Mirror Reflections: Reading Nietzsche Dangerously

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Recently scholars have had a renewed interest in the rhetorical dimension of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. Moving past familiar questions about the philosophical significance of its presence, these scholars have begun to ask how Nietzsche's rhetoric induces existential forms of reading where readers feel as though they are being personally addressed and confronted with the slavishness of their own moral convictions. Building on this scholarship, this dissertation seeks to compliment the common textual approach to understanding how Nietzsche's rhetoric produces such experiences by turning attention onto the different "types" of readers affected by Nietzsche's rhetoric and the nature of their moral confrontations. Moving from the question of *how* Nietzsche's rhetoric works to *what* it does, I follow Nietzsche's example of diagnosing the hidden workings of slave morality within influential intellectual figures who exemplify a larger "type" of personality. Engaging with the work of Michel Foucault, William E. Connolly, and Jack Donovan, I sketch the relationship between their respective interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy and the rhetorical "hooks" that pull them in to portray three such personality types: the scholar, the democrat, and the artist. Just as each type is attracted to different elements of Nietzsche's philosophy so they reject others. Exploring the relationship between these "typical" figures and the elements of Nietzsche's philosophy they reject, I pursue an existential reading of Nietzsche from the perspective of each figure to reveal the hidden pathologies of fear, vanity, and resentment that animate them. Such pathologies are ultimately grounded in a moral rejection of suffering that forecloses opportunities for self-affirmation, and while this dynamic plays out differently

in each type, there is a shared logic that extends beyond each individual thinker into different human types. To realize this is to see that the same diagnostic Nietzsche offers of these types is applicable to all who participate in them and that we, too, face the same moral confrontation if we are willing to look at ourselves reflected in Nietzsche's philosophy. For this to occur, all we must do is start reading Nietzsche dangerously.

Keywords: Nietzsche, reading, rhetoric, morality

Biographical Sketch

Erik Petrie received his bachelor's degree in English from Amherst College, his master's in Social Science from the University of Chicago, and, in 2023, received his doctorate in Government from Cornell University. In his dissertation, *Mirror Reflections: Reading Nietzsche Dangerously*, Petrie explores what it means to read Nietzsche's philosophy existentially, that is, as a means of confronting modern pathologies that enslave us to moral psychologies driven by fear, vanity, and resentment and keep us from the personal task of self-affirmation. His research interests include Critical Theory, affect theory, psychoanalysis, and continental philosophy. A devoted teacher, his greatest passion has always been helping to foster his student's ability to think critically about the dominate discourses that shape their lives, the psychological and affective dimensions of politics, and what it means to find and articulate one's own vision.

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Introduction

This dissertation is about reading Nietzsche's philosophy existentially. To read Nietzsche's philosophy existentially is to cease reading it solely as an object to intellectualize, contemplate, or argue over. To read Nietzsche's philosophy existentially is to read it as if it were speaking directly to you. Such an experience might be characterized as a moral confrontation. I write "might" because, while an existential reading of Nietzsche's philosophy does lead us to an experience of moral confrontation, it does not lead us to confront the standards of an external morality. Unlike perhaps any other moral confrontation, what makes the existential experience of reading Nietzsche's philosophy distinct is that it confronts us with demands that appear immoral. This is because Nietzsche's philosophy addresses its readers with an altogether foreign understanding of morality, one grounded not in social standards but in a fundamentally amoral affirmation of life. To affirm life unflinchingly, to take it for what it is, actively opposes slavish forms of morality that seek to divide life up into a clear dichotomy of good and evil. Such affirmation leads us to a place where the only moral question is whether we are affirming or fleeing from ourselves, from our own unconscious drives and desires, from the tragic forces of life that shape the contours of our lives and are often entirely beyond our control.

To read existentially is to collapse the intellectual distance we sometimes maintain between ourselves and a text. We get part of the way to such an existential mode of reading when we acknowledge that the construction of any text is partly the result of our own interpretation, of our own projections of ourselves onto it in an attempt to both create and discern its supposed meaning. But reading existentially occurs not only when we begin to reflect on how we contribute our own interpretations to a text. It starts when that text speaks to the motivations underlying our own projections. In a such a moment, the experience

of reading leads to something more than intellectual reflection and seems to speak to a deeper register of our being. This register is moral for it speaks to what orients our lives, giving form to how we live, how and why we choose to make the meanings we do. It is a confrontation of the values and psychological dispositions that have shaped us into who we are, and it is a questioning of whether such things have successfully led us to ourselves.

To write about the experience of reading Nietzsche's philosophy existentially is to join and contribute to a renewed scholarly interest in the question of how Nietzsche's philosophy is often capable of speaking directly to its readers, confronting them with themselves. About such an experience, David Allison has written that "Perhaps more than any other philosopher who readily comes to mind, Nietzsche writes exclusively for *you*. Not at you, but for you. For you, the reader. Only you. At least this is the feeling one often has when reading him."[1] These frequently cited words capture the contours of an experience shared by scholars, one they are continually trying to articulate in relation to the distinctive character of Nietzsche's rhetoric.[2]

Scholarly interest in Nietzsche's rhetoric is not new. Works by Walter Kaufmann, Sarah Kofman, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Alexander Nehamas, have long stood as exemplary studies of the

[1] David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), vii. Cf. Michael Ure, *Nietzsche's The Gay Science: An Introduction*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

[2] Ken Gemes, "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006): 191-208; Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James I. Porter, "Nietzsche's Genealogy as Performative Critique," in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 119-136; Richard White, "The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals,"" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 48(4), (1988): 683-696.

rhetorical nature of Nietzsche's philosophy.[3] However, as Tracy Strong has noted, these works have left something to be desired: "It is the case that in recent years several authors...had turned their attention to the question of rhetoric in Nietzsche. For the most part, however, this has remained at the level of showing that he used rhetoric, not in what his rhetoric *does*, and especially not what the political implications are."[4]

Scholars are beginning to follow Strong's suggestion that to understand how Nietzsche's philosophy personally addresses its readers requires a more attentive reading of Nietzsche's rhetoric to answer the questions of how it works, what it does, and what its implications may be. To this end, Hugo Drochon has offered a more attentive reading of the rhetorical dimensions of Nietzsche's genealogical practice and raised the question of whether our abandonment of Christianity should entail that of democracy as well.[5] Simon Lambek has offered a new way of thinking about how Nietzsche's rhetoric by suggesting that its ability to induce self-critique in its readers is due to its dissonance, its uneasy juxtaposition of the beauty and pleasure of language with the terror of disturbing ideas.[6] Additionally, Linda Williams has noted how many of Nietzsche's seemingly key concepts operate as mirrors. That is, many of his better-known concepts, such as the will to power, the overman, and the eternal return, are vaguely defined by

[3] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large, (London: Athlone Press, 1993); Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[4] Strong, "In Defense," 511. Cf. Simon Lambek, "Nietzsche's Rhetoric: Dissonance and Reception, *Epoché*, 25(1), (2020): 57-80; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 19.

[5] Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), chapter three.

[6] Simon Lambek, "Nietzsche's Rhetoric: Dissonance and Reception, *Epoché*, 25(1), (2020): 57-80.

Nietzsche, forcing readers to put a part of themselves into the gaps between his ideas to arrive at an interpretation, one that they in time come to see as their own.[7]

The idea that Nietzsche writes his philosophy in such a way that it forces us to project ourselves into the spaces created by its aphoristic, fragmented, vague, and digressional nature occurs frequently in contemporary scholarship. Nietzsche writes with gaps, and his readers, to the degree that they are compelled by what he writes, find themselves in a position of needing to make sense of it. This urge on the part of readers is a desire for resolution, an attempt to resolve the dissonance of Nietzsche's ideas. But as we strive to bring resolution to Nietzsche's philosophy, it constantly alludes us. In time, once we recognize that we are unable to bring all of Nietzsche's ideas together into a consistent whole and that our attempts to do so exclude elements of his philosophy that direct us to our own partiality, we are brought to see our interpretations for what they are, *our* interpretations. Strong describes this experience of reading Nietzsche in the following way:

> Nietzsche's writing thus calls up...a *critical relation between what the reader wants and what the text makes available and requires of the reader*. The effect is to call into question precisely the desire to give resolution and to bring consonance to the experience. Nietzsche has reversed the traditional picture of the reader and text: *it is as if the text has become the analyst and the reader the analysand*...In reading Nietzsche...one can call into question what one wants to make of Nietzsche – and that teaches one something about oneself. The text is intended to produce a "self-critique."[8]

It is such a readerly experience of self-critique that I am interested in, not as something to understand intellectually but as something to pursue. For as much as I appreciate the renewed turn to rhetoric by recent scholarship and make my own humble contributions to it, what I am primarily after in these pages is something akin to the experience of such existential readings, of the moral confrontations they lead us

[7] Linda Williams, *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).
[8] Tracy Strong, "In Defense of Rhetoric," *Political Theory*, 41(4), (2013), 522.

to encounter. Studying Nietzsche's rhetoric may get us to answers about how his philosophy leads readers to such experiences, but it can also reassert an intellectually distant and impersonal relationship to Nietzsche's philosophy, one that wishes to understand how Nietzsche's rhetoric produces moral confrontations rather than attend to the very nature and implications of such confrontations.

Nietzsche knew that his readers would always be tempted to adopt an "objective" orientation to his philosophy, relegating it to an intellectual register. Because of this, he repeatedly stressed the importance of understanding the existential register on which morality operates, insisting that it is not enough to intellectually acknowledge our relationship with morality as problematic but that we must embrace the appropriate relationship to this problem. Addressing the challenge of confronting morality on such registers, Nietzsche writes that it "makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an 'impersonal' one, meaning he is only able to touch and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought."[9]

Because Nietzsche did not want his philosophy to be merely read "impersonally," he repeatedly stressed the psychological confrontation he wished it to precipitate and his desire to find readers courageous enough to submit to it. Nietzsche describes himself a "*psychologist* without equal" and writes of his philosophy that "one word from me will drive all your bad instincts into your face."[10] With such an estimation of his own philosophical project, Nietzsche knows that the temptation to read his work

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §345.
[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103-105.

intellectually will always be there, that "People become 'impersonal' when they do not want anything to do with the content of my writings." Nietzsche draws out this tendency to bring it to his readers attention, to recognize that whatever they gain from his philosophy, if they have not submitted themselves to it personally rather than merely intellectually, then they have missed something. To encounter such confrontation, Nietzsche tells his readers, "You need to never have gone easy on yourself, you need to have harshness in your habits if you are going to be cheerful among harsh truths. When I imagine a perfect reader, I always think of a monster of courage and curiosity who is also supple, cunning, cautious, a born adventurer and discoverer."[11]

To have the courage to read Nietzsche's philosophy existentially is to read it in relation to oneself. Scholars attentive to Nietzsche's rhetoric often study its textual aspect, but they ignore its relational aspect. That is, while rhetoric may itself be textual, the effect of rhetoric only exists in relation to a reader – and who this reader is matters. For different types of readers will read the same text, the same instances of rhetoric, differently. The omission of the question of who the reader is in studies of Nietzsche's rhetoric is, on the one hand, curious, for the notion that there are different personality types that people participate in is a common feature of Nietzsche's philosophy. To be one type as opposed to another is to be attracted to different aspects of Nietzsche's rhetoric, to make different interpretations, to avoid different forms of confrontation. We cannot write about the effect of Nietzsche's rhetoric or perhaps of his rhetoric at all without reference to the type of reader we assume is reading his philosophy.

