology leave no room for talking about a self and so there is no warrant for talking about agency.<sup>31</sup> Agency requires the actions of a self (and self, I think, requires the notion of agency). Thus people create themselves through their actions, many of which may not be the products of deliberation or any conscious volition. Indeed, it is with something of a shock that most of us wake up, some late morning well into life, and realize what we have made of ourselves. The process of “making” has been filled with intentional actions, to be sure, but there may well have been no intention to become what one has become. (Alternatively, “one should be careful what one wishes for,” for the shock may be precisely that one *has* become what one intended, and now the haunting question is why one ever would have wanted that in the first place!)

The existentialist question of agency might be (cautiously) separated into two aspects, first, the global sense of self-creation briefly described above—how one becomes what (who) one is (in both Nietzsche’s and Sartre’s sense) and, second, what it is to be responsible for a particular action. (It should be assumed that this brief formulation includes “acts of omission” as well as responsibility for events and states of affairs that one’s actions or inaction bring about.) One way of dealing with Nietzsche’s concept of self-creation

is to insist that it is the global sense that concerns him, not responsibility for particular actions. This neutralizes the supposed antagonism with fatalism just because it is obvious, as indicated above, that one creates oneself through his or her actions *whether or not these actions are knowingly so directed*, indeed, whether or not these actions are even fully intentional. A person does not take a drink in order to become an alcoholic, but this may be the end result and, at some point, one might well say (unsympathetically) that he has “made himself” what he is. Indeed, his drinking itself may soon become “incontinent,” against not only his better judgment but even, in an obvious sense, against his will. Nevertheless, he has created himself, made himself into what he is.

But although Nietzsche (unlike Sartre) says relatively little about responsibility for particular actions, I think that it is important to insist that he does suppose a robust sense of agency and thus responsibility with regard to particular actions. Again, there are a number of important contrasts involved here, and the alcoholic described in the preceding paragraph, for example, may be said to be responsible or not responsible for taking a single drink depending on which contrast we have in mind. The idea of “compulsion,” which seemed clear to Aristotle but not so to Freud, is surely a key ingredient in the matter.<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, in particular, seems to suggest that all of our behavior is to a certain extent compelled—not so much by external forces (what Aristotle had in mind) or by forces from the unconscious (what Freud had in mind), but by one’s nature. Thus the birds of prey in *Genealogy of Morals* cannot help but act like birds of prey, and lambs cannot help but act like lambs. Thus a strong person cannot but be strong, and a weak person cannot but be weak, and the particular actions they perform are thus “compelled” by their natures. Nevertheless, they are responsible for these actions. And it does not much matter whether they deliberate over them (as Nietzsche suggests the slaves often do and the masters usually do not) or even whether they are fully conscious of what they are doing (which, Nietzsche assures us, the masters are, if only out of a thoughtless transparency, and the slaves are not because they are self-deceived).

Acting out of one’s nature may by itself be ample warrant for ascribing responsibility. A distinction recently formulated by Harry Frankfurt helps make this clear.<sup>33</sup> He calls a “free action” simply one in which one acts in accordance with his or her desires. If we take it (as Frankfurt does) that free action implies responsibility, then a person who acts in accordance with his or her desires is responsible for that action. This eliminates compulsive actions and (with some fine tuning) coercive actions, but it includes many “thoughtless” acts and, with some further argument, unintended acts (so long as the outcome is in accordance with one’s desires).<sup>34</sup> Frankfurt further distinguishes a “*wanton*” from a full-blooded person, where a *wanton* acts thoughtlessly on his or her desires. But a full-blooded person is not a *wanton*. He or she acts on “second-order desires,” “desires about acting in accordance with one’s desires.” An alcoholic may crave a drink but never-

theless desperately want to resist that temptation.<sup>35</sup> A person who acts not only in accordance with his or her (first-order) desires but also in accordance with his or her second-order desires not only acts freely but also has “free will,” according to Frankfurt. This set of distinctions is important in reading Nietzsche for at least two reasons.

First, Nietzsche is often read (on the basis of seemingly clear textual passages) as an “instinctualist,” urging us to act “out of instinct” instead of with reflection and deliberation. In the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche suggests that the “masters” act like this and it is one aspect of their virtue. Elsewhere, he suggests that the virtues more generally are much more matters of instinct than they are of calculation or reflection. (In *Ecce Homo*, he confesses that he is “an atheist by instinct.”) But if acting on instinct is taken to mean acting thoughtlessly or without further motivation or (in Frankfurt’s language) without second-order desires, then this is a crude and highly misleading interpretation of Nietzsche. Because even if Nietzsche (like Kierkegaard) harshly criticizes action that is strangled or eviscerated with an excess of deliberation and reflection, he surely urges us to act in accordance not only with our natures (that is, with our first-order desires born of that nature) but also with second-order, “higher” goals and aspirations. That is to say, Nietzsche tells us to follow our instincts and not get distracted by impersonal theories (especially *moral* theories) *but not to the exclusion of higher-order desires and reflection*. We may not be free to change our natures, according to Nietzsche, but that does not mean that we are limited to thoughtlessly acting on their most immediate (and often stupidest) manifestations.

Second, and more directly to the point in question, one might well say that Nietzsche believes in, even insists upon, our “free will,” so long as this does not imply some suspicious notion of the subject, as in both Kant and Lutheran Christianity more generally. And though this will cause trouble only for the terminally literal, “free will” in Frankfurt’s sense need not imply any particular view of the subject (apart from the capacity to have and act on higher-order desires), nor any mysterious entity or faculty of Will.<sup>36</sup> Following Frankfurt we can interpret Nietzsche as holding that we are free and responsible (that is, we have what he refuses to call “free will”) insofar as we act not only in accordance with our desires, “instincts,” and character, but also in accordance with our higher-order desires (also derived from our character, presumably). Thus to have free will it is not necessary to deliberate nor even to make a decision. (Frankfurt and Greenspan both have some clever arguments against the need to invoke either decisions or the possibility of “acting otherwise” in the analysis of freedom.) It is enough to act in accordance with one’s highest aspirations.

For Kant, the model of the rational Will recognizing and obeying the dictates of reason against the various impulses and compulsions of the

inclinations requires an unusually radical notion of agency. It is obvious that Nietzsche pursues a very different paradigm. I have argued, throughout this book, that Nietzsche should be counted in the first rank of “virtue ethicists” (as much as I hate that ugly label and agree with recent critics, including Martha Nussbaum, that it has now become a false category of ethical theories).<sup>37</sup> What this means, in part, is that in his criticism and evaluations Nietzsche looks not at isolated acts and their intentions (nor their consequences—at least, not consequences in isolation) but rather he looks at “the whole person,” his or her *character*, trying to understand the kind of being who would do this or that or live a certain kind of life. So, too, when one looks at one’s own past behavior (as well as one’s felt proclivities), one evaluates oneself not so much in terms of specific objects of pride or regret but rather as a whole person, or at least as a person in some substantial domain (as a father, as a competitor, as a scholar). Of course, some specific objects of pride or regret may loom so large in the portrait as to threaten to obliterate or in any case redefine all of the other features. It is perhaps with this in mind that one should read one of Nietzsche’s most justly famous aphorisms, “‘I have done that,’ says my memory. ‘I cannot have done that’—says my pride, and remains adamant. At last—memory yields.”)<sup>38</sup> But as a virtue ethicist, Nietzsche needs to have no particular commitment to the nature of agency.

One can easily appreciate why Nietzsche, considered as a virtue ethicist, would have a good deal to say against the Kantian conception of morality as focused on “a good will.” Apart from his more sophisticated arguments, there is Nietzsche’s rather straightforward concern about supposedly good intentions that don’t “come off.” There are also those ancient concerns about hypocrisy, self-deception, and *akrasia* (incontinence), all of which might be construed as some sort of breakdown between intention and action. But like Sartre after him, Nietzsche is adamant about the need to construe intentions only as part and parcel of the actions they initiate. A good will not manifested in action is no will at all. A good will is only good character manifested in action and nothing more.

What, then, is self-creation? Self-creation is the gradual manifestation of character through its cultivation and development. There need not be any “bootstrapping” or mysterious acts of will, nor need there be any problematic commitment to one or another kind of “subject.” We should note that there is an “imminent teleology” in Nietzsche’s ethics, however he may rail against misplaced teleology in the natural sciences or ill-considered purposive explanations in the social sciences (not to mention the more or less theological teleology defended by Kant and Hegel in cosmology). It is on the basis of one’s nature that one has talents, virtues, abilities, and purpose in life. One might also argue that one’s ability to cultivate his or her character or develop his or her talents is itself subject to abilities and talents with

which one is either blessed or not, but what is not in question is the need to cultivate one's character and develop one's talents and take responsibility for doing this.