[11] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 103-104.

To avoid the question of what type of reader we are assuming, what perspective we are adopting, gets us out of the thorny question about how we scholars can offer readings of Nietzsche from perspectives outside of our own experience of the text. But the fact is we cannot. Beyond the types that we specifically participate in, we have no ability to find our way into the reading experiences of other types of people. There is a limit to our readerly experience, one that curbs our desire to be objective and presses us to own our own interpretations and the implications they have for us personally. This brings about the challenge of realizing that to write about the personal address of Nietzsche's philosophy means that we must include *ourselves* in our readings of Nietzsche, the fact that we share in the very type we see being confronted, that we are ourselves still struggling with slave morality, and that wrestling with such enslavement means we have already ceded the means of our own self-affirmation.

To offer readings of Nietzsche that include something of ourselves is difficult for two reasons. First, because it leads us to the problem of locating a space between scholarship and autobiography, when these two genres are often seen as opposed to one another. Scholarship is often understood as the attempt to be impartial, impersonal, and objective. Contrarily, autobiography is about our subjective experience, our account of our own lives. How can we effectively straddle both tasks simultaneously? Second, to write honestly about oneself, to do so in a way that runs up against instances of our own moral confrontations, brings us into contact with our own psychological defenses and resistances, our desires to save face or hide the truth about ourselves, even from ourselves. To be honest about oneself is one thing. Confessing it aloud for others to hear is something else entirely. I have long struggled with these challenges, and in this I am not alone. No one has been more open about wrestling with them as a scholar and reader of Nietzsche than Lawrence Hatab, who writes:

> Normally philosophy presumes an impersonal stance in the pursuit of truth. Personal interjections are at best a rhetorical flourish and at worst an embarrassing impediment to the enterprise. There has been some relaxation of such a mandate in recent years. Yet engaging the philosophy of Nietzsche would seem to require a complete suspension of the mandate. For Nietzsche, philosophy cannot be grounded in rational argumentation but in the reflective exposure of *interests*. Accordingly, it might be that no interpretation of Nietzsche could be considered serious if it did not mimic Nietzsche's case by interjecting one' sown story of motivations and interests. So, here goes. (Fervent impartialists and voyeurs, please skip to the next chapter).[12]

I have long admired this reflection and the courageous autobiography that follows it. It is an example I strive to follow as I struggle to determine how to walk the line between a scholarly investigation of the experience of reading Nietzsche existentially and being honest about this as a part of my own personal experience.

In an attempt to navigate these challenges, my own experiment is to follow Nietzsche's example of offering a diagnostic account of different types of people in the grips of slave morality, types to which he belongs. Nietzsche often seems to offer scathing critiques of other thinkers, philosophers, and writers, calling them out by name. But despite appearances, Nietzsche repeatedly states that none of his criticisms are personal, either in terms of working out a vendetta or of attacking people as people. Instead, Nietzsche criticizes what he believes are exemplary figures, exemplary in that they clearly and powerfully put on display a human type enslaved to morality. It is the type illustrated by some influential figure, that Nietzsche is criticizing. Nietzsche does not lay the blame for slave morality at the feet of individual people. Rather he seeks those who illuminate something true about us all, about our own moral decadence. Following Nietzsche's practice of critique, I hope, will keep my project from unproductively

[12] Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 111. Perhaps Kaag offers yet another, more fruitful model of weaving the academic and the personal: John Kaag, *Hiking with Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018).

slipping into autobiography and ease the challenge of self-disclosure, allowing it to start as an awareness of a decadent culture before acknowledging the form it takes in my own life.

Thus, following Nietzsche's lead, I pursue the experience of reading his philosophy existentially in relation to three types of people, those of the scholar, the democrat, and the artist. To do so I engage with the work of Michel Foucault, William E. Connolly, and Jack Donovan. Beginning with each figure's respective interpretation of Nietzsche, I highlight the rhetorical dimension of Nietzsche's philosophy that hooks each of them, exploring the effect of Nietzsche's appeals to knowledge, nobility, and artistic creativity. Then I note the aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy each interpretation chooses to reject or modify. Picking up these discarded or ignored aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, I read each of these interpretations in light of them to pursue the existential reading they all pass by and the moral confrontation they do not wish to experience.

My selection of readers is not arbitrary and my accounts of self-confrontation are more than mere speculation, for I personally stand behind each of the readings I offer. That is, I am personally drawn to the ideal types of the scholar, the democrat, and the artist and have at different times in different ways approached and read Nietzsche's philosophy through each of these perspectives. Each of the interpretations of Nietzsche and the intellectual figures I choose to represent them have previously influenced and mediated my relation to Nietzsche's philosophy. In this, I am not unique. For each of the readings I offer, readings of Nietzsche as a genealogist, democratic, and artist are influential and familiar, influencing in some way most readers' experience of Nietzsche's philosophy. Indeed, often we cannot come to Nietzsche's texts without some sense of the intellectual history that surrounds and weighs upon them. Those of us drawn to these interpretations share in their selective reading of Nietzsche, in their

embrace of his personal address, his invitation for projection, in the desire to have him affirm what we consciously wish for and want. But we also share in the refusal to read Nietzsche further, to adopt a mode of self-critique. That is, going to the root of these interpretations is necessary if we are to find the parts of ourselves that are already co-opted by them, leading us to read Nietzsche one way as opposed to another. There is no path to oneself that does not require the questioning of interpretations handed down to us that shape our experience. To discover what they must reject reveals why we are drawn to them, the disavowals we wish to share.

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The structure of my project takes the following form. In the first chapter, I argue that one of the central tasks of Nietzsche's philosophy is to bring its readers to encounter a state of moral confrontation and that we see this most powerfully and clearly in his work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Starting with Nietzsche's remarks about his own philosophy, namely, its ability to confront readers with their own bad instincts, his bold claims about *Zarathustra* being the most profound book ever written, and his instruction to approach it existentially rather than intellectually, I turn my attention to a close reading of *Zarathustra* to ask not what it means but what type of experience it seeks to communicate. Identifying and placing to the side the enigmas and interpretative challenges of the text, I draw out and connect elements of its narrative to unpack not what it means for its protagonist to overcome himself but what is entailed in the experience of doing so. This leads to a reading of Zarathustra's own experience of self-confrontation. That is, I track Zarathustra's start as a naïve, prophetic figure seeking to share his teachings of wisdom and make disciples and his growing experiences of disappointment and rejection that ultimately lead him back into solitude. There he is forced to confront that he has not affirmed the

implications of his own philosophy. Attending to Zarathustra's experiences of moral confrontation illuminates the challenge entailed in any self-confrontation; and, while the precise implications of Zarathustra's confrontation are left vague, the importance of such confrontation and what it entails are clear, as Zarathustra is forced to relinquish control over the outcome of his actions and instead affirm his tragic task.

Seeing self-confrontation at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy, each of the subsequent chapters of my project explores how it differently confronts three types of readers. In the second chapter, I turn to the genealogical interpretation of Nietzsche in the work of Michel Foucault to bring out and diagnose the scholarly type. Foucault wishes to extract a genealogical method from Nietzsche, a means of tracing the origins of essentialist claims to reveal their contingency and open alternative political possibilities. This interpretation turns Nietzsche into the source for a scholarly methodology that provides a new way to think about and study the acquisition and use of knowledge as well as its entanglement in power. Foucault grounds his interpretation of Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, so I turn to this text to ask what draws Foucault to it, what ideas he adopts, and what aspects he rejects to facilitate his interpretation.

Through an existential reading of the text, I then reveal that the *Genealogy* addresses itself to the figure of the "scholar," a figure seeking knowledge as a means of escaping the challenge of self-knowledge. Drawing attention to Nietzsche's rhetorical strategies – his appeals to the modern desire for knowledge, his offer of a vicarious release of resentment, and the disguise of moral comfort in the form of scientific truth – I show how Nietzsche leads his readers to confront their own fear of themselves, of the unconscious, beastly desires that lie within them, existing beyond the security of morality. Ultimately,

Nietzsche brings the reader to confront the silent alignment of religious morality and scholarly notions of truth as both use morality to shield themselves from the dangers of self-affirmation and self-knowledge. This leads Nietzsche to conclude that the pursuit of knowledge is undergirded by a moral desire to know truth as a means of shielding us from suffering. And this, in turn, leads us to confront the need for a different relationship to suffering, where we affirm it in or actions instead of keeping it at an intellectual distance.

In the third chapter, I explore William E. Connolly's democratic interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy to illuminate the democrat as an ideal type. Connolly reimagines Nietzsche's figure of the noble, transfiguring it into a democratic ethos attainable for all. Drawn to Nietzsche's theorization of nobility's transcendence of resentment through an affirmation of the constant processes of change and becoming, Connolly wishes to co-opt such a disposition to respond to the dangers of identarian conflict in today's increasingly pluralistic democracies. Connolly finds the means for such a project in the "arts of the self" nobles use to give style to themselves and sees in these practices of self-fashioning an opportunity to foster respect among different identities.

Starting with Connolly's own curious attraction to nobility, a symbol of social and political hierarchy grounded in inegalitarianism, I adopt and expand upon Daniel Conway's observation of Nietzsche's use of nobility to appeal to the vanity of his readers. While Conway argues that Nietzsche uses nobility to draw in readers and then expose the disparities that exist between them and his noble ideal, I extend this insight by exploring Nietzsche's claims about vanity as a social pathology endemic to democracy itself. Doing so, I argue that Nietzsche sees vanity as an ascetic form of self-affirmation that results from slave morality's relationship to suffering. That is, vanity is the result of the bifurcation and

turning of one part of the self again another through the adoption of ascetic techniques. These techniques, in turn, have the effect of inflicting moderate forms of suffering on oneself to create compensatory meanings that shield us from the greater suffering of self-affirmation. Seeing this, I argue that Connolly puts on display the democrat's desire to refashion asceticism into democratic respect for all in a way that maintains rather than addresses an inner torsion in the self that keeps it grounded in resentment and makes a truly noble vision of self-affirmation impossible.

In the fourth chapter, I explore the resonances between Nietzsche's philosophy and its far-right interpreters, focusing on its articulation in the recent work of Jack Donovan to illuminate the danger of resentment for the artist as an ideal type. A fellow traveler of the Alt-Right, Donovan shares with Nietzsche a critical and abusive rhetoric as well as an attraction to masculine conceptions of power and domination. Offering a critique of contemporary culture through the lens of gender, Donovan derides the effeminacy of our times and turns to Nietzsche's vision of the noble warrior to articulate a political vision of male tribalism. However, what sets Donovan apart is the recognition of his own *ressentiment* and his turn to Nietzsche to address it. Using Nietzsche's theorization of Apollo and Dionysus as representative of different aesthetic forms, Donovan argues for a future-oriented project of cultural creation to reestablish traditional notions of masculinity free from the psychological dangers of *ressentiment*.

While Donovan wishes to resist resentment, his gloss on Nietzsche's notion of artistic creation becomes my point of entry for reading the space between him and Nietzsche's philosophy. Turning to Nietzsche's evolving understanding of Dionysus, I show that, in contrast to Donovan's take on the dynamic between Apollo and Dionysus, where the later imposes himself on the former, Nietzsche sees

such creation as the attempt to hold at bay the destructive and uncontrollable forces of life Dionysus represents. Later breaking with this vision once he sees it uses art to shield us from suffering, Nietzsche grows increasingly interested in the psychology of creation represented in the figure of Dionysus. No longer interested in the question of how to represent the god, Nietzsche becomes increasingly interested in how to follow Dionysus's example of being subject to the destructive forces of life that continually recreate the god anew.