## Nietzsche on Responsibility

I admit that Nietzsche does not often talk about or use the term *responsibility* (*Verantwortung*) except by way of criticism. In his early work, in particular, he argues against the ascription of moral responsibility to anyone for anything. But I do not think that it is at all a misreading or a bad interpretation of Nietzsche that places the existentialist thesis of "responsibility for self" at the very heart of his philosophical mission. Nietzsche actually discusses responsibility at some length in at least two places, where, as usual, he is both sarcastic and critical of the concept's history and its abuses without saying much about its positive value.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, it is hard not to see that, as so often, Nietzsche's scorn is mixed with tremendous respect.

In *Genealogy*, it receives its best known and most protracted treatment: "Precisely this is the long history of the origins of *responsibility*. As we have already grasped, the task of breeding an animal that is permitted to promise includes, as condition and preparation, the more specific task of first making man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable."<sup>40</sup> Responsibility is also cited as a "privilege," as a hallmark of individual "freedom" and "sovereignty," awakening "trust, fear and reverence." Its "proud knowledge . . . has sunk into his lowest depth and become instinct," what the "sovereign human being calls his *conscience*."<sup>41</sup>

The sneer quotes surrounding such terms as "freedom" and "sovereignty" should be interpreted with some care. Insofar as they point to or presume a Kantian notion of self, they are, to be sure, intended sarcastically. But insofar as they indicate precisely the self-mastery that Nietzsche advocates, they should be treated with appropriate respect. The mixed description of people as "necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable" suggests very different images and analyses. I take it that "necessary" in this context means something like "inflexible," but it could also be an allusion to Kant's deontology and its peculiar sense of practical necessity.<sup>42</sup> "Uniform," "like among like," and "regular" are, of course, intended as insults, but how else would one "breed" animals who can trust one another other than by making them "predictable." Would Nietzsche suggest that trust and reverence (let's put aside fear) are unto-ward sentiments in any social setting? Are masterly types thereby unpredictable? And does predictability necessarily point to slavish attitudes? I would think, to the contrary, that one of the dangers in dealing with the



weak and resentful is their unpredictability, the likelihood that they will act precisely contrary to their own self-interest out of spite. (Consider Dostoyevsky's "underground" man, who calls his devious ability to act out of spite his "most advantageous advantage.")

The use of the phrase "sunk into his lowest depth" referring to instinct is, of course, curious in several ways, not least the fact that it is unusual (in biology, at least) to speak of *acquiring* an instinct. As an essential aspect of one's nature, an instinct is precisely what is not acquired. But in what sense are the instincts "low"? This is not Nietzsche's usual way of speaking about them. Assuming that one is talking about the species and not individual acquisition, Nietzsche seems torn between chastizing responsibility as "unnatural" (a familiar complaint with him) and criticizing it for *becoming* natural, an odd set of complaints. Rather, I think that the whole paragraph, which turns on the odd phrase "permitted to promise," should be read as a much more neutral piece of anthropology, on the one hand, and as a barbed bit of admiration and wonder, on the other. Isn't it remarkable, Nietzsche is telling us, that human beings have so mastered their sense of themselves that they can commit themselves into the future and take responsibility for what they have done in the past? What higher praise could be offered, and what could be more necessary in the breeding of the "future philosophers" and even *Übermenschen* that Nietzsche so breathlessly anticipates? Does it make sense to suppose that the *Übermensch* would not be "permitted to promise," or that he would be in some unusual sense free to break his promises? (On the other hand, "Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers have ever doubted their right to lie.")<sup>43</sup>

The other passage that deals with responsibility in some depth is the "Four Great Errors" section of *Twilight of the Idols*, from "the error of a false causality" to "the error of free will." In section 7, Nietzsche supplies "the psychology" of "making responsible," tracing the compulsion to look for "responsibilities" to the "instinct of wanting to judge and punish." So, too, the notion of freedom: "the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness." And here Nietzsche trots out once again his incontinent campaign against judgment, guilt, and punishment. ("Christianity is a metaphysics of the hangman.") But notice that there is an enormous difference between the notion of responsibility discussed in *Genealogy* and the one discussed under the rubric of the "error of free will." The first does not presume any particular notion of the subject (though, as I suggested, Nietzsche sometimes alludes to Kantian notions) nor does Nietzsche equate responsibility, whether *taking* responsibility or *being* responsible, with accountability (being *held* for one's past deeds). Indeed, to point out that a responsible being is "necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable" and acting out of acquired "instinct" is precisely to avoid any conception of particular motive or origin. The *Twilight* version,

however, is all about a particular notion of self, and one can quite clearly reject that notion of self without rejecting, in the first sense, Nietzsche's notion of responsibility. Moreover, the "author" of an action need by no means act out of free will. The Chinese sense of responsibility, for example, utterly ignores motivation and choice and looks only to character and consequences.<sup>44</sup> And one wonders how Nietzsche's argument in *Twilight* jives with one of his most pungent aphorisms, namely, the one about pride and memory in *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>45</sup>

So what does "responsibility" mean for Nietzsche? This, of course, is crucial to the question, "Is Nietzsche an existentialist?" as I have formulated it. One might be instrumental in cultivating one's character only in the more or less trivial sense that it is one's character that is being cultivated, as one might say that the acorn is instrumental in its development into a tree. But even this trivial account has the virtue of distinguishing self-generation and growth from external shaping and molding, and some such distinction is undoubtedly at stake here. Insofar as one develops one's talent for, say, playing the piano only because one has been threatened and coerced into doing so, one might be said not to have taken responsibility for developing one's talent at all. Insofar as one has developed one's talent for playing the piano only because one has been bribed and rewarded—Alasdair MacIntyre's example of an "external" as opposed to "internal" reward system for a practice—we also hesitate to talk about responsibility.

But it does not follow that an "internalist" account of taking responsibility needs to include anything like an act of will or a special "subject" or any willful overcoming of counterinclinations or any other specific obstacles. It need not involve deliberation or "practical reasoning." It means, in classical terms, that one's wishes, intentions, aspirations, and actions are all in harmony, that the trajectory of one's development is in tune with one's talents and the practices or institutions that sustain them. All of this might well be accompanied by those "feelings of delight of [one's] successful executive instruments" that Nietzsche suggests might easily be confused for a volition or an act of will.<sup>46</sup> But to say that responsibility may thus be severed from the Kantian notion of Will is not for a moment to say that it must also be distinguished from agency and responsibility in this larger and more ordinary sense. Taking responsibility for one's destiny makes perfectly good sense within Nietzsche's naturalistic outlook. This should be distinguished, however, from *holding* a person (including oneself) responsible, which is what Nietzsche often says is "absurd," not because it invokes an utterly implausible metaphysics but because it harks back to the blaming perspective that Nietzsche is (erratically) trying to hard to get away from. Blaming (holding responsible) may be optional and therefore (in theory, at least) avoidable. Being responsible, by contrast, seems unavoidable and essential to becoming who we are for Nietzsche.

## Existential Life-Affirmation and Eternal Recurrence, Again

Which brings us back (as again and again) to eternal recurrence.<sup>47</sup> How can our defense of agency and responsibility be reconciled with Nietzsche's famous doctrine? Whatever else eternal recurrence signifies for Nietzsche, it alludes to a sense of inevitability and invites a kind of fatalistic acceptance. It is the test of one's life affirmation, and though one might insist that one *chooses* to affirm or not affirm life under the thought of recurrence, one's life as such would seem to be nothing other than what it is and what it must be. Eternal recurrence says, "it has always been thus, it will always be thus." This provides a mythological (not metaphysical) backing for Nietzsche's fatalism. But is it conducive to a sense of responsibility? And does it in fact provide a good reason for life-affirmation?

In his *Vocation of Man*, Fichte considers a this-worldly version of eternal recurrence, the prospect of one's eating and drinking and reproducing so that others may eat, drink, and reproduce in an "ever-revolving circle, this ceaseless and unvarying round, in which all things appear only to pass away, and pass away only that they may reappear as they were before."<sup>48</sup> Fichte finds the very idea of this "monster" intolerable, and so, like Hegel after him, envisions "progress towards a higher perfection."<sup>49</sup> Schopenhauer, while elaborating the "ever-revolving circle" in much greater detail, rejects any such progress. He concludes with utter pessimism: life is without purpose, meaningless. Nietzsche, taking up a circular vision of life as eternal recurrence, rejects Schopenhauer's pessimism. Or does he?

Two large issues are at stake here, and Nietzsche does not always distinguish them, nor does he hold a single view throughout his philosophical career. One is the value of life. The other, sometimes viewed as its antithesis, is the value of suffering. There is little question that the ultimate aim of Nietzsche's philosophy is "the affirmation of life," but what this vague phrase means is by no means obvious. Just saying "yes" or "Yeah to life!" doesn't seem very significant at all. Being a Christian or a Platonist does not obviously constitute a refusal to affirm life, much less does it obviously entail the denial of life, as Nietzsche often suggests. Nor is that peculiar phenomenon called "a passion for life" necessarily life-affirming. It may just be the continuing excitement about whatever it is that one is doing without any sense of *life* as such, or, alternatively, it may betray a dread of death. In either case, one might still insist that life is ultimately meaningless and on reflection, no good.<sup>50</sup>

It is in this context that I want to reconsider Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, Nietzsche's "formula for the highest affirmation."<sup>51</sup> Despite my own recorded enthusiasm for the idea as an "existential imperative" (in Bernd Magnus's old phrase), I want to cast some doubt on this. What, exactly,

does one do with this “thought”? Do I choose what my reaction to such a fantasy will be? Nietzsche seems to suggest that I simply have a “gut reaction” of joy or despair, without having to think about it at all. But the thought of eternal recurrence is a highly speculative and purely reflective philosophical question. First impulses are probably not to be trusted, and I would think that someone who actually found himself gnashing his teeth and throwing himself to the ground would probably have misunderstood the demon.

What about the *experience* of recurrence? I can abstractly imagine my life repeating itself over and over again, but from *within* my life it will always seem like the first time around.<sup>52</sup> Abstractly reflecting, I may grimace at the thought of repeating that same high school humiliation an indefinite number of times (as, in fact, I have done in my imagination). But I quickly realize that, in each life, the humiliation itself will only happen once. So what does it cost me, this “great(est) stress,” to agree to affirm the repetition of lives? Indeed, one might argue that the thought of eternal recurrence not only costs nothing but provides yet another crutch for the weak of heart, promising another life after this one even if it is once again and then again the same life over again.

I have already argued that eternal recurrence is a great idea only so long as one doesn't take it literally or push it too hard. It provides a healthy alternative to the Christian promise of bliss indefinitely delayed and the idea that this life is nothing but a testing ground for a better one. Camus's Meursault is certainly right when he counters the prison chaplain's heavenly fantasy with the thought, “A life in which I can remember this life on earth. That's all I want of it.”<sup>53</sup> But even so, and Camus has always seemed to me to be the most life-affirming of philosophers, such a memory-stocked recurrence seems to me not to constitute life-affirmation either. One can mull over and wallow in even the most depressing or humiliating experience, and do so with relish and enjoyment. Or one can remember the good times in life with genuine regret, now viewed through the lens of unfulfilled hopes and ambitions or the dubious lens of a lately acquired moral-religious perspective.<sup>54</sup> What is missing from Meursault's image is reflection (which should not be confused with mere memory). And it is in reflection that life is affirmed or regretted, but reflection *within* life, not from some transcendent resting point outside of life's continuing recurrence.

Chris Janaway answers such doubts with a very useful distinction, which he employs against Bernd Magnus's more recent refusal to accept Nietzsche's thought on the grounds that it would require a person to accept everything in history, and (thinking of the Holocaust) this he refuses to do. Janaway distinguishes “first-” from “second-order” affirmation and negation, and he also follows Schopenhauer in distinguishing between *reflective* and *unreflective* affirmation and negation. (These two distinctions are not the same.) Thus a negative experience of humiliation can be reflectively affirmed as being valuable, “all things considered,” and a positive experi-

ence of joy can also be overridden by a negative assessment, for instance, to the effect that it was foolish or even degrading. Thus Nietzsche would rather have done without many of his illnesses and loneliness, and he rejects some of his own prior euphoric states and utterances, but he nevertheless insists that he would accept his life, reflectively, with all of them. But is even this necessary, according to Nietzsche? Why should a partial affirmation be deemed insufficient to count as life-affirmation? Why not "I love my life and accept it all, despite *a*, *b*, and *c*, which I do wish had been different"?

But then again, isn't this dichotomous splitting of experiences into "positive" and "negative" really just another instance of the sort of simpleminded hedonistic thinking that Nietzsche is (inconsistently) warring against? Is suffering necessarily negative, even on the first order of experience? It seems to me that one of the strengths of Nietzsche's "will to power" hypothesis is precisely its rich multidimensional expansion of the thin two-color palette of pleasure-pain hedonism. And this, of course, brings us to the second big question, the value of suffering.

The intractable problem for life affirmation, according to Schopenhauer, is that life is filled with suffering. This is the Buddha's first "noble truth." But it is not the mere existence of suffering that detracts from or undermines the value of life. Schopenhauer sometimes suggests that it is the *proportion* of joy versus suffering (and all of the hedons and antihedons in between) that makes life meaningless. Sooner or later, the latter greatly outweighs the former. This is quite a different argument, of course, than the metaphysical arguments about the nature of the Will, and a life with more pleasure than suffering (such as is often attributed to Schopenhauer) is compatible with life's being pointless and meaningless because of the irrationality of the Will. But Nietzsche rejects both hedonism (at least in his later philosophy) and Schopenhauer's Will, and it is by no means evident that the will to power is either irrational (it defines its own rationality) or in any sense compromised by suffering. So in what sense does suffering present an obstacle to life-affirmation for Nietzsche? Or could this possibly be the wrong question?

In his *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche returns to his beloved Greeks to find a life-affirming response to suffering. But he also continues the Christian search for a "justification" for suffering and he considers a godlike aesthetic solution that he later rejects.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the very impetus to alleviate and justify suffering smacks of morality, which is one reason why he turns on Schopenhauer as a closet moralist and Christian. Sometimes, Nietzsche suggests that a scientific view of the universe in terms of pure chance would solve the problem of suffering, but though pure chance might undermine certain sorts of blaming and other moralistic explanations of suffering, it is clear that it does not dictate the acceptance of suffering or the affirmation of life.

In a lighter vein, Nietzsche sometimes suggests that laughter and "dancing" are the solution to suffering, but as appealing as such a solution may

be to most Nietzscheans, it is not at all convincing that the forced and sometimes hysterical laughter that Nietzsche displays does any more than disguise suffering. Indeed, even healthy humor only distances us from suffering and makes our getting through this meaningless life more tolerable. (I think in particular of Walter Huston's riotous laughter at life's work turned [literally] to dust at the end of his son John's movie *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*.) Ultimately, I think, Nietzsche's answer is that suffering is just an essential part of life. Thus in *Genealogy* he writes, "Life operates essentially, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought of at all without this character."<sup>56</sup> But none of this dictates the affirmation of life much less one's own life, at best, it only means a high tolerance for suffering.

Janaway, Magnus, and many other authors consider eternal recurrence in the light of Nietzsche's proclamation of *amor fati*, particularly his extreme pronouncement in *Ecce Homo* that "one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary . . . but to love it."<sup>57</sup> I do not think that eternal recurrence and *amor fati* are equivalent theses. I have argued that Nietzsche's fatalism is a concrete classical thesis (inherited from Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles) concerning the important details of one's life as "directed from the start," whereas eternal recurrence is a highly abstract "thought experiment" aimed at the overall affirmation of life. Nevertheless, I think that thinking about *love (amor)* can throw some light on the issues of suffering and life-affirmation.

I think that there is another way of thinking about eternal recurrence, however, that addresses both the value of life and the value of suffering. I take my cue here from Maudemarie Clark, who gives us a wonderful analogy: two married people ask, "If you had it to do over, would you marry me again?"<sup>58</sup> I agree with Clark that this captures very nicely the "test" and "affirmation" aspect of eternal recurrence, but I would like to push her analogy one step further. What is it that is affirmed when we affirm our lives? Magnus and Nehamas insist that it is every moment of life, although Magnus takes this as "each and every," while Nehamas takes it holistically. But Magnus goes on to argue, "Who among us would not prefer some other possible life or world?"<sup>59</sup> Janaway counters this by distinguishing between imagining and wanting, and despite imagining something different and even better, nevertheless wanting to hold onto what one has *because it is mine*. I think that this is a very promising suggestion.

Consider this: I love my wife. Does that mean I cannot imagine *anything* about her that I wish were otherwise? Gallantry perhaps dictates that I say "no," and prudence advises that I not provide any details, but Nietzschean truthfulness requires that I admit that it is so. There is at least one tiny little thing, some small habit, perhaps, that I could readily live without. Would such a change alter the universe, as Nehamas suggests? Would the resulting person no longer be she? I think that these are nonsensical ques-

tions, and they do not become less so when Nehamas generalizes them as a grand philosophical thesis about counterfactuals and possible worlds. I can easily imagine my wife being just slightly otherwise, and I can wish it (perhaps even suggest it) as well. But I nevertheless prefer her to anyone else. I love *her*.