To exemplify the process of submitting to fate, of the interrelationship between creation and destruction Dionysus signifies, I turn to the greatest example in Nietzsche's philosophy – himself. Tracking Nietzsche's transformation as he leaves his academic profession and breaks with all his former philosophical influences and presuppositions to become the itinerate philosopher who sought self-affirmation in solitude, I pay particular attention to the evolution of Nietzsche's relationship with Richard Wagner and how this parallel's his evolving understanding of Dionysus. In Nietzsche's own life, we see how under the influence of Wagner he was led to use art and creation to mediate suffering and posit a justification of life. However, after breaking with Wagner and wrestling with the personal and psychological challenges of solitude, Nietzsche comes to know the experience of Dionysus's suffering, being forced to sacrifice friendship and happiness to seek himself and his fate as a true philosopher. In the process of suffering this loss, Nietzsche comes to a place of profound creativity, giving birth to a philosophy that has shaped the intellectual landscape of the twentieth century.

Thus, in tracking Nietzsche's developing understanding of Dionysus we see that, in contrast to Donovan's desire to be an artist by asserting a masculine conception of creation, Nietzsche reveals the only forms of creation that escape *ressentiment* are those that submit to larger, unconscious and external

forces of fate beyond our control. It is only once we do this, once we allow the forces of fate to tear from us everything that keeps us resentful, that we become capable of creating in a way that does not impose our conscious desires on the world but finds opportunities to give expression to the creative forces of life. In this way, I argue that Donovan's desire to hold a masculine conception of Nietzsche's noble warrior with his early articulation of art does not overcome *ressentiment* but displaces it in a way typical of decadent artists. In contrast, we see in Nietzsche someone who has overcome the decadence of this personal type and thereby discovered that creation is an unconscious process of submitting to what is largely outside of one's control. It is only in submission to such forces that we begin to create through a remaking of ourselves

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Over the course of this work, I aim to make two scholarly contributions. First, I wish to make a humble contribution to the renewed study of Nietzsche's rhetoric. While I do not follow Strong's call for careful attention to the specifics of Nietzsche's rhetoric and how it operates, I do underline three rhetorical ways Nietzsche's philosophy not only can but has "hooked" specific types of readers as well as the interpretations they have produced. Seeing how these interpreters get hooked and what they leave out of their accounts of Nietzsche's philosophy presents us with an opportunity to turn each one back toward Nietzsche and what they eschew, opening the possibility to confront them – and ourselves – with the morally motivated psychologies of fear, vanity, and resentment that animate them.

My second contribution is bringing to the fore several of the ideal types Nietzsche appeals to and demonstrating the importance of thinking about specific readers when we approach questions about his rhetoric. I do not offer an exhaustive account of the various types Nietzsche identifies and appeals to in

his philosophy. Instead, I focus on three: the scholar, the democrat, and the artist. I choose these three because they are types that I participate in, that characterize parts of myself. I have been personally hooked by Nietzsche's appeals to knowledge, nobility, and art, and I have been forced to confront the fear, vanity, and resentment lurking within myself. This is what it means to participate in these types. Avoiding the question of the specific types of readers drawn in by Nietzsche's rhetoric and how we ourselves participate in them can be a way of further intellectualizing one's relationship to Nietzsche's philosophy, leading us to get bogged down in questions that take us away from the dangers of self-confrontation. But to offer an existential reading of Nietzsche requires confrontation, and I try to stage this and recreate my own experiences of reading Nietzsche's philosophy as a means of diagnosing the hidden psychologies of slave morality as they can be seen in the work of Foucault, Connolly, and Donovan and as they extend potentially to us all, all those who share with them participation in a particular type.

Chapter One

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*: The Experience of Moral Self-Confrontation

In this chapter, I argue that Nietzsche's philosophy is centrally concerned with precipitating experiences of moral confrontation in its readers. To show this, I first turn to Nietzsche's comments about his philosophy to establish that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stands at its center. Not only does Nietzsche see *Zarathustra* as a pinnacle of his philosophy. He also articulates how we should approach the text, how we must read it existentially, sharing in the experience it articulates. This leads me to offer a reading of *Zarathustra* that suspends more typical questions about what the text means and instead focuses on understanding its protagonist's experience of self-confrontation. Attending to the narrative development of the work, we come to see that Zarathustra's teachings about overcoming and the overman are things he must reject insofar as they participate in a moral desire to escape from the limitations of human existence. In their place, we see Zarathustra come to terms with a different process of overcoming, one not based on a volitional desire to change the world but understood as the process of coming to terms with and relinquishing our mistaken moral demands on life.

My argument proceeds as follows. In the first section (1.0), I turn to Nietzsche's remarks about *Zarathustra* and his own philosophy more generally in an attempt to find the most sympathetic way into the text. This leads to Nietzsche's unequivocal comments about the importance of *Zarathustra* and the designs of his philosophy to bring readers toward the existential experience it transmits. I then turn to scholarly debates over *Zarathustra* to show how the attempt to discern the meaning of the text has long been frustrated and possibly misplaced. Finally, I suggest that a more fruitful way into the text, one that

takes its lead from Nietzsche himself, is to attend to the question of Zarathustra's experience of moral confrontation over the entire course of the narrative.

In the next section (2.0), I attempt to orient my reader in preparation for my own reading of *Zarathustra*. I do this by providing a brief overview of the text and explain why I believe that an often-overlooked dream in the center of the text is an ideal place from which to unfold an understanding of Zarathustra's experience. The rest of the chapter (2.1-2.3) is devoted to a reading of this dream that seeks to demonstrate how it captures, in an abbreviated form, Zarathustra's personal experience through the trials and tribulations of his story, as he continually returns to the challenge of accepting the implications of his own teachings. In this way, I try to bring us closer to an experience of moral confrontation that Nietzsche dramatizes and places at the center of his philosophy, inviting us to follow suit.

1.0 The Challenge of *Zarathustra*

In this section, I demonstrate the importance of *Zarathustra* in Nietzsche's philosophy and the different challenges it presents to its readers, both interpretative and personal. I begin by turning to Nietzsche's comments about *Zarathustra* to demonstrate the central place it occupies in his philosophy. Then, I note the curious fact that, despite the importance Nietzsche places on *Zarathustra*, this text has long been ignored and derided by scholars. While more recent reception of the text has been relatively positive, most scholars approach *Zarathustra* while ignoring Nietzsche's own comments about the challenge of getting into the text in the right way. That is, Nietzsche insists that *Zarathustra* is not simply a text to be read intellectually. Rather, it is a text to be read existentially. Taking my lead from Nietzsche's own remarks, I suggest that how we approach the text is crucial, for to understand it we must have an existential reaction to it, one where our own experience resonates with that of Zarathustra as he perseveres through his own personal trials and tribulations.

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When we begin to look at what Nietzsche says about his own philosophy, it becomes evident, as Jeremy Fortier has recently put it, that "No reader can reasonably ignore *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*."[13] Not only does Nietzsche consider *Zarathustra* to be his most important work, but he claims it is the greatest book ever written: "*Zarathustra* has a special place for me in my writings. With it, I have given humanity the greatest gift it has ever received,"[14] and, again he writes: "I have given humanity the most profound

[13] Jeremy Fortier, *The Challenge of Nietzsche*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 104. Cf. Tom Stern, "Introduction: Nietzsche's Life and Works" in Tom Stern (ed), *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 20.

[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

book in its possession, my *Zarathustra.*"[15] Nietzsche's belief in the importance of his work even leads him to predict that someday, "there will be endowed chairs dedicated to *Zarathustra* interpretation."[16] And his hyperbolic praise of *Zarathustra* continues as he claims that "there was no *counter-ideal*" to the various forms of slave morality that have long plagued humanity, not, that is, "*until Zarathustra.*"[17] As the counter-ideal to all hitherto existing morality, Nietzsche approvingly sees the protagonist of his story as a great "Dionysian monster" that will overthrow all metaphysical consolation, as the "guest of all guests" who will usher in a feast of victory that will make the whole world laugh and tear down the curtain that separates good from evil. [18]

Nietzsche not only considers *Zarathustra* to be the greatest gift bestowed on humanity. He also sees it as the "solution" or culmination of half his philosophy. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes that, after having finished writing *Zarathustra*, the "task for the years that followed was as clear as could be. After the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying, *no-doing* half..."[19] As the "solution" to the yea-saying half of his philosophy, Nietzsche claims that *Zarathustra* possesses the "highest possible formula of affirmation" in the idea of the eternal return.[20] Nietzsche does not further elaborate what this means, deciding instead to characterize affirmation as a psychological problem.[21] But

[15] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 223.
[16] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 100.
[17] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 136.
[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Preface §7; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178-180. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 2§25.
[19] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 134.
[20] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 123.
[21] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 130. I tackle this puzzle in chapter four.

while he does not explicitly unpack the puzzle of what affirmation is or looks like, he is clear that, with *Zarathustra*, he had completed half of his philosophical task.

The significance of completing his positive task takes on even greater importance when we realize that the other "negative" task of Nietzsche's philosophy is to "hook" readers and reel them in to his philosophy.[22] While Nietzsche characterizes the no-saying, no-doing half of his philosophy as a series of critical engagements with existing moral values, he also claims it involves "slowly looking around for anyone related to me, for anyone who, out of strength, would give me a hand with *destruction*." Nietzsche claims that, "All my writings from this point on," that is all his post-*Zarathustra* writings, "have been fishhooks" meant to draw people in to help him with the Dionysian task of finding "*joy even in destruction*," the very thing *Zarathustra* is said to disclose. And nearly all Nietzsche's subsequent work bears this out. For many of his works – *Beyond,* the 1886 preface to *Birth*, the original plan of the *Genealogy*, and *Twilight* – end with direct references to *Zarathustra*, as if pointing the way to the final summit of Nietzsche's philosophy. Moreover, *Zarathustra* is mentioned in all Nietzsche's subsequent works, which is true of no other work in his corpus. And each mention of the text praises it, enticing the reader to learn more.[23] Thus, we see in Nietzsche's own words that *Zarathustra* has a central place in his

[22] For other scholars who have also pointed out the implications of Nietzsche's fishhooks, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1986), 247; Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. Harvey Lomax, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 19.

[23] All quotations in this paragraph are from *Ecce*, 134. References to *Zarathustra* in Nietzsche's subsequent published work are as follows: Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 180; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, P§8, 2§25, epigram to E3; Nietzsche, *Birth*, 11-12; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 223, 224, 229; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 233; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 72-73, 79, 83-85, 91-92, 99-107, 123-135, 143-151; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Preface, §§53-54. For more on the

philosophy, for everything he writes before it finds its culmination in it, and everything he writes after it points back to it. It is, in Nietzsche's view, his crowning achievement.

Given that Nietzsche sees *Zarathustra* as the centerpiece of his philosophy, it is peculiar that its reception has long been one of neglect. Nietzsche himself writes that there was an "absurd silence" around *Zarathustra* in his own time, and Kathleen Marie Higgins observes more than one hundred years after its publication that "*Zarathustra* has been relegated to the fringes of scholarly interest, even scholarly interest in Nietzsche."[24] Higgins claims its neglect has long been due to its hybrid nature, combining as it does elements of philosophy, fiction, poetry, and lyric. Its collage of genres has made *Zarathustra* notoriously difficult to understand and interpret, and these difficulties have in turn led many scholars to see it as inferior to Nietzsche's later, more straightforward philosophical texts.