But what does it mean to say that I love *her*? My preference for her is certainly part of the story. But unqualified preference? There is a sense in which I love *everything* about her—that is, I love *her*, but another in which I do not. I would not mind that (unspecified) small change. Shakespeare writes, “Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds.”<sup>60</sup> In one sense that’s true, in another, obviously false. If we follow Janaway, we might be tempted to say that I love her because she is *mine*! Well, in some sense, perhaps—namely, she is the one I love. But “mine”? I think not. You get the subtlety, and I think that it applies to Nietzsche’s notion of life-affirmation as well. There is indeed something about the fact that it is *my* life, although it is as hard to pin that down as it is to pin down the transcendental unity of apperception. But in another sense my life is not *mine* at all. *Amor fati*: my life is in an important sense out of my hands. This is why it is important for me to embrace it, accept it, affirm it, despite whatever hardships or drawbacks it may have. It is *my* life, whatever I may think of its details or the world in which I find myself “thrown” to live it. And this, I think, is the sense of eternal recurrence. Not affirming much less loving every moment, and not even affirming or loving my life all things considered, despite my complaints and occasional unhappiness. Loving my life, like loving my wife, is simply being delighted with what I have, in general, and preferring no other. (Cf. Hegel’s argument on the rationality of history: “To him who looks rationally at the world the world looks rationally back.”)<sup>61</sup>

But this still leaves something out. I think Magnus had it right when he argued, twenty-five years ago, that eternal recurrence serves as an “existential imperative.” But this is in a way the very opposite of *amor fati*, and it is also contrary to the “nonselective view” that both Magnus and Nehamas now argue. What that view neglects is the *future*. Eternal recurrence is not only the acceptance of one’s life *so far* but a way of thinking about one’s future. There may be overwhelming complications regarding counterfactually changing even a single event in one’s past, but no such complications are evident regarding one’s yet-undecided future. Of course, Nietzsche’s fatalism thesis casts a long shadow here—how we are to understand such statements as “everything has been directed along certain lines from the beginning”?<sup>62</sup> But I think the main point of recurrence is lost if we take a timeless (nonperspectival) “all or nothing” view of our lives. It is our lives *from the perspective of the present* that raises the issues of life-affirmation, not the deathbed or pre-execution reflection that some commentators seem to assume. And that means that the thought of recurrence is not just a test of affirmation. It is an ongoing guide to existential reflection.

Nietzsche calls eternal recurrence “the greatest weight.” I would now argue, to the contrary, that eternal recurrence is *not demanding enough*. I do not deny that it is a welcome counter to linear Christian mythology. I do not question its value (as in my case) as an existential kick of inspiration. But it does seem to me a pretty slim and abstract support for such a weighty matter as life-affirmation. It is one thing to acknowledge (even with joy) that you would gladly live your life again and again and again, but it is something else to really *live* your life, to both throw yourself into it with gusto and think and feel at the same time that you really, really love what you’re doing. In such a life, suffering is just part of the process, and this, I think, is what Nietzsche saw quite clearly. Thus I have argued that Nietzsche’s philosophy is ultimately a philosophy of enthusiasm, which is what really distinguishes him from his sometime mentor Schopenhauer. And we don’t really need either eternal recurrence or *amor fati* to appreciate that. As Nietzsche writes at the very beginning of *Ecce Homo*, “How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?” And that is all of the life-affirmation one really ever needs.

### Conclusion: Is Nietzsche an Existentialist?

So is Nietzsche an existentialist? Is his classical sense of responsibility sufficient to align him with the more bootstrapping philosophies of Kierkegaard and Sartre? My answer is, I think so. But to see this one would have to go back to Kierkegaard and Sartre and show that they are not nearly the bootstrappers they are usually supposed to be. Sartre leaves much more room for determinism and the limitations on action by way of “the situation” than his extravagant celebration of “absolute freedom” would suggest. And Kierkegaard loads up his concept of “subjective truth” with a lot more substantive psychology than the phrase “leap of faith” would suggest. Both philosophers would insist that no choice and no action takes place in a vacuum. For Sartre, the situation in which we find ourselves, which includes our entire past and its present ramifications and our personalities with all of their distinctive and limiting features, dictates not only the range of choices but, Sartre sometimes says, the choice itself: “I am not ‘free’ either to escape the lot of my class, of my nation, of my family, or even to build up my own power or my fortune or to conquer my most significant appetites or habits.”<sup>63</sup>

In a much-quoted 1970 interview (in *New Left Review*), Sartre famously says, “The idea I have never ceased to develop is in the end that a man can always make something out of what is made of him.”<sup>64</sup> For Kierkegaard, my “subjectivity” includes my passions and my desires, my frustrations and my neuroses, and these more or less dictate my choices. It may seem curious that neither Kierkegaard nor Sartre develop anything like a theory of



choice, or for that matter a concept of freedom. Both simply presume it as the starting point of their philosophies. Sartre gives us the rather empty conception of freedom as “spontaneity,” tells us that it is identical to (not simply a property of) consciousness, and pretty much leaves it at that. What he goes on to develop over many hundreds of pages of *Being and Nothingness* are the various manifestations (including denials) of freedom and responsibility. So, too, I think, we get nothing even remotely approaching a theory of freedom and responsibility from Nietzsche, nor does he even talk about such things except—usually—to mock various extravagances and liberties taken with “free will” in particular. But I read Nietzsche as presuming from the outset a powerful prejudice, that we are free to develop our character and our talents and it is our responsibility to do so. But first and last, in his student writings and in his *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s somewhat narcissistic concern is his own enormous sense of potential and the grave responsibility it engenders. But it also becomes our concern, and living with Nietzsche means taking our own potential—and our responsibility for that potential—seriously. And if Nietzsche sometimes describes all of this a bit pretentiously as a “destiny,” then that underscores not only his fatalism but also his existential resolve.

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## NOTES

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### *Introduction*

1. Nietzsche's provocative bumper-sticker aphorisms make for easy quotation, if not understanding. "What does not kill me makes me stronger" (*Twilight of the Idols*, "Maxims and Arrows," 8): How often has that appeared in everything from Hollywood soliloquies to corporate board meetings, without the slightest hint of irony or skepticism?

2. It is here that the infamous Leopold and Loeb murder trial usually gets mentioned, so I am mentioning it merely to get it out of the way. Need I add that those two demented University of Chicago students did not really understand Nietzsche? *Compulsion* (Richard Fleisher, 1959).

3. It was Aristotle who introduced the distinction between the "inner" and the "outer" into Western thought to mark the nonproblematic distinction between self-contained, "self-moving" living organisms and nonliving things. Since then, the "inner" has acquired a thick association with the metaphysical and religious, especially the "soul" and the mind.

4. Karl Jaspers, at the beginning of the twentieth century, first noted this similarity between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, despite their obvious differences (Kierkegaard's religious devotion, Nietzsche's belligerent atheism).

5. The obvious comparison is the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*.

6. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," §1.

7. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 103.

9. See, for instance, Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

10. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

11. See, e.g., Nietzsche's now infamous and very influential early (then unpublished) essay "Truth and Falsity from the Non-moral Point of View."

12. Bernard Williams on the artist Paul Gauguin, in "Moral Luck" in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

13. But there is a more general question whether *any* ethical theory can provide an adequate explanation of why murder and cruelty are wrong. William Gass, in a classic article, makes the case that the standard ethical theories are hopeless in this regard ("The Case of the Obliging Stranger"). The charge has

often been made against Kant, for instance by Hegel just a few years after Kant put forward his “categorical imperative” as a test of moral maxims.

14. A word, however, on sources. Collected and printed in *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufman, translator and editor (Random House, 1969), the status of Nietzsche’s unpublished notes (*Nachlass*) has been exhaustively debated and no doubt commented upon by virtually every commentator in the field. The best policy, it seems to me, is to trust Nietzsche’s notes only when they are confirmed by (and thus reiterate, occasionally in more striking language) Nietzsche’s published statements. In the case of eternal recurrence as a physical hypothesis, no such statements exist.

15. Irvin D. Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

16. According to Chamberlain, Nietzsche himself was plagued with the rude question that preoccupies the tenured inhabitants of philosophy departments the world over, “Are you a philosopher?” (the criteria usually dictated by the limited credentials of the questioner). See Lesley Chamberlain, *Nietzsche in Turin: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Picador, 1996), 4, describing one of Nietzsche’s 1888 letters. My own view is that if Nietzsche is not a philosopher, who could plausibly claim to be one?

17. Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

18. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Clever,” §10.

19. Bernd Magnus, Stanley Stewart, and Jean-Pierre Milieur, *Nietzsche’s Case: Philosophy as/and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 301.