But scholarly attitudes toward *Zarathustra* have begun to change, and it is now beginning to garner more attention. Within more recent literature, *Zarathustra* is often interpreted in one of two ways. Some scholars have offered a utopian reading of it as a prophetic work that provides a new vision of a future humanity. Other scholars read *Zarathustra* in the opposite way, seeing it not as a work of prophecy but as a text that seeks to deflate the very prophetic ambitions it puts on display. [25] The debate that ensues

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original plan of the *Genealogy*, see Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

[24] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 143; Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), xii.

[25] For examples of "utopian" readers, see Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1986); Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Zarathustra*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004 [1995]). For examples of the "deflationary" reading, see Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Alexander Nehamas, "For Whom the Sun Shines: A Reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," in *Klassiker Auslegen: Nietzsche's Also Sprach Zarathustra*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000). For another useful overview of this scholarly divide, see Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 155. Loeb has a helpful

between these perspectives often turns on the question of how to interpret the relation between the different parts of the text. On both sides of the debate, all agree that there is a significant stylistic difference between the fourth and final part and the rest of the work. Part Four is said to deviate from the serious, quasi-religious tone of the first three parts and is instead a kind of satire, replete with slapstick humor, insults, awkward interactions, and a continually confused and dithering Zarathustra. Additionally, Part Four is largely narrative driven, while the rest of *Zarathustra* is mostly focused on the speeches and songs of Zarathustra. Because of these stylistic differences and the publication history of *Zarathustra*, which makes the relation between the different parts even more ambiguous, it is not clear whether, and if so how, the work should be read as a whole.[26] Scholars who endorse the utopian reading of *Zarathustra* insist that Part Four is a separate work, one of less importance that should not directly bear on the significance of the rest of the text. These scholars tend to see Zarathustra unironically as the wise man the narrator tells us he is, a man striving to find followers and create new values that will lead to the overcoming of humanity and all hitherto existing moralities. In contrast, scholars who adopt the deflationary reading argue that Part Four as an integral part of the rest of the work, one that adds a

breakdown of the differences between these two different interpretations, calling the former the "utopian" reading and the latter the "deflationary" reading of *Zarathustra* (119-122).

[26] Scholars have noted that Nietzsche originally wrote Part Four as a separate work, possibly the first part of a new, separate work devoted to the character of Zarathustra. They note that Nietzsche saw the first three parts of *Zarathustra* as a completed, stand-alone work. However, because Nietzsche later abandoned the idea of writing further episodes and because he was unable to find a publisher for Part Four, he appended it to a new, private publication of *Zarathustra*. Only forty copies of this new edition were published, and Nietzsche only dispersed them among his friends. Thus, when Nietzsche refers in his published work to *Zarathustra*, he is only referring to the first three parts, Though, there is an allusion to the existence of Part Four (Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 79). Moreover, near the end of his sane life, Nietzsche wrote to a friend expressing the desire to retrieve all the private editions of *Zarathustra*, claiming that the world was not ready to receive Part Four, and suggesting to some that he wished to reaffirm that the first three parts were meant to stand alone. For more on this history, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1986), 287-288; and Del Caro's footnote in *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 199.

satirical conclusion and announces the impossibility of Zarathustra's desire to overcome humanity and morality.

I wish to take a step back from this debate to find another way into the text of *Zarathustra*. I am also interested in the question of how to read *Zarathustra*. But by this I do not mean how to understand the relationship between the different parts that make up the text. Rather, I am interested in the relationship between *Zarathustra* and its readers and the question of how they should orient themselves toward the text. On this question, Nietzsche is far from silent. And I believe that shifting our attention here will reveal that, regardless of the stylistic differences contained in *Zarathustra*, there is a strong line of continuity that runs through the whole work as Nietzsche never loses sight of trying to draw his readers into the existential experience of Zarathustra.

Nietzsche is clear that reading *Zarathustra* is challenging. This difficulty is not related to interpretative challenges. Rather the challenge is found in Nietzsche's insistence that we cannot simply read *Zarathustra* intellectually. To truly understand what the text is doing requires us to feel our way into it: "Regarding my *Zarathustra*...I do not acknowledge anyone as an expert on it if he has not, at some point, been both profoundly wounded and profoundly delighted by it, for only then may he enjoy the privilege of sharing, with due reverence, the halcyon element from which the book was born and its sunny brightness, spaciousness, breadth, and certainty."[27] Nietzsche is insistent on this point, further claiming about *Zarathustra* that "to understand six sentences from it" can only mean "to have *experienced* six sentences from it," and that to gain this kind of understanding of the text "would raise

[27] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §8.

you to a higher level of existence than 'modern' men are capable of achieving."[28] To feel our way into *Zarathustra*, to be wounded and delighted by it, requires us to do more than intellectually contemplate the teachings of Zarathustra. We must also seek to "understand" the experience of Zarathustra as he finds himself continually confronted with the implications of his own teachings. Thus, regardless of where we fall in the debate between utopian and deflationary readings, regardless of where we think the original text of *Zarathustra* ends, the narrative of the various sections continues to tell the same story, a story about moral confrontation.[29] To see Zarathustra struggle with such confrontation, to relate this experience is what is required to understand *Zarathustra*.

However, the challenge of understanding *Zarathustra* – the text and the character – is harder than meets the eye. While Nietzsche insists that we must experience *Zarathustra*, he also knows that there is no easy or direct route to such an experience:

> You will not have an ear for something until experience has given you some headway into it. Let us take the most extreme case, where a book talks about events lying completely outside the possibility of common, or even uncommon, experience – where it is the *first* language of a new range of experiences. In this case, absolutely nothing will be heard, with the associated acoustic illusion that if nothing is heard, *nothing is there*. At the end of the day, this had been my usual experience and, if you will, the *originality* of my experience. Anyone who thinks that they have understood me has made me into something after their own image.[30]

In response to this difficulty, Nietzsche adopts a particular style of writing. In his own words, he describes it as a style that aims "to *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos,"[31] one that is tied to an experience of confrontation, for, as Nietzsche unabashedly writes, "one word from me will drive all your

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[28] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 100.
[29] Discerning Zarathustra's experience requires attending to the plot of *Zarathustra*, and as Dirk J. Johnson has recently noted, this is an often-neglected aspect of the text. See Dirk J. Johnson, "*Zarathustra*: Nietzsche's Rendezvous with Eternity," in Tom Stern (ed), *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 187.
[30] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 101.
[31] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 104.

bad instincts into your face."[32] Thus, he concludes that to be such a reader of his philosophy "you need to never have gone easy on yourself, you need to have *harshness* in your habits, if you are going to be cheerful among harsh truths." To be such a reader of Nietzsche is to have felt the initial "hooks" of his philosophy, to be drawn in and pulled toward *Zarathustra*, to a text and a character who exemplify the kind of self-confrontation that must be adopted to understand the experience Nietzsche wishes to communicate. Coming to feel and understand such confrontation is possible here because, in the words of Wendy Brown, "Zarathustra's exceptionality in what he is willing to confront and bear...is Nietzsche's device for revealing us to ourselves."[33]

[32] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 103.
[33] Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory*, 21(3), (1993), 405.

2.0 An overview of *Zarathustra*

Before turning to my reading of *Zarathustra* to illustrate the experience of self-confrontation it contains, I would first like to orient my own reader by providing a sketch of the general contours of the text and providing an account of why I choose to find my point of entry into it through a reading of one of Zarathustra's dreams.

Zarathustra is divided into four parts. Part One begins with Zarathustra descending from his mountain solitude to share his wisdom with humanity. On his way to the market, Zarathustra is warned about sharing his wisdom with people who do not want it. But this does not deter him. Upon reaching the market, Zarathustra begins to preach to the people. He teaches the overman, a vague notion of what human beings will evolve into; the immanence of the earth, trying to draw attention to the death of God and all religious and metaphysical notions of another world that lead us to devalue our own material existence; and the last human being, the current state of humanity as it enjoys happiness and ease and is no longer interested in or even aware of the ineluctable becoming of life that continually remakes things anew. Zarathustra's teachings are met with confusion, misunderstanding, and ultimately rejection, and he finds himself at the end of his adventure alone. Returning to a state of solitude, Zarathustra realizes that he needs to abandon his pride, his desire to convert the masses. So, instead, he chooses to go in search of more receptive disciples.

The rest of Part One is devoted to a series of Zarathustra's speeches. While the themes of these speeches are varied, they share in their rejection of all religious, moral, and metaphysical notions of another world, citing the moral and temporal relativism of all such ideas and values, and they also share in Zarathustra's celebration of the "earth," that is, of sex, death, war, aggression, and becoming – all

things morality usually condemns as "evil." At the conclusion of these speeches, Part One concludes with Zarathustra's address to his disciples just before he leaves them to return to his solitude. In his speech, he warns them against himself, noting that to be his disciples is to question him and his teachings and continue to pursue self-affirmation.

Part Two opens with Zarathustra in solitude atop his mountain. Awakening from a nightmare, Zarathustra grows concerned that his teachings are being distorted and his disciples led astray. So, he descends from his mountain and returns to them. What follows are more speeches, but their tone and subject matter shift substantially. In place of his announcement of the death of God and his celebration of the earth, Zarathustra's speeches now express disgust, contempt, and even resentment toward the baseness of humanity. Mixed into these denunciations are admissions of Zarathustra's own ponderings over whether the mediocrity of humanity is alterable and a growing tension within himself that he must confront in his dreams, visions, and more astute interlocutors, a tension that begins to reveal that he has not come to terms with the implications of his own teachings.

In Part Three, Zarathustra dawdles about before returning to the solitude of his mountain, offering a few final speeches and "passing by" lesser "enemies." Back in solitude, he offers a set of speeches on reclaiming the three great sins, his arch enemy the spirit of gravity, and an account of the moral tablets he has cast off and the new ones he wishes to put in their place. Then, suddenly, Zarathustra collapses. The rest of Part Three tracks his struggle to affirm the idea of the eternal return, the idea that the constant state of transformation, becoming, or overcoming he has repeatedly discussed in his teachings is not progressive but cyclical, that, while he is calling for something beyond the current state of humanity, the qualities that drive him to disgust will return, that there is no final salvation from them. Realizing the

weight of the eternal return, Zarathustra is torn between becoming the teacher of this idea or else ending his life. In this state of tension, he sings a song to a female personification of life that questions how, after all the ways he has demonstrated his love for her, she has the gall to forsaken him. In response to his song, life appears and speaks with Zarathustra. What transpires in this conversation is not clear, but its consequence is that it brings the two of them back together. This leads to the final song that closes out Part Three, where Zarathustra proclaims his love for life and for eternity.

In Part Four, we return to Zarathustra years later, still atop his mountain, waiting for a sign to lead him back down again in search of his disciples. One day, while thinking about himself as a fisher of men, he encounters a familiar nihilistic soothsayer who has come to seduce Zarathustra to his final sin, his pity for the "higher man." During their conversation, Zarathustra hears a cry of distress from the higher man and goes off to find him. As Zarathustra searches for the higher man, he comes across a whole host of initially unsavory characters who have heard his teachings and are looking for him. Informing them that he is currently responding to a cry of distress, he directs them to his home and promises to entertain them later in the evening. After spending the day in search of the distressed cry, Zarathustra returns home to realize that the sound has been coming from all the characters he encountered throughout the day.