21. Lester Hunt confesses a similar naïveté, when he too in college wondered “whether the *Übermensch* would vote or get married.” Hunt now writes that there is no question but “Nietzsche’s writings were a source of insight and encouragement. They were certainly not, as Henry Miller would say, mere ‘literature.’” Lester Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1991).

## Chapter 1

Portions of this chapter previously appeared in “Nietzsche, Postmodernism, and Resentment,” in *Nietzsche and Postmodernism*, ed. Clayton Koelb (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), in chap. 6 of my *Passion for Justice* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990), and in “One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

1. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking/Random House, 1967), I, 23.

2. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 4. Cf. “What is needed is that something must be held to be true, not that it is true” (Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §507).

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), “The Problem of Socrates,” §3.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954): “The Problem of Socrates,” §11.

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Random House, 1967), I, 10. The adjective “shabby” comes from *Will to Power*, §7.

6. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack,” §2.

7. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," §3.
8. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," §10.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), "The Problem of Socrates," §86; *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," §6.

10. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 231.

11. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 6; *Antichrist*, §11.

12. The coherence of Nietzsche's ideas is an issue that has provoked a remarkable amount of commentary, from Karl Jaspers's rather implausible thesis that Nietzsche thoroughly contradicts himself to the now-popular "postmodern" theses (tediously singleminded themselves) that Nietzsche speaks in several voices, from several perspectives, and there is no single "Nietzsche." To which one can only reply, "Of course." Nevertheless, several voices can sing in harmony, and several perspectives can converge on a single set of targets and admit similar origins. On Nietzsche's "affirmative" philosophy, see, e.g., the various essays in Yirmiyahu Yovel, ed., *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker: Papers Presented at the Fifth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, April 1983* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), esp. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 221–234.

13. Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 14 (October 1983): 304–320.

14. I am indebted for this insight to one of my graduate students, Jessica Berry, who is writing her dissertation on Nietzsche and the Ancients.

15. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, §85.

16. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," §33.

17. Richard Rorty, notably, has defended the "playful" Nietzsche in opposition to the serious philosophical Nietzsche ("one of the worst of the various Nietzsches"), but why, apart from certain internal skirmishes within the philosophy profession, should one feel compelled to see these two as opposed? See his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

18. Some of the older, harsher critics include Brand Blandshard and Bertrand Russell. The new commentators include a small army of postmodernists and deconstructionists, but perhaps still exemplary is Paul de Man, for example, "Nietzsche's Theory of Rhetoric," *Symposium* (spring 1974). Three excellent discussions of Nietzsche's style are Arthur Danto, "Some Remarks on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals," in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); and Magnus, Stewart, and Milieur, *Nietzsche's Case*.

19. In a recent debate (the focus was Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*), both Nehamas and Bernd Magnus argued at some length against the idea that Nietzsche in any sense tried to tell us "how to live." I responded then, as I hold here, that Nietzsche's passionate prescriptions and his impact cannot otherwise be understood. "Telling someone how to live," of course, does not have to involve specific prescriptions—"Don't ever tell a lie" or "Change your underwear daily"—but may consist wholly of general exhortations. "Be yourself" (or "Become who you are") is, in the right circumstances and for the right readers, not an annoying vacuity but a profound, even life-changing bit of advice. So, too, "Don't feel guilty" may not be anything like "Don't ever tell a lie," but for some people, it may be the most important admonition they will ever receive.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §211.
21. For instance, *Will to Power*, §540.
22. I have pursued this topic in "What a Tangled Web: Deception and Self-Deception in Philosophy," in *Lying and Deception in Everyday Life*, ed. Michael Lewis and Caroline Saarni (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).
23. Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, I, §95.
25. See, e.g., Albert Jonsen, Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).
26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Notes 1875*, vii, 216, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), 50.
27. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," §5.
28. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," §3.
29. Howard Kahane, *Logic and Philosophy*, 8th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998), 240.
30. Michael Scriven, *Reasoning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 228, seems to agree with the exception for "experts," and with the legal context again in mind he distinguishes the "reliability, consistency and credibility" of a witness, three concerns where criticism of his or her moral character may be "appropriate." But why, again, should it be that with an "expert witness" ad hominem arguments are tolerable, but not in general? Paul Feyerabend, no doubt, would be quite happy with this bit of anti-authoritarian discrimination, but why should experts be singled out for ad hominem abuse? Why should legitimate ad hominem arguments be confined to the courtroom and excluded, presumably, from the philosophy seminar?
31. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.
32. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §125, cf. §343.
33. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, I, §95.
34. Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to his sister, Christmas 1887, in Kaufmann, *Portable Nietzsche*, 456–457.
35. William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1967), 58.
36. Halverson, *Concise Introduction*, 58.
37. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Socrates," #3,
38. Nietzsche, referring to George Sand, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes," #6; #12: "Morality as Anti-nature," 1.
39. Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Philosophers: Their Lives and the Nature of Their Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).
40. Consider again the crude anti-Nietzsche ad hominem argument, from a logic textbook, no less: "Don't waste your time studying the philosophy of Nietzsche. Not only was he an atheist but he ended his days in an insane asylum" (Halverson, *Concise Introduction*, 58).
41. Dionysus, as Nietzsche well knew, was also considered the great seducer (see, e.g., Euripides' *Bacchus*).
42. Cf. the Marie von Bradke quote at the beginning of this section: "His pathologically delicate soul, overflowing with pity."
43. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.
44. See my comment on Nehamas, "Nietzsche and Nehamas's Nietzsche," *International Studies in Philosophy*, special issue on Nietzsche, 21.2 (summer 1989).

45. Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1963). I do not mean to deny for a moment, of course, that Danto's book was one of the most important events in Nietzsche scholarship. Following Walter Kaufmann's equally important de-Nazification of Nietzsche a few years earlier, Danto captured Nietzsche's ideas in a form that made Nietzsche "respectable" in the then overwhelmingly analytic world of American professional philosophy. His recognition of the limits of this approach can be found in several places, among them his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1983 ("Philosophy as/and/of Literature," reprinted in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986]) and in his essay "Some Remarks on the Genealogy of Morals," in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

46. It is the demand for integration of philosopher and philosophy that distinguishes philosophy from most other disciplines, and this is what makes it so odd when we meet "philosophers" (almost always philosophy professors) who keep their philosophical interests wholly compartmentalized and isolated from the rest of their lives—no matter how exciting or boring, no matter how admirable or loathsome. This is also what drives the "Heidegger crisis." See Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

47. Here I backtrack from my objection to Nehamas's reconstruction of Nietzsche as Nietzsche in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* and my "Nietzsche and Nehamas's Nietzsche." The issue now seems to me much more complicated.

48. *Jung's Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra* ed. James L. Jarrett (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

49. See my "One Hundred Years of Ressentiment."

50. *Genealogy*, I, 6.

51. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, II, §10.

52. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, II, 1.

53. Claude Levi-Strauss, interview, 1970, qtd. in my *Ethics: A Brief Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 9.

54. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: NYRB Press, 1973).

55. One might, with considerable caution, relate this to a recent movement in analytic epistemology, particularly with the philosophy of Ernest Sosa. It is sometimes called "virtue epistemology," a species of what is called "reliabilism" (Alvin Goldman), and it is to be understood in terms of the "virtue" or reliability of the knower and the source of the evidence.

56. Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

57. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §481; *Beyond Good and Evil*, I, 22; IV, §108.

58. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §410.

59. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, II, 4. He says the same of himself (*Ecce Homo*, IV, 1) and of Shakespeare (*Ecce Homo*, II, 4).

60. On the "real" Socrates, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Paradox of Socrates," in *The Philosophy of Socrates*, ed. Vlastos (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 1–4.

61. See, for example, Vlastos, "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato's Dialogues," in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 1–34; Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," *Philosophy and Literature* 3.2 (1979): 131–169.

62. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §43.

63. I find it fascinating that Nietzsche is often credited as a major contributor to the "death of the author" movement, promoted by such well-known and

successful authors as the late Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. This is a major theme of Nehamas's recent work, and, indeed, Nietzsche did play around considerably with narrative identities and "masks." But, when all is said and done, I cannot think of a philosopher who was more conscientiously an author who could be identified with a very real flesh-and-blood writer.

## Chapter 2

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).

2. Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (New York: Free Press, 1961) (originally written in 1912).

3. I owe this bit of confession and implicit apology to the promptings of Professor Kathleen Higgins, one of the recipients of my early promotion of Nietzschean arrogance (in *From Rationalism to Existentialism*, 1972), and to Frithjof Bergmann, who expressed many of the same concerns in Solomon and Higgins, *Reading Nietzsche*, 29–45.

4. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 7.

5. As early as his Jena lectures at the beginning of the nineteenth century, G. W. F. Hegel rejected the formalism of Kant's morality. He openly rejects formal "morality" in favor of a more situated "custom-ethics" in both his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807 and his *Philosophy of Right* in 1821.

6. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 91.

7. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, §6, §7.

8. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," §44.

9. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §97.

10. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 302.

11. But cf. Kafka's "Couriers": "They were offered the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. The way children would, they all wanted to be couriers." Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (1958); reprinted in Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: Random House, 1974), 167.

12. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 13.

13. The triviality of universalizability is a thesis often debated. R. M. Hare and others have defended it as an essential feature of ethical language, but see, e.g., Don Locke, "The Triviality of Universalizability" in the *Philosophical Review* (1977).

14. Aristotle's "decadent" concessions to morality may already be noted in his rather unconvincing defense of "the unity of the virtues," the thesis that a good man must and will have *all* the virtues. This is a thesis that Nietzsche, naturally, rejects utterly.

15. Nietzsche, "Erst der entmannte Mensch ist der gute Mensch," *Samtliche Werke*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980 13, 347. See also *Genealogy*, III, 21.

16. See, e.g., Peter French, *Responsibility Matters* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), and Bonnie Steinbock and Alastair Norcross, eds., *Killing and Letting Die* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994).

17. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §364.

18. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §413.

19. I have discussed Nietzsche's conceptions of strength and weakness at length in "One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*" and here in chapter 4.



20. Alexander Nehamas: "In order to refute [Nietzsche's perspectivism] we must develop a view that . . . does not promote a particular kind of person and a particular kind of life—a view that applies equally well to every one at all times and in all contexts. The task may be possible, but simply saying that it can be done is not the same as doing it. Alternatively, we must show, in the same detail in which Nietzsche revealed the presuppositions of the views he attacked, that his efforts were a failure" (*Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 68).

21. Nietzsche himself argues against the genetic fallacy, e.g., in the *Genealogy*.

22. See, e.g., Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 64.

23. See, e.g., the various essays in Peter A. French, Howard K. Wettstein, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII, Ethical Theory: Virtue and Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

24. Adam Smith, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, book I, i.

25. See, e.g., G. E. M. Anscombe in "Modern Moral Philosophy" *Philosophy*, 33 (1958) pp. 1–19 and Michael Stocker in "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" *Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1976) pp 453–466: an earlier diatribe against both Kantian formalism and nascent utilitarianism is Arthur Schopenhauer's *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. Payne (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). And then, of course, there was Aristotle, who argued against the Platonists and hedonists of his own day.

26. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

27. See "Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics" in my *From Hegel to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and chapter 5 here.

28. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 12.

29. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 11.

30. Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans J. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 97, 107, 109–110.

31. For a good analysis of Sartre's mistake here, particularly with regard to his bad-faith analyses of women (the young woman on a date, Wolfgang Stekel's "frigid" wife), see Kathleen Higgins, "Bad Faith and Kitsch as Models of Self-Deception," in *Self and Deception*, ed. Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

32. D. L. Rosenhan, "On Being Sane in Insane Places," *Science* 179 (1973): 250–258.

33. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §276.

### Chapter 3

1. I know that I am begging some important questions here about adaptation, but suffice it to say that Nietzsche is essentially a Darwinian, whatever his occasional complaints, and that he is also a Lamarckian, believing that acquired and cultivated traits are also passed on because they prove to be adaptive.

2. William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1962).

3. For more on this, see my *Passions* (New York: Doubleday, 1976; reprint, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993) and, for two excellent historical studies, Susan James, *Passion and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Thomas Dixon, *The Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

4. J. Golomb, W. Santianello, and R. Lehrer, *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). The cover, somewhat cruelly, shows Nietzsche in

his final years in Weimar, when his mind could barely have been described as superficial, much less as profound.

5. Clancy Martin, "Nietzsche on Deception," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2002.

6. Nietzsche often celebrates his own insights in psychology, but what he fails to appreciate are his related talents in the field once called physiognomy. Many of his most cutting descriptions are not depictions of what is deep in the mind at all, but portraits of postures and tell-all facial expressions. For example, consider this brilliant line from the *Genealogy*: "While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself [*genmaios* "of noble descent" underlines the nuance "upright" and probably also "naive"], the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. *His soul squints.*" Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.

7. Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

8. Clancy Martin, "Nietzsche on Deception."

9. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §9, §8, and *Daybreak*, §188. I am indebted to Clancy Martin for his development of this theme in his dissertation. *Rausch* has been suggested as a Darwinian advantage by John Richardson in his recent work on Nietzsche and Darwin (e.g., at a recent Nietzsche conference at Santa Clara University in 2001).

10. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 800.

11. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, II, 86.

12. For a much more subtle account of the role of the passions in Augustine and Aquinas, in particular, see Thomas Dixon's *The Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. For the medievals, there were two very different sorts of passions, and although the "lower" passions were distractions from our proper engagement with God (and thus "sinful"), the "higher" passions were all that Nietzsche would have wanted them to be, except for their intended object, of course.

13. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VI, §204.

14. Nietzsche, *Wanderer and his Shadow*, §222.

15. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Morality as Anti-nature," §1.

16. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §1.

17. For more on this, see Graham Parkes's wonderful book *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 145ff.

18. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* "The Prejudices of Philosophers" §9.

19. I owe this observation to a suggestion made to me by Alasdair MacIntyre years ago.

20. For instance, from section 6 of *Twilight of the Idols* and throughout *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

21. For an excellent functionalist account of emotions in psychology, see Nico Frijda, *The Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and his "Emotions are Functional (Most of the Time)" in *The Nature of Emotion*, ed. P. Ekman and R. Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

22. The same comment was made by David Hume (in his *Treatise*): "A passion is an original existence . . . and contains not any representative quality." Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) p. 415. Annette Baier, with some reason, comments that this is perhaps the most bewildering comment in all of Hume's writings.

23. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §381.
24. See David Buss, *The Dangerous Passion* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
25. This is one way of thinking about Nietzsche's "naturalism" (John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1996]), but Nietzsche is no materialist, although he was clearly fascinated by materialism early in his career. Cf. Freud's "Scientific Project" of 1895, where he tries to account for the workings of the mind and the drives by rendering the "psychic apparatus" more or less equivalent to the brain.
26. E.g. in his early essay "On Moods" (1864), discussed by Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 42ff.
27. I have in mind particularly La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Montaigne, and Pascal. An excellent account of their insights into the "rationality" of emotions is Jon Elster's book *Alchemies of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
28. On Nietzsche's sense of agency, please see chapter 7 below. The idea of "emotional intelligence" was developed by Peter Salovey back in the very early 1990s and turned into a popular concept (with considerable distortion) by Daniel Goleman in his book with that title (*Emotional Intelligence* [New York: Bantam, 1995]).
29. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, art. LXXIX.
30. Here Elster prefers to talk about "mechanisms," since he rejects the strong Sartrean thesis that I am suggesting here. But I think that his discussion of such mechanisms, particularly in the context of the French moralists mentioned above, contains much of what I am here describing as strategies.
31. E.g., throughout the first essays of *Ecce Homo*.
32. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Four Great Errors."
33. In his essay "Observations on Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," of 1764.
34. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 387.
35. Nietzsche, *Wanderer and his Shadow*, §65.
36. This connection is pointed out by Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 146–147. One might note that Plato, who is talking about *eros* and "flowing toward learning" is not anything like the calculative rationalist that Nietzsche so despised in his own times. Indeed, Plato's conception of the passions is still a field, however overmined, with unsuspected riches.
37. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, V, 1.
38. I was reminded of this by Smith scholar Charles Griswold, in correspondence.
39. Nietzsche, *Wanderer and his Shadow*, §65.
40. Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 147; Nietzsche, *Wanderer and his Shadow*, §37.
41. *Oekonomicus* as opposed to *Chrematisike*, which would characterize the field of economics today—profit-crazy and purely financial.
42. Credit for the term, at least as a proper name, goes to my friend Sam Keen, *The Passionate Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).
43. There is, no doubt, some neurophysiological explanation of such behavior, probably in terms of such exotic brain stem spots as the locus coeruleus and the deficiency or excess of such chemicals as norepinephrine/serotonin. I do not doubt that a good deal of "the passionate life" is chronic rather than cultivated, but the question—if we are not to beg such questions as whether a virtue must be something "under one's control"—is whether the passionate life can be considered virtuous and, if so, what those virtues might be.

44. Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). This view of Aristotle seems to have far-reaching influence, for example in David Steward Nivison's comparison of Aristotle and Mencius in his excellent article on "Mencius and Motivation," *Journal for the American Academy of Religion*, special issue on classical Chinese philosophy (September 1979): 419.

45. E.g., Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, §8 (*Samtliche Werke* I, 411).

46. Notably, in *Daybreak*.

47. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.

#### Chapter 4

1. It is worth noting that the French term is much broader than the German or the English, signifying deep feeling in reaction to an offense or a disappointment. Arthur Danto suggests that it may be the feeling itself that is the critical sign of weakness rather than its particular structure, taking an offense "personally" and brooding over it as opposed to exercising one's aristocratic prerogative as a matter of course.

2. The argument that all human action is egoistic is for the most part confined to Nietzsche's early moral works, notably *Daybreak* and *Human, All Too Human*.

3. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 299.

4. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, §406, §424.

5. Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, 23.

6. See Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 60.

7. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, V, 3.

8. See, for example, most of the letters translated by Christopher Middleton in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996). Here again I want to give praise to Irvin Yolem's excellent novel *When Nietzsche Wept*, which seems to me to capture quite sympathetically Nietzsche's very mixed feelings about sexual love and friendship and about Lou in particular.

9. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §127. Schopenhauer's argument is in his small book *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. Payne (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

10. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 138.

11. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 251.

12. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §338.

13. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §338.

14. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §50.

15. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §134.

16. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, Wanderer and His Shadow*, "The Ugliest Man," II, 239, 240.

17. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §17.

18. The phrase "upward contempt" comes from William Miller, "Upward Contempt" (*Political Theory* 23 (1995) 476–499) and his *Humiliation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1993).

19. Martha Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism" in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 139–167.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollindale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), "The Ugliest Man," IV, §7.

21. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.
22. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10, 13.
23. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.
24. as argued by Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.
25. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 16.
26. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 6.
27. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.
28. See, notably, Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
29. I have rendered “birds of prey” as eagles not out of patriotism but because it is easy to imagine an eagle and I think it is important not to think of vultures and buzzards in this context.
30. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966).
31. The protective, submissive evolutionary origins of the smile have become something of a major debate in sociobiological circles in recent years. The “smile” of the submissive pack animal in response to the alpha male, for example, is part of the “don’t hurt me; you win” posture that is essential to peace-keeping among competitive social animals. But whether or not this thesis holds up as sociology, it has great plausibility as social phenomenology. The smile of the sycophant can hardly be read in any other way.
32. Of course, Rawls would insist that such abilities, like all other individual advantages, must be placed behind “the veil of ignorance.” It has often been pointed out, accordingly, that Rawls’s rational negotiators are not in fact “unencumbered” at all, but in fact presuppose the skills and knowledge of first-rate social scientists and decision theorists if not the strategic know-how of a good divorce lawyer. Cf. Dr. Chester L. Karrass, leader of one of the most widely attended negotiation seminars in the American business world: “Unfortunately you don’t get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate” (*American Way* magazine, virtually every issue).
33. The four cardinal virtues are in Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §556.
34. On wolves and chimps, see my *Passion for Justice*, chapter 3, and Jane Goodall, *In the Shadow of Man* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1971).
35. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10.
36. Kathleen M. Higgins suggests that he sings them himself in *Zarathustra*. Kathleen M. Higgins, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).
37. See F. Bergmann on slavery and freedom, in *On Being Free* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
38. It is certainly worth reminding ourselves, in this context, that Nietzsche insists that master and slave morality can coexist within the same personality—no doubt an accurate self-assessment.
39. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* II, §11.

## Chapter 5

1. Lou Salomé (1882) quoted in Karl Jasper’s *Nietzsche* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 37f. and in R. C. Solomon, ed., *Nietzsche* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 8.
2. I first presented the core of this chapter as a talk entitled “A More Severe Morality” at a conference hosted by Yehoyel Yovel in Jerusalem, Israel, in 1983.

It was first published in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 16.3 (Oct. 1985) and then in Yovel's book *Nietzsche's Affirmative Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986) as "Une Morale plus severe: L'éthique affirmative de Nietzsche" in *Krisis*, ed. Alain de Benoise (Paris: Carrière-Mainguet, 1988) and in my book *From Hegel to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Its latest incarnation is in Daniel W. Conway's *Critical Assessments: Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Routledge, 1998). Lester Hunt later defended a similar thesis in *Nietzsche and the Origins of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1991), as did Thomas Brobjer in *Nietzsche's Ethics of Character* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Press, 1995).

3. See Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969) and in his *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to His Science of Wisdom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

4. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §28.

5. Maurice Blanchot, "The Limits of Experience: Nihilism," reprinted in David Allison, *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1977), 121–128.

6. *Will to Power*, I, 1, 2. But soon after, he insists that "morality was the great *antidote* to nihilism" (I, 4). This, in my mind, demonstrates the inadequacy of relying on Nietzsche's notes for any coherent thesis.

7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

8. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 473–479 and 479–484.

9. See, for example, G. E. M. Anscombe in *Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), esp. 58–66, and John Cooper's rebuttal in his *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1986). More recently, the debate has been continued by Terence Irwin, Julia Annas, and Rosalind Hursthouse.

10. See, e.g., William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 62–67. But real genius for manufacturing rules out of inarticulate practice is exemplified by the pop philosopher Jerry Seinfeld, who with his friends delights in explaining that which for the most part needs no explanation. The fact that it is humor suggests something about the nature of this philosophical enterprise.

11. The delightful use of this example is in MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, contrasting descriptive reports of practices with prescriptive rules.

12. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), 7.

13. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 12.

14. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 20.

15. E.g., "At first, I approached the modern world . . . hopefully. I understood . . . the philosophical pessimism of the nineteenth century as if it were the symptom of a greater strength of thought, of more daring courage, and of a more triumphant fullness of life . . . What is romanticism? Every art and every philosophy may be considered a remedy and aid in the service of growing and struggling life, but there are two kinds of sufferers: first those who suffer from an over-fullness of life . . . and then there are those who suffer from the impoverishment of life . . . To this dual need of the latter corresponds all romanticism . . . The will to eternalize also requires a dual interpretation. First, it can come from gratitude and love . . . But it can also be that tyrannical will of one who is

seriously ailing, struggling, and tortured . . . (Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 370). Cf. Novalis: “The world must be made more romantic. Then once more we shall discover its original meaning. To make something romantic . . . the lower self becomes identified with the higher self.” (Friedrich von Hardenberg, *The Romantic Reader, Fragments*, trans. H. E. Hugo, (New York: Viking, 1974) p. 51.

16. G. W. F. Hegel, “The Life of Jesus,” trans. Peter Fuss (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

17. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 12.

18. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and the second *Critique*, trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956).

19. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §228.

20. Hegel, *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802) and *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), part C (AA), chapter 6 (“Spirit”), esp. §439–450.

21. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954); W. H. Walsh, *Hegel’s Ethics* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1969).

22. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §226.

23. Edward O. Wilson toys with this argument, for example, in the infamous twenty-seventh chapter of his *Sociobiology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

24. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 103ff.

25. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), book I, chapter 2.

26. See, e.g., Richard Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 172.

27. Andre Gide, *The Immoralist* (New York: Vintage, 1954).

28. Alexander Nehamas has some empirical research in this regard: in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he has found that better than three-quarters of the candidates for *Übermensch* are writers. See his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.

29. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

30. “When the exceptional human being treats the mediocre more tenderly than himself and his peers, this is not mere courtesy of the heart—it is simply his duty.” Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §57.

31. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §556, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

32. Supposedly, Alexander set up Phyllis to seduce and make a fool of Aristotle. A nice telling of the story is in David Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 155–157.

33. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §290.

## Chapter 6

1. Kant has been turned into an “agent-based” virtue ethicist, for example, by Steve Darwall (see *The British Moralists and the Internal “Ought,” 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). John Stuart Mill betrays his Aristotelian bias in chapter 5 of *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1979).

2. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, IV, §10.

3. Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

4. Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

5. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues" in Peter French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, eds. *Ethics and Character: Midwest Studies Volume XIII* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

6. The phrase is a title briefly considered by Nietzsche for his last several works, but he wisely rejected it, I presume because even he found it too pretentious.

7. Thomas Brobjer, in conversation, 2000.

8. Nietzsche, letter to Paul Rée: "Then my life hasn't been a mistake!"

9. I owe this summary of the nature of early Greek morality to Julius Moravcsik.

10. Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §11.

11. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," §3.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, §10, and elsewhere. His attacks on Tertullian in book I.15 and in *The Antichrist* are especially exemplary.

13. Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

14. Again, the opposite of a vice is not a virtue. Gossiping is a vice. Not gossiping is not a virtue. Indeed, one might argue, it is itself another type of vice.

15. Thanks to my colleague Stephen Phillips for his help with the Upanishads, and thanks to Roy Perrett of the University of Hawaii for the Maori virtues (based on a Ngati Awa source; see Roy Perrett 1991 *Philosophy East and West*, p. 191). Thanks also to Andrew Sharp of the University of Auckland.

16. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 556; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 284.

17. But see Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §277, on the "hot and cold virtues," and, in particular, on the advantages of "hot" vs. "cold" courage.

18. Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. S. Lombardo (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), xv, 348–351; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book III, chapter 8, line 1116. trans. Sir David Ross points out that the quotation more likely resembles Agamemnon than Hector (68), but Aristotle considers: "Passion is sometimes reckoned as courage; . . . for passion above all things is eager to rush on danger. Hence Homer's 'put strength into his passion.'" Aristotle goes on to say that men who act from passion are not truly brave but more akin to beasts. They do not act "for honor's sake nor as the rule directs" (1117). Nevertheless, he adds, "they have something akin to courage."

19. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV, section I.

20. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV, section I, and Sir David Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 1995).

21. I am indebted throughout this section to Clancy Martin, who wrote an insightful study of Aristotle and Nietzsche's notions of "truthfulness" for his dissertation at the University of Texas (December, 2003).

22. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 1.

23. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, preface §4.

24. See John Cooper's summary essay on the topic, "The Unity of Virtue," in *Virtue and Vice*, ed. E. Paul (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

25. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, 5.

26. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II.

27. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 32.

28. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 1.

29. See Middleton, *Selected Letters*.



30. Kathleen M. Higgins, *Comic Relief: Nietzsche's Gay Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
31. Notably, Henri Bergson in his *Laughter* (quoted in John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1987], 119).
32. Kathleen M. Higgins, "Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors," in *Beauty Matters*, ed. Peg Zeglin Brand (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 87–111.
33. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
34. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism" trans. P. Mairet (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).
35. This, again, is one of the main themes of Alexander Nehamas's excellent book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.
36. I credit this precise formulation to my good friend Ray Bradley, who is not a Nietzsche fan, but perhaps someday will be.
37. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," §10.
38. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (in Tilman and Cahn, eds. *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics* New York: Harper and Row, p. 442.) Special thanks to Janet McCracken for some wonderful discussion of play in her recent work.
39. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* §67.
40. Thanks to Janet McCracken, again.
41. Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963); P. G. Zimbardo *Quiet Rage* (video) Stanford University, 1992; J. M. Darley and C. D. Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Disposition Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27 (1973).
42. Gilbert Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (1999–2000): 223–226; John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also R. E. Nisbett and L. Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Prentice-Hall, 1980).
43. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 2; I, 6; I, 9, 10; III, 1.
44. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 29.
45. Mary Wollstonecraft, quoted in R. Tong, *Feminine and Feminist Ethics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993) 33.
46. *Dhammapada*, quoted in Freny Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 3.
47. See, for example, Stuart Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), and his *Innocence and Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). See also Bernard Williams, "Politics and Moral Character," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Thomas Nagel, "Ruthlessness in Public Life" in Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality*.
48. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I, 2.
49. Anthony Flew, "The Profit Motive," *Ethics*, 1976.

## Chapter 7

1. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, II, 10.
2. Dan Dennett ridicules fatalism as the "mystical and superstitious" thesis that "no agent can do anything about anything" and whose only virtue is "the

power to create creepy effects in literature” in *Elbow Room* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 123, 104.

3. The terminology here varies. Brian Leiter distinguishes between classical determinism, classical fatalism, and causal essentialism. He defends only the last, which he attributes to Nietzsche and interprets as the “essential” properties of an individual that “non-trivially determine the . . . possible trajectories” for that individual. “The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche,” in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator*, ed. C. Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 225.

4. Mark Bernstein, *Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

5. See Nietzsche’s 1868 dissertation “On Teleology” trans P. Swift Nietzscheana #8 (Urbana, IL: NANS, 2000).

6. See, for example, Cecil M. Bowra, *Sophocles Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945); Cedric H. Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951); Marjorie Barstow, “Oedipus Rex as the Ideal Tragic Hero of Aristotle,” *Classical Weekly* 6.1 (October 5, 1912); and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

7. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §290.

8. Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism,” 217–257.

9. Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism,” 255.

10. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994) 424.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 97, 107, 109–110.

12. In early Greek mythology, they are three young, graceful women. Later, they became old women, not unlike the Weird Sisters in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. In Roman mythology, they are four, Ananke, Nona, Decuma, Morta; in Norse mythology, Urtyh, Verthandi, Skuld.

13. See Lisa Raphals, “Fatalism, Fate, and Strategem in China and Greece,” in *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons*, ed. S. Shankman and S. W. Durrant (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 207–234.

14. Dennett, *Elbow Room*.

15. Homer, *Iliad*, 16:470–496.

16. Homer, *Iliad*, 20:298ff.

17. Homer, *Iliad*, 18:350–351.

18. Homer, *Iliad*, 6:512–513.

19. Homer, *Iliad*, 1:226–231.

20. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 400ff.

21. See, for example, Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 360.

22. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 232.

23. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §458.

24. I have never understood what conceptual hang-up Aristotle must have had that he passed onto generations of Christian philosophers who utilized the same lack of imagination to “prove” the existence of God. (An overly sophisticated theory is that they just didn’t have an adequate mathematical conception of infinity.)

25. The *locus classicus* here is Aristotle’s famous example of the sea battle tomorrow in his *Metaphysics* (New York: Penguin, 1999). There the question becomes, if it is *true* that there will be a sea battle tomorrow, must it not already be the case that there will be a sea battle tomorrow? For an extended treatment of these concerns, first in Aristotle, then in contemporary metaphysics, see

Sarah Broadie, "Aristotle's Sea Battle" in her *Passage and Possibility*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) and Bernstein, *Fatalism*.

26. See Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

27. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, second edition, trans. N. Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1933) B, 472.

28. The quote is from Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 100.

29. I have elsewhere argued that Sartre sustains a full-blooded determinism in his philosophy, untouched by his adamant insistence that we must, even ontologically, consider consciousness as free and free from causation.

30. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 373.

31. There is a sense in which this might be challenged, though not, I think, at any risk to the thesis I am advancing here. Lewis Thomas suggests that even the most primitive living things (e.g., slime molds) have a sense of self in that they "recognize" their own kind (in effect, their own offspring) and avoid others (other slime molds with different genetic composition). Lewis Thomas, *Lives of a Cell* (New York: Viking, 1974).

32. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, III. Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* trans. J. Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1966).

33. Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23.

34. The purpose of this exclusion is to avoid "Gettier-type examples," that is, deviant causal chains that violate our intuitions about intentional action. See also Patricia Greenspan, "Impulse and Self-Reflection: Frankfurtian Responsibility versus Free Will," *Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999): 325–340 and David Zimmerman, "Making Do" in *Doing and Time* (forthcoming).

35. He or she satisfies the second desire by not acting in accordance with the first.

36. See Greenspan, "Impulse and Self-Reflection."

37. The recognition of Nietzsche as virtue ethicist goes back at least to the early 1980s. See my "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Ethics," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1986, also in Yovel, *Nietzsche's Affirmative Philosophy*; Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origins of Virtue*; and Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Ethics of Character*.

38. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §68.

39. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, §2; *Twilight of the Idols*, "Four Great Errors," §3–7.

40. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 2.

41. *ibid*

42. My thanks to Clancy Martin for this point.

43. *Twilight of the Idols*, "The 'Improvers' of Mankind," §5.

44. See, e.g., Ronald De Souse and Jingsong Ma, "Social Constraint and Women's Emotions in Pre-modern Chinese Literature," *Proceedings of the International Society for Research on Emotions*, 2000.

45. *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Prejudices of Philosophers" §9.

46. Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 19.

47. This section is based on a conference presentation I made on Nietzsche at the University of Texas at Austin in March, 2001, commenting on a paper by Chris Janaway on the same subject.

48. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-

Merrill, 1956), 101. I take this reference from Robert Wicks, "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Justification of Existence" (2000).

49. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, 152. Quoted in Wicks, "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Justification."

50. Cf. Nietzsche's account of "The Problem of Socrates," in *Twilight of the Idols*.

51. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* II Z1

52. Cf. Georg Simmel, discussed in Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 266.

53. Albert Camus, *The Stranger*. trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Knopf, 1946).

54. Malcolm Muggeridge, one of the great playboys of the twentieth century, "found" Christianity well into his sixties, and then expressed righteous indignation (not regret) at the very thought of his five decades of exploits.

55. I became convinced of this thesis by Wicks's "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Justification."

56. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 11.

57. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," §10.

58. Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 269.

59. Bernd Magnus, "Perfectability and Attitude in Nietzsche's *Übermensch*" *Review of Metaphysics* 36 (March 1983) pp 633–660.

60. William Shakespeare, sonnet 116 ("Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments"), lines 2–3. *The Complete Sonnets* (New York: Dover, 1991).

61. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill), 13.

62. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §458.

63. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 619.

64. *New Left Review*, 58 (1970) Reprinted in R. C. Solomon, *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1985), 513.

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