The dinner scene that ensues finds Zarathustra torn between wanting to be happy for the higher men who are pleased to have found him and feeling a reoccurring desire to leave them and escape into the fresh air. Everything comes to a head when, returning from outside, Zarathustra finds that the higher men have exalted an ass as their new god. In response, Zarathustra ultimately sings a song that distinguishes between the higher men's search for a new religious authority, first in Zarathustra himself

and later in the ass, and the truth of his teachings about the eternal return, of the need to confront such desires. The next morning, Zarathustra receives a sign that it is time for him to descend from his mountain and return to his task. Receiving this sign, Zarathustra is struck by the events of the previous day. He sees in his response to the cry of distress and his ambivalence over the higher men that he has been caught up in pity for them, in a desire to help and aid them rather than to pronounce the eternal return and place the weight of it on any who claim to seek after his teaching.

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Throughout *Zarathustra*, there are several highly symbolic moments that both capture and foreshadow the future events of the text. Most of these explicitly call out for interpretation, are misinterpreted, and only later become clear as the plot develops. For example, in Part Three, Zarathustra has an enigmatic vision of a shepherd choking on a snake that symbolically anticipates his confrontation with the thought of the eternal return, and in Part Two Zarathustra shares a dream about a coffin that falls, knocks him over, and breaks open to release sounds of laughter that anticipates his later conversation with life and the inescapability of his fate.

Throughout Nietzsche's philosophy, he holds several views on dreams and imagistic thinking.[34] From the start of his philosophy, dreams are associated with the Greek god Apollo and are seen as the paradigm of all imagistic aesthetics. Nietzsche believes that dreams are both the result of misunderstood

[34] For Nietzsche's views on dreams as the ideal representative of imagistic aesthetics see Nietzsche, *Birth*, §§1, 4; for dreams as translations of physiological states see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §13; for dreams as the origin of dualistic thinking see Nietzsche, *Human*, §5; for views that "anticipate" psychoanalytic views about phylogenetics and wish fulfillment see Nietzsche, *Human*, §§12, 74, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, eds. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §§119, 312.

physiological process operating during sleep as well as being rooted to the primitive history of humanity. Additionally, Nietzsche believes that the phenomena of dreams are responsible for humanity's belief in metaphysical dualism, the division between the real world and a world of appearance. But among these views, Nietzsche also argues that, "dreams are...chains of symbolic scenes and images in place of the language of poetic narration; they paraphrase our experiences or expectations or circumstances with such poetic boldness and definiteness that in the morning we are always astonished at ourselves when we recall our dreams."[35] However, Nietzsche insists that dreams only communicate clearly to us on "rare occasions" and that "usually the dream is a bungled product," something that needs to be disentangled and disambiguated. This contrast between the force of a dream and its need to be deciphered is repeatedly seen in *Zarathustra* and seems to be the role dreams play in its narrative.

In the rest of this chapter, I provide a close reading of the dream that occurs at the start of Part Two. Though brief, this dream is different from the other moments of symbolism and imagery in *Zarathustra* in that it is never explained. Moreover, unlike his other dreams and visions, which usually leave him at a loss as to their meaning, Zarathustra quickly offers his own interpretation of this dream. While this may appear to provide its meaning, Zarathustra offers his interpretation with an odd calm that contrasts with the terror initially felt within the dream. Moreover, his interpretation leads him to descend from his mountain solitude for the sake of his teaching and his disciples, yet it is clear that there are other more pressing, selfish motives driving his behavior. What I aim to show in what follows is that Zarathustra misinterprets his dream and the reason we are never offered an interpretation of it in the narrative is that

[35] Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §194.

it captures the experience of self-confrontation Zarathustra is struggling to embrace throughout *Zarathustra*, the very thing Nietzsche wants his readers to feel their way into rather than contemplate.

2.1 Zarathustra's Dream: The Mirror

One night, years after leaving his disciples and returning to the solitude of his mountain cave, Zarathustra dreams that a child approaches him holding a mirror and says, "O Zarathustra look at yourself in the mirror!" Zarathustra looks into the mirror and sees a devil grimacing, sneering, and laughing. This image frightens him, and he cannot bring himself to look at it. Upon awakening, Zarathustra is troubled by the dream and interprets it to mean that his teachings have been distorted by his enemies, that his disciples have been led astray, and that he must return to them, to save them.[36]

There are at least three reasons why we might choose to believe Zarathustra's interpretation of this dream. First, the epigram to Part Two, which immediately precedes Zarathustra's dream, supports Zarathustra's interpretation. The epigram reads: "only when you have all denied me will I return to you,"[37] and, if Zarathustra's dream interpretation is correct, this is exactly what happens. Second, it appears that Zarathustra is not the only one to see a distorted image of himself in a mirror. In Part Four, Zarathustra encounters two kings who also claim to have seen a distorted image of Zarathustra in the mirrors of his enemies,[38] thereby seeming to confirm Zarathustra's dream interpretation. Third, the imagery of the mirror is used on another occasion to convey that Zarathustra's teachings have been distorted. In Part Four, Zarathustra announces to the group of higher men who have sought him atop his mountain that, "I need clean, smooth mirrors for my teachings; on your surfaces, even my own image is distorted."[39] Because Zarathustra is pointing out how the higher men, despite their intentions, have

[36] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 63-65.
[37] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 69, 71.
[38] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 211.
[39] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 229. Cf. Zarathustra's conversation with his soul at the end of Part Three.

failed to respond properly to his teaching, the language of mirrors and distorted images in this scene also seems to build on and reinforce the idea that Zarathustra's teachings are distorted in the mirrors of others.

However, each of these three instances is more complicated. Regarding the first, though Zarathustra appears to be afraid that his teachings are being distorted, a closer look reveals that what is really at issue is that Zarathustra is struggling to live up to his own teachings. At the end of Part One, just before he returns to his solitary mountaintop, Zarathustra warns his disciplines they should be on their guard against him:

> Truly, I advise you: go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you.
>
> The man of knowledge must not only love his enemies; he must also be able to hate his friends.
>
> One repays a teacher badly if one remains always only a student. And why do you not want to pluck at my wreath:
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> You revere me; but what if your reverence tumbles one day? Beware that a statue does not slay you!
>
> You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra? You are my believers: but what matter all believers?
>
> You had not yet sought yourselves: then you found me. Thus, do all believers; therefore, all belief comes to so little.[40]

Zarathustra warns his disciples against his own possible mistakes, but he also tells them that they must overcome him, avoid remaining his disciples, and seek themselves. But if his disciples need to create space between themselves and their teacher, Zarathustra seems unable to give them the very space he encourages them to take:

> Thus, I want to die myself, that you friends may love the earth more for my sake; and I want to become earth again, to have rest in her that bore me.
>
> Truly, Zarathustra had a goal, he threw his ball: now you friends are the heirs of my goal, I throw the golden ball to you.

[40] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 68-69, 167. I may need to think more about why this passage is also quoted in *Ecce Homo*, Preface, §4.

> Best of all I like to see you too, my friends, throwing the golden ball! And so, I still linger a little on the earth: forgive me for it![41]

These lines capture the beginning of Zarathustra's growing ambivalence. On the one hand, he wants his disciples to overcome him and his teachings and seek themselves. On the other hand, Zarathustra cannot bring himself to leave his disciples. He lingers when he should leave. Knowing that his continued presence can only be an obstacle to their own self-overcoming, Zarathustra pleads for forgiveness. On some level, Zarathustra begins to feel the tension between his teachings, which tell his disciples to overcome him and find their own way, and his own longings, which communicate to his disciples that it is not time to become independent of their teacher.

Eventually, Zarathustra does tear himself from his disciples and return to his mountain cave, but there his longing for them continues. At the start of Part Two, just before Zarathustra's dream, the narrator relates that Zarathustra's "soul…became impatient and full of longing for those whom he loved: because he still had much to give them. For this is hardest of all: to close the open hand out of love and to keep a sense of shame as a giver."[42] This comment reveals that, though Zarathustra has found the strength to leave his disciples, he is not strong enough to overcome his longing for them. He has given them his wisdom, but when it comes to the most difficult part of giving, of leaving his gift with its recipients to do with as they see fit, to allow them to find themselves, Zarathustra is shameless, unable to close his hand because he desires to keep giving, to keep teaching, to keep having disciples.

Zarathustra's ambivalence in relation to his teachings make it harder to believe his dream interpretation. Considering the context, it is less likely that Zarathustra's teaching is in danger of being

[41] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 65.
[42] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 73.

distorted and more likely that Zarathustra is unwilling to confront the implications of his own teachings, just as, in his dream, he is unwilling to look at himself in the mirror. For what would it matter if Zarathustra's teachings are being distorted if he has already encouraged his disciples to move beyond them? There is no obvious answer to this question, and it, combined with Zarathustra's ambivalence, leads us to question Zarathustra's dream interpretation. Is he right that his teachings have been distorted, or is he using this dream interpretation to indulge further in his longing for disciples, to allow him to return to them, to keep giving, to be without shame? Because of the content of Zarathustra's own teachings and the comments of the narrator, we have reason to suspect Zarathustra's dream interpretation when it conforms to his desire to have disciples rather than his wisdom, which tells him to let them go.

Just as Zarathustra's dream interpretation allows him to escape the implication of his teachings, the testimony of the kings, who claim to have seen his image distorted in a mirror, seems to reflect a similar relation to Zarathustra's teachings. It is true that the kings relate encountering Zarathustra's image and the words of his teachings from his enemies, and they confirm that his image is distorted in a mirror. But this is not all the kings say. They also relate that while they found Zarathustra's image terrifying and could not look at it, they heard his words, were affected by them, and came in pursuit of Zarathustra to hear more. In particular, these kings were captured by two of Zarathustra's teachings, namely, that "you should love peace as a means to new wars, and the short peace more than the long one!" and "What is good? Being brave is good. The good war hallows any cause." In response to these teachings, the kings

remark that "our fathers' blood stirred in our bodies at the sound of such words."[43] But Zarathustra sees through the kings. The narrator tells us: "As the kings talked in this manner and gabbed enthusiastically about the happiness of their fathers, Zarathustra was overcome by no small desire to mock their enthusiasm; after all, these were visibly very peaceful kings he saw standing before him, the kind with old and refined faces."[44] The significance of this comment is that the kings have come to Zarathustra to hear more about war, yet Zarathustra sees that their interest in war is at best academic, that in their very being they have neither the interest nor the capacity to engage in war. For this reason, Zarathustra must resist the urge to mock the discrepancy between reality and the words the kings want to discuss, for, while they wish to speak of war, they have no real interest in engaging in it.

But Zarathustra's reaction is curious given that the kings' response to Zarathustra's teachings mirrors his own. The kings see Zarathustra's image in the form of a devil reflected in a mirror, just like Zarathustra. The kings are frightened by this image, just like Zarathustra. Rather than fixate on the image, the kings get lost in the teachings of Zarathustra, wanting to better understand and continue to converse, just like Zarathustra. The kings remain fascinated by a teaching that they themselves do not want to confront, one that would force them to overcome their peaceful constitution. And here a question arises concerning what the kings verify: Zarathustra's distorted image or the unwillingness – shared by Zarathustra – to look at themselves in the mirror.

The third invocation of distorted images and mirrors presents the same question. When Zarathustra tells the higher men that, "you are not beautiful or wellborn enough for me. I need clean, smooth mirrors

[43] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 199-200.
[44] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Martin), 212.

for my teachings; on your surfaces, even my own image is distorted," he is partially right. Throughout Part Four, the higher men demonstrate again and again that they can learn but they cannot live Zarathustra's teachings. The kings who seek war turn out to be profound lovers of peace; the last pope who has lost faith in God ends up claiming that it is better to worship God in the form of a braying ass than in no form at all;[45] and the ugliest man, the one who has killed God and should be able to affirm life for himself, can only affirm the festival aspects of life for the sake of Zarathustra.[46] These "higher men" surely cannot reflect Zarathustra's teachings. But then neither can Zarathustra. In fact, the overarching point of Part Four is that Zarathustra – the preacher who scorns pity, proclaiming "Oh, where in the world has greater folly occurred than among the pitying? And what in the world causes more suffering than the folly of the pitying?" – continually finds his actions motivated by pity for the higher men. At the end of Part Four, he realizes this:

> "To my last sin?" cried Zarathustra and laughed scornfully at his own words. '*What* has been left me now as my last sin?'
> – And once more Zarathustra became immersed in himself and sat down again on the great stone, and he reflected. Suddenly he jumped to his feet –
> "*Pity! Pity for the higher men!*"[47]

With this realization, Zarathustra sees that he too, just like the higher men, is not a clean or smooth enough mirror for his own teachings. Thus, when Zarathustra says to the higher men, "you are not beautiful or wellborn enough for me. I need clean, smooth mirrors for my teachings," he is right that they are not mirror reflections of his teachings. But when Zarathustra continues, saying: "on your surfaces, even my own image is distorted," we have reason to pause. Insofar as Zarathustra's relation to

[45] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 255.
[46] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 258.
[47] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 266.

pity for the higher men stands in opposition to his teaching, insofar as his pity is tied up with the search for clean, smooth mirrors for his teachings, insofar as Zarathustra is still looking for disciples, we see that the higher men are accurate mirror reflections of Zarathustra and his relation to his own teachings. Neither the higher men nor Zarathustra can reflect his teachings, to live them rather than merely speak of them.

2.2 Zarathustra's Dream: The Devil

If Zarathustra's refusal to look in the mirror represents his inability to face the divergence between himself and his own teachings, then next we need to ask what the image of a grimacing, laughing devil in the mirror represents. Fortunately, throughout *Zarathustra*, there is one consistent reference to a devil as Zarathustra's "archenemy." This devil is also called the "spirit of gravity," and it is no coincidence that it always appears just before Zarathustra begins to contemplate the idea of the eternal return.[48]

But before turning to Zarathustra's confrontation with this harbinger of the eternal return, it is worth pausing over Nietzsche's first articulation of the eternal return, for here we also find a demonic spirit. At the original conclusion of *The Gay Science*, we are told, imagine that a demon appears and tells you that you will be forced to live your life exactly as you have lived it over and over again without ever having the possibility of experiencing anything new. How would you respond? Would you gnash your teeth and curse the demon, or would you worship it as a god? Would you weigh every decision you have left, knowing that whatever you choose you shall have to choose eternally, that you will be tied to that decision forever, unable to alter anything, never able to choose an alternative – or would your disposition simply change, would your relationship to yourself and to life be altered such that you would "*long for nothing more*" than to live the same life over and over again?[49]

Much has been written about the eternal return, and there is little consensus about how it works or what it means.[50] But most conversations about the eternal return begin with and fixate on the question

[48] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro): 29, 83-84, 124, 158.
[49] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay* Science, ed. Bernard Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §341.
[50] See Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence,* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Chapter 6; Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapter 1.

of how or whether the hypothetical idea of life infinitely recurring is supposed to work. Few scholars accept the idea of the eternal return as a hypothetical idea that should be explored without questioning its premises. When we simply stick with what Nietzsche writes about the eternal return, we see that the force of the idea is supposed to lead us to two alternative responses to the fact that "there will be nothing new" in our lives. Either we will focus on making the "right" decision with every choice we have left, of choosing things that we would like to repeat for eternity, that will enrich our lives and make them worth living, or we will alter our disposition, and learn to long for nothing more.[51]

Rhetorically, Nietzsche seems to align an initial distinction, between gnashing our teeth or praising the demon as a god, with a second, between fretting over our future choices or changing our disposition toward life. In this way, Nietzsche suggests that either we gnash our teeth and fret over our decisions, or else we embrace a befuddling cheerfulness as we relinquish our longing for innovation. Given all that Nietzsche writes about cheerfulness in *Science*, one is tempted to assume that he is advocating for the second response to the eternal return. This assumption is strengthened when we scrutinize the first option concerning how to respond to the eternal return. For the more we push on the first option, the less it makes sense. To fixate on making right choices misses the true weight of the eternal return, namely, that we must face living everything, good and bad, pleasurable and painful, over and over again without any possibility of experiencing something new. That is, the eternal return is not meant to lead to a utilitarian calculus, in which our willingness to live our lives over again depends on whether the pleasure

[51] For a surprising example of the first, oddly Kantian interpretation of the eternal return as a formal principle of personal ethics, see Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), Chapter 3.

of our lives outweighs the pain, nor is it meant to lead us ask whether we have performed enough virtuous actions such that the life we live is good enough to repeat for eternity.[52] Irrespective of whether our life has more good things than bad, more pleasure than pain, the weight of the eternal return is the loss of "newness" in the face of endless redundancy. Even if our lives have more good things than bad, more pleasure than pain, we still must live them over and over again without even the remotest possibility of something new, something more, something different. This is the weight of the eternal return: that in the absence of newness the ratio in our lives between the good and the bad, the pleasurable and the painful, simply does not matter, for the weight of redundancy will weigh on us all the same if what we continue to long for is something new, something more, something different.

But if the first option seems to lead to a dead end, the second leads to a puzzle. When we push Nietzsche's second possible response to the eternal return, that we should instead come to change our disposition rather than fret over what decisions we have left to make in our lives, we are forced to speculate about what it means or how it is possible to "*long for nothing more*." Nietzsche's own answer to this question, even in *Science*, seems to point to Zarathustra, for the section that immediately follows the articulation of the eternal return is a facsimile of the first section of *Zarathustra*, and Nietzsche writes elsewhere that the basic idea of the text is the thought of the eternal return.[53]

The first time Zarathustra encounters the spirit of gravity and contemplates the eternal return he rejects the spirit's suggestion that time is cyclical, that everything repeats itself forever.[54] Rather, just as

[52] Nietzsche, *Science*, §12.
[53] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 123.
[54] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 156.

Nietzsche moves from the mere thought of eternal recurrence to its implications in *Science*, Zarathustra also turns his attention to its implications. In this context, the implication of the eternal return is that the present moment is not new, and that the appearance of choice and the possibility of innovation are illusory. Zarathustra presents the eternal return in terms of a spatial metaphor. He says, imagine there is a path that recedes backwards, another path that proceeds forwards, and a gate at the place where they meet marked "Moment." Here is the past, the future, and the present. Next, imagine these two paths go on for eternity, such that both contain everything that will ever happen. The consequence of this is that time breaks down. The distinction between the past and the future no longer makes sense. Both are simply eternity, contained within a closed set that contains everything that will ever be. Moreover, the present Moment, that which always seems to feel new, filled with choices and possibilities, is devoid of these things. There is no choice to make or deliberate over, there are no alternative futures hanging in the balance, what was will always be and the power of creation, the idea that something new could be brought into being is an illusion:

> "Must not whatever *can* already have passed this way before? Must not whatever *can* happen, already have happened, been done, passed by before?
>
> "And if everything has already been here before, what do you think of this moment, dwarf [the spirit of gravity]? Must this gateway too not already – have been here?"[55]

That is, the "can," the idea that alternative options exist, that we might have the power to transcend the infinite repetition of life, that we could discover or create something new – all these things are an illusion.

When Zarathustra encounters the eternal return for the second time, he again rejects the idea of the eternal return and focuses on its implications.[56] This time, Zarathustra formulates the implications of

[55] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 125-127.
[56] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro) 175.

the eternal return differently, doing so in terms of the impossibility of doing away with the human, all too human quality of humanity. Abandoning his metaphor of time, Zarathustra articulates the eternal return in a new way while still capturing what is most horrifying in it for himself. He says, do not make light of the eternal return. It is not enough to think that everything returns. We must further realize what this means. It means that what eternally returns is the little human being, the accuser of life, the conscience-stricken one, the one incapable of enough evil to overcome himself.[57] But this is not all, for the return of the little man is not the worst of it. The reason he returns eternally is not simply that he lacks sufficient evil to overcome himself but that all human beings lack this capacity, for all are trapped within the eternal return, unable to find a way out of it. That is, not only is the little man insufficiently evil to escape the eternal return, so too is the supposedly great man. Both remain trapped in their humanness. This is why, when we compare the greatest with the littlest, we realize that they are "all too similar to one another – all too human still even the greatest one!"[58] Thus, once again, this time in terms of the strength to do evil rather than time, Zarathustra underlines the true implications of the eternal return – that there is no possibility of creating something new.

When we compare Zarathustra's two encounters with the eternal return, we are left with observations and questions but no answers. Contrary to so much scholarship, both times Zarathustra contemplates the eternal return it is his interlocutor – the first time the spirit of gravity, the second time Zarathustra's own animals – who articulates it as an abstract idea.[59] Both times, Zarathustra rejects this

[57] Cf. Nietzsche, *Science*, §4.
[58] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 177.
[59] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 123-124; 174-179.

reductive conception of the eternal return as false and facile. In its place, Zarathustra offers two very different versions of the eternal return, the first emphasizing that there is no moment in which to act contrary to the eternal return and the second that no human possesses enough power to act contrary to the eternal return. Here the emphasis is less on a cyclical conception of time or the idea that everything repeats itself for eternity. The emphasis is rather on the impossibility of acting and overcoming in any way that is more than human, where to act as a human is to be subject to fate, to the possible illusion of choice, and to human weakness, the inability to transcend or to be truly greater than another.

One insight we do gain by comparing the accounts of the eternal return in *Zarathustra* with the account in *Science* is that Zarathustra responds to the eternal return in terms of wanting to act, of wanting to make the right choices, wanting to overcome the wrong choices, wanting to find a way to overcome the eternal return. This is why for Zarathustra, the man who wishes to create disciples and new values, the implications of the eternal return signify the impossibility of his own longings. But all this fretting over the impossibility of action reveals that he has still not come to terms with his own disposition, with how he longs not only for disciples but for something beyond this world, something capable of escaping the eternal return of a human, all too human life.

2.3 Zarathustra's Dream: The Child

To gain an understanding of how Zarathustra begins to come to terms with the eternal return, with his own longings, we need to go back to one more element of his dream – the child. The child approaches Zarathustra carrying a mirror and tells him to look into it. All this happens so fast it is easy to miss that, despite the frequent use of the image and language of children, this is the only time a child appears in *Zarathustra*. Moreover, it is the only time a child speaks for itself.

This sole appearance may initially seem trivial, but when we contrast it with the way Zarathustra talks about "the child" as a symbol, we find curious discrepancies. In the dream, the child functions as a means of confrontation, directing Zarathustra to look at himself in the mirror, to confront himself and the idea of the eternal return, with how it throws into question the possibility of realizing his desire. But when Zarathustra introduces the concept of the child, precipitating confrontation is not part of his description:

> The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying.
>
> Yes, for the game of creation my brothers a sacred yes-saying is required. The spirit wants *its* will, the one lost to the world now wins *its own* world.[60]

Here Zarathustra describes the child as a symbol of something god-like.[61] It seems to possess tremendous powers of creation capable of making a new beginning; it is a primary mover, the cause of other things without being the effect of something else; and it is innocent and forgetful, not imbricated or weighed down by the world but capable of turning its will into a world of its own. But what does it mean if the image Zarathustra uses to embody his desire for god-like creation is what confronts him with the idea of

[60] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 17.
[61] Berkowitz, *Ethics*, 159.

the eternal return? In Zarathustra's dream, the child does not bring creation but literally carries with it the eternal return, a doctrine that announces the end of new experiences, of moments of free choice, of a human strength capable of great evil, of doing away with the smallness of human beings, of engaging in anything close to an act of divine creation. In short, the child that appears before Zarathustra is the antithesis of his ideal child. It not only carries with it an idea that stands opposed to Zarathustra's great ambition to overcome humanity, an ideal so radically immanent that it makes the possibility of god and creation impossible, but by doing so, the child literally stands before Zarathustra as a testament to the impossibility of satisfying his own personal longings for transcendence.

This discrepancy between the child as a symbol for creation and as the carrier of the eternal return leads to further questions about Zarathustra's initial description of the child. Zarathustra presents the child as the third and final transformation of the human spirit, but, when it comes to his own spirit – the only spirit we see develop over the course of the narrative – this is not how it transforms. Zarathustra teaches that the spirit begins as a camel, transforms into a lion, and then finally into a child. Each of these symbols represents a different stage of the spirit's relation to morality. The camel represents a spirit weighed down by existing morality,[62] the lion a spirit that has thrown off existing morality, and the child a spirit ready to create new moral values of its own.[63] But Zarathustra's spirit *begins* as a child; it does not end up as one.

At the beginning of his story, Zarathustra is described as a child not because he possesses god-like powers of creation but because he is a child in relation to his knowledge of the death of God. When

[62] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 154.
[63] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 16-17.

Zarathustra descends from his mountaintop at the beginning of the narrative, the first person he encounters is a religious hermit. The conversation that ensues between them is one of mutual misunderstanding. The hermit sees that Zarathustra has been transformed atop his mountain, that he has taken on the appearance of a child, and that he wishes to share his wisdom with humanity. But the hermit does not understand that the cause of Zarathustra's transformation is knowledge of the death of God. Because the hermit does not understand, he tells Zarathustra not to go to humanity with the intention of giving them anything because they only want someone willing to help carry their burdens. Zarathustra's responses to the hermit throughout their conversation are minimal, and, at its end, he simply tells the hermit that he must leave him before he takes something from him. As Zarathustra walks away, it is revealed that he is in danger of taking the hermit's belief in God, for Zarathustra is beside himself with laughter that the hermit still holds such a belief.

But the hermit also departs laughing because he thinks that Zarathustra fails to understand the nature of humanity, that he is too naïve, too childlike. At the end of the Prologue, after Zarathustra has experienced the misunderstandings and rejections of his teachings, he admits to himself that the hermit was right. But Zarathustra's acknowledgement is only partial. He acknowledges that the hermit was right that humanity does not want wisdom, but he fails to see why the hermit was right. What Zarathustra fails to see is that the death of God, or knowledge of the death of God, does not itself precipitate anything. The assumption that God's death or knowledge of His death would bring about a change in humanity, or even the feeling that humanity could or should change, is not necessarily true. Yet Zarathustra holds it to be true because he believes in the otherworldly power of his wisdom. Thus, ironically, Zarathustra is wrong despite holding a true premise, while the hermit is right despite holding

a false one. Zarathustra is wrong to think that the death of God will affect humanity despite having wisely discerned that God is dead, while the hermit is right about his characterization of humanity because his false belief in a dead God leads him to the same conclusions as a humanity unmoved by God's death.[64]

A comparison between Nietzsche's infamous madman and Zarathustra may help to illustrate this point further. In *Science*, Nietzsche writes that a madman goes into a marketplace, just as Zarathustra does; that he announces the death of God, just like Zarathustra; and that his message is not understood, just like Zarathustra's. But though all these things are the same, the responses of the madman and Zarathustra to an unreceptive crowd are markedly different. The madman realizes that the death of God is so great an event that it will take time for people to understand it, even for those who have performed the deed. That is, the death of God announces that God is dead and yet his shadow continues to be cast over humanity. We may not believe in God, but we continue to live as though we did. This is a moment when causal thinking proves false: to kill something does not always make it go away. Zarathustra's response, in contrast, does not demonstrate further insight and wisdom in the aftermath of his failed attempt to share his wisdom with humanity. Instead, Zarathustra simply modifies his longing by making his desired audience more selective, stating that he will no longer try to share his wisdom with humanity but that he will look for "companions."[65] Here we see again that Zarathustra will not relinquish his longing, not simply for disciples, but for children, for followers who will take his teachings seriously and create a human world without God. Rather than analyze why his attempt to share wisdom fails, to question his own motivations, Zarathustra finds a way to sustain his desire by blaming one audience and

[64] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 4-5.
[65] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 14.

searching for another. In this, Zarathustra, the proclaimer of the death of God, sets out in search of new gods. He believes in the power of his wisdom to create god-like children, and he believes that these children will have the power to create a human world without God. But both beliefs attempt to displace god-like attributes onto humanity, both beliefs still exist under the shadow of God, which means that, like humanity, Zarathustra still resides there, too.

This is where the imagery of the child becomes so important because it contains all that Zarathustra will have to give up to fully realize the death of God and affirm the eternal return. The child stands for a divine power of creation, for the transformation of the human spirit that Zarathustra seeks in himself and in his disciples, and for the fact that the longing for these otherworldly beings stands in tension with the radical immanence of the eternal return, as it forecloses the possibility of standing outside of life and creating innovations that can shape it according to one's will. Thus, the reason Zarathustra struggles so vehemently with willing the eternal return is that to do so would mean giving up his greatest longing.

It is not until the end of the narrative that Zarathustra is able to affirm the eternal return by giving up his desire for children, and this occurs irrespective of which part of the text we believe is the true ending. In Part Three, after facing the eternal return, Zarathustra has a set of conversations, first with his soul and then with life. With his soul, Zarathustra wrestles with the realization that he is a bad giver. His soul confronts him, saying that gratitude should not be the response of the receiver but of the giver, that givers should not expect gratitude but be grateful their gifts were accepted. The implication is that Zarathustra gives to receive, meaning that he does not give as an end but as a means, seeking happiness by inducing gratitude in another. Thus, Zarathustra must accept the limited power of the giver, see that

giving cannot induce gratitude, that giving does not bring about a disposition of affirmation and acceptance.[66]

Unable to confront his soul, Zarathustra turns an accusatory finger toward life. He claims to have loved life and been mistreated by her. But life responds that Zarathustra does not love her, that if he did, he would not be contemplating suicide.[67] Zarathustra responds by whispering something in the ear of life that shocks her but is kept from the reader. Whatever is said leads Zarathustra and life to embrace one another, and Zarathustra is said to love life more than all his wisdom. All this leads to Zarathustra's song, where he finally affirms the eternal return by giving up his longing for children: "Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it were this woman whom I love: for I love you, oh eternity!" This refrain occurs at the end of each stanza of his song and conveys not only that Zarathustra has accepted the eternal return but that by doing so he has finally surrendered his desire for god-like children.

But what Zarathustra's affirmation of the eternal return amounts to is unclear at the end of Part Three. Does he affirm life and then die? Is he simply an innovative tragic figure capable of affirming life? Does he continue to live? Is he transformed in this moment? Is he about to return to his task to seek disciples? Is he now ready to find the right audience? Does he need to surrender his desire for anything

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[66] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 179-181.
"Oh, my soul, I gave you everything and all my hands have become empty on you – and now! Now you say to me smiling and full of melancholy: 'Who of us is supposed to be thankful?
– does the giver not have to give thanks that the receiver received? Is bestowing not a bare necessity? Is receiving not – mercy?'" 180.

[67] "Then life looked pensively behind her and around her and said softly: Oh Zarathustra, you are not faithful enough for me!
You do not love me nearly as much as you say, I know you are thinking of leaving me soon.'"
Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 183.

more than life to prepare himself for another task? We do not know. This ending, with the silence that follows Zarathustra's song and the mystery of what he whispers to life, leaves us in the dark. How does he come to surrender his longing for children to affirm the eternal return, and what does it mean? We do not know; we just know that he does.

In Part Four, we also see Zarathustra surrender his desire for children. Everything starts when one of Zarathustra's disciples, the ugliest man, appears to affirm the eternal return. The ugliest man claims to affirm the eternal return amid a festival of affirmation, and he does so not by affirming all of life, the good and the bad, the pleasurable and the painful, but "For Zarathustra's sake," because "one day, one festival with Zarathustra taught me to love the earth."[68] Zarathustra no sooner hears this affirmation – seemingly the words he has always longed to hear, having a disciple affirm the eternal return because of him – than he rebukes his disciples by teaching the eternal return. He slips into a drunken state and begins singing. For six choruses, Zarathustra sings about the struggle of even articulating the eternal return, as affirming it means to affirms all that is painful and terrifying as well as good and pleasurable in life. Already, Zarathustra's criticism of the ugliest man is evident, as what it means to affirm the eternal return is not to find something in life that makes it all worthwhile but having the strength to endure everything just as it is.

On the seventh chorus, Zarathustra takes this idea of endurance a step further by articulating two different responses to pain. The first response is to suffer from pain, to ask it to "refrain," to stop, to cease. Out of such suffering emerges a longing for life, but only in the sense of bringing about something

[68] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 258.

new, different, innocent, and full of promise, namely, children: "'I want heirs,' thus speaks all that suffers, 'I want children, I do not want myself.'"[69] The other response to pain is one of joy, one that asks pain to "refrain," to repeat again and again like a musical phrase: "joy does not want heirs, not children – joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same."[70] The juxtaposition of these two responses to pain make it clear that to affirm the eternal return is to tell pain to "refrain" in the musical sense, to give up children, to find joy rather than children.

After affirming the eternal return, Zarathustra falls asleep. The next morning, he wakes up and receives a sign that it is time for him to return to his task, to share his wisdom with humanity now that he has overcome his desire for children. Then, Zarathustra exclaims the enigmatic finals words of Part Four:

> "My suffering and my pity – what do they matter! Do I strive for *happiness*? I strive for my *work!*
> Well then! The lion came, my children are near, Zarathustra became ripe, my hour came –
> This is *my* morning, *my* day is beginning: *up now, up, you great noon!*"
> Thus spoke Zarathustra and he left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun that emerges from dark mountains.

These final lines are difficult to understand. Why would Zarathustra continue his work of sharing wisdom with humanity if he no longer seeks happiness or children? Is this another instance in which he simply affirms a tragic fate? Has his affirmation of the eternal return transformed him in some way, taught him something new? Does he now have the capacity to find his children? Are these children of the eternal return, children no longer entangled with divine connotations? Is the contradiction of working without an aim or with full knowledge of the impossibility of that aim supposed to be comedic,

[69] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 262.
[70] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, (Del Caro), 262.

satirical? Is this ending a parody of Zarathustra, is he again simply confused and mistaken? To all these questions there is, once again, no apparent answer. We do not know what the ending means. What we do know is that Zarathustra's affirmation of the eternal return leads him to surrender his longing for children, to give up the ghost of creating something new.

3.0 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a reading of *Zarathustra* that unfolds the experience of its protagonist from a dream about looking in the mirror and confronting oneself. That is, I have sought to articulate the experience that lies at the center of the text. This is the experience of Zarathustra's trials and tribulations throughout the text. While he teaches the death of God and the end of familiar, Judeo-Christian values as well as the need to embrace overcoming, Zarathustra's experiences reveal that such overcoming does not lead us beyond our humanity or our limitations but to their affirmation. This does not change the world. It changes us, reorienting us to life in such a way that we surrender the moral impulse to judge and transform a world we cannot bring ourselves to affirm. Again and again, Zarathustra's desires for a transcendent overcoming are frustrated, and we see him continually resist turning inward, toward himself, to confront the eternal return and find himself – not life – transformed. What this means for Zarathustra, what it leads him to, what his "work" is, how that changes if at all once he has overcome his pity and desire for children, is not clear. But neither Nietzsche nor Zarathustra are interested in us following them to escape our own moral confrontation. What is clear in Zarathustra's story is the struggle to face his own reflection, both his idea of the eternal return and the remaining moral desire for overcoming to signify a "better" world. It is the importance of this struggle, the experience of it, that Nietzsche wishes to communicate, that stands as the central challenge of the text.

Reading *Zarathustra* as a dramatization of Zarathustra's experience reveals what experience Nietzsche wanted his readers to have, what experience he insisted they needed to have to understand the text. While my reading of Zarathustra's experience does lead to a more "deflationary" estimation of the work, it does not reduce the text to a critique of moral aspirations for another world. Rather, we must

realize that intellectually contemplating Zarathustra's self-confrontation is not the same as experiencing such self-confrontation ourselves. To submit to such an experience, we need to gain a greater sense of the moral impulses at work within ourselves. Such moral impulses are exactly what Nietzsche wishes to hook and tease out of his reader in the second, negative half of his philosophy. That is, after composing *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche knows that only half of his philosophical task is complete and that he now must hook readers and reel them into its experience of self-confrontation. But this is only possible once readers have a sense of their own moral rejections of life that keep them from their task. If Zarathustra must confront himself, his desires, and his entanglement in morality to return to his task, a task that lies on the other side of his affirmation of fate, it is important to remember that this process begins because he is pushing his moral desires to the tipping point of their own overcoming. Nietzsche writes in the *Genealogy* that, "All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of necessary 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life," where this "self-overcoming" is not the desire to become something more than human but to let things run their course. Nietzsche does not morally rebuke his readers, his draws out and intensifies their moral desires, bringing them to the point of their own "overcoming."

In the chapters that follow, I turn to three different, influential readings of Nietzsche's late philosophy, to show how Nietzsche rhetorically hooks different readers, how he speaks to their moral desires, their unwillingness to affirm life, the fact that it eternally returns. Once I illuminate the rhetorical hooks of Nietzsche's philosophy and provide an account of the misinterpretations they invite as they indulge the moral impulses of Nietzsche's readers, I then return to the aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy that must be rejected to offer such interpretations. Knowing that Nietzsche's wishes to lead his readers

to *Zarathustra*, to an experience of self-confrontation that resonates with their own, attention to the elements various interpretations must reject brings to light the moral confrontation they wish to flee. Exploring the implications of such confrontations will repeatedly reveal not only the challenge but also the force of the moral confrontation Nietzsche wishes to precipitate in his readers as he brings them to their task of affirming their fate, of "overcoming" slavish forms of morality that keep them from their own self-affirmation.

Chapter 2

Nietzsche and Genealogy: Confronting Our Fear of Self-Knowledge

In the previous chapter, I argued that *Zarathustra* stands at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy as a dramatization of moral confrontation as he relinquishes his otherworldly ambitions and affirms his own personal fate. I also noted Nietzsche's claim that his subsequent philosophy operates as rhetorical "hooks" meant to draw readers back to *Zarathustra*. In this and subsequent chapters, I approach Nietzsche's philosophy from the perspective of influential interpretations to see how his philosophy has rhetorically "hooked" certain readers and what it would mean to lead these interpretations toward their own moral confrontation.

In this chapter, I turn to Michel Foucault's influential reading of Nietzsche as a genealogist to draw out what in Nietzsche's philosophy appeals to the scholar as a type of reader and what does it mean to confront the presence of slave morality in such a figure. Foucault's reading of him turns Nietzsche into a scholar rather than the itinerate philosopher he was. Against Nietzsche's strong stance against the scholarly type as a figure who search for knowledge leads to a lack of self-knowledge, Foucault's interprets Nietzsche as a diligent seeker of historical knowledge himself, a true scholar, nestled away in dusty libraries tracing the documented contingencies of history. However, Foucault's interpretation is drawn to the knowledge that Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* seems to promise and misses how the text seeks to confront the moral compromises of the scholar, who surrenders to the fear of giving true expression to oneself beyond the artificial limits of morality and seeks knowledge as a means of evading self-affirmation.

In what follows, I trace the effects of Nietzsche's rhetoric in the *Genealogy* to see how he hooks scholarly readers. Nietzsche does so through several rhetorical strategies, including his repeated imitation and then subversion of scholarly modes of writing, his reflexive critique of the scholar's own *ressentiment*, and his appeal to the scholar's feelings of superiority over religion. Each of these strategies initially seems to hold out the promise of historical knowledge, knowledge that will free us from the past and grant us insight into ourselves. But each then turns back on the scholarly reader and seeks to confront the drive to knowledge itself with its own moral assumptions and compromises. In particular, Nietzsche wishes to confront how the pursuit of knowledge leads us to flee from the dangers of affirming ourselves outside the bounds of conventional morality.

In the next two sections (1.0-1.1) I lay the groundwork for my subsequent reading of the *Genealogy*. The first introduces Foucault's reading of Nietzsche as a genealogist, demonstrates a shared tension in the writing of Nietzsche and Foucault, and suggests that the connection between them is not a shared view of genealogy but a specific rhetorical practice. The second introduces the *Genealogy* by attending to Nietzsche's own comments about the text. The next set of sections (2.0-2.3) are devoted to each respective section of the *Genealogy*. Each presents a reading that traces Nietzsche's rhetorical appeals to a specifically scholarly audience and unpacks his attempt to induce moral and psychological self-confrontation. Then, in the final section (3.0), I conclude by unpacking the implications my reading has for those seduced by the more common genealogical reading and raise two further questions that invite us to enter the space of confronting our own fears as we risk looking at ourselves in the mirror of Nietzsche's text.

1.0 Foucault's Interpretation of Nietzsche

In this section, I present Foucault's account of genealogy, rehearse important differences between Foucault and Nietzsche, and argue that what unites the two thinkers is not a shared commitment to genealogy but a similar rhetorical strategy. Providing an account of Foucault's reading of Nietzsche is necessary, for in the following sections I do not offer a reading of the *Genealogy* as such but a reading of the relationship between the text and the type of reader Foucault is. This "type" is that of the scholar, the figure who seeks truth and knowledge in an increasingly scientific or positivist manner. Next, I point to the dissimilarities between Nietzsche and Foucault that have already been established in the secondary literature to disabuse us of the common assumption that what unites them is a shared understanding of and commitment to genealogy. Finally, I point out a similar tension in their thinking between the descriptive claims they make and the normative agendas they secretly try to advance to tease out that Foucault's true indebtedness to Nietzsche is rhetorical rather than genealogical. This section then ends with a question, namely, whether Nietzsche and Foucault adopt similar rhetorical practices to the same moral end, and it is this question that then frames my own reading of the relationship between the *Genealogy* and the scholarly type.

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Anyone who has read Nietzsche's *Genealogy* knows it is a wild book, full of tangents, rants, inductive leaps, and disturbing speculations. However, Foucault offers a reading of it that turns Nietzsche into something of a traditional scholar. From the first words of his influential essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault writes, "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied

many times."[1] Foucault's emphasis here is on the records of history, relics that may be hard to decipher but that have a material existence and can be patiently, objectively observed, studied, and inspected. By calling genealogy "gray" Foucault deliberately echoes Nietzsche's own remark that this should be the color of genealogy contrary to the erroneous genealogies of others that engage in wild "hypothesis-mongering into the *blue*."[2] Thus, Foucault's desire to align himself with Nietzsche is clear from the beginning, as he seems eager to flesh out what it means for genealogy to be "gray."

Foucault's reading of Nietzsche as a typical scholar interested in genealogy has grabbed the attention of numerous scholars, but its influence is due more to the persuasiveness of Foucault's work than to an attentiveness to the rhetorical intricacies of Nietzsche's text. The writing of genealogies has exploded in the last few decades, establishing itself as a new genre of academic writing. More than any other figure, it is Foucault who has had the greatest influence and who is most often cited. However, the popularity of genealogies now exists alongside a growing body of Nietzsche scholarship that stands opposed to Foucault's relatively literal reading of genealogy. Today, almost no Nietzsche scholar reads the *Genealogy* as a serious historical work or as a model of "gray" genealogy.[3] Of all the most recent books published on

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980 [1971]), 76.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Preface §7.

[3] I have found only one example of a Nietzsche scholar who argues that the *Genealogy* should be read literally. See Mark Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006). But this view is dwarfed by a body of literature that not only focuses on the rhetorical dimension of the *Genealogy* but does so because of the issue of the genetic fallacy. See Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Mark Bevir, "What is Genealogy," *Journal of the Philosophy of History 2*, (2008): 263-275; Daniel W. Conway, "Genealogy and Critical Method," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 318-333; Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, (London: Continuum, 2008); Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Cousens Hoy, "Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 251-268;

the *Genealogy*, the emphasis has instead been placed on understanding its rhetorical dimensions, with most scholars sidestepping the question of the veracity of Nietzsche's historical arguments. This recent emphasis is due to scholars needing to find a way around a logical fallacy present in Nietzsche's arguments. Simply put, Nietzsche's arguments in the *Genealogy* fall prey to the genetic fallacy, the logical mistake of deriving the intrinsic value of something from its origin. For most scholars, there is no debating the presence of the genetic fallacy in the *Genealogy*, as Nietzsche explicitly argues that he is attacking Christian values by exposing their decadent origins in resentment and cruelty. Thus, scholars have turned to rhetorical readings of the *Genealogy* to salvage Nietzsche's philosophy from its logical incoherence. Given this, Foucault's reading of Nietzsche as a practitioner of "gray" genealogy has become increasingly untenable, at least as an attentive reading of Nietzsche.

While Foucault's claim about grayness is questionable, it is not the only claim Foucault makes about Nietzsche and genealogy. Central to Foucault's reading is the notion of descent, or of the distinction between two different understandings of descent. The first is that of the typical historian, to whom both Nietzsche and Foucault are opposed. Such historians still have something metaphysical or religious lingering in their thinking, for they are interested in telling grand, totalizing narratives about history that gather a myriad of facts together, uniting them under a single, God-like theme or idea that can

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Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul S. Loeb, "Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals?" *International Studies in Philosophy* 27(3), (1995): 125-141; Alexander Nehamas, "The Genealogy of Genealogy," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006): 57-65; David Owen, *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*, (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007); James I. Porter, "Nietzsche's Genealogy as Performative Critique," in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 119-136; Robert C. Solomon, "One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 95-126; Richard White, "The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals,"" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 48(4), (1988): 683-696.

demonstrate not only a clear, teleological continuity or sense of progress through time, but can hide or silence all the contingencies and idiosyncrasies that would disrupt their narrative.[4] Their aim in providing such histories is to construct and fix social identities and infuse them with a clear meaning or purpose. However, the consequence of the historian's project is that it reifies history and social identities, encapsulating them in ways that hide alternative possibilities, freezing the free play of contingency, and leading them dangerously close to essentialisms that can easily be coopted into forms of domination. This is where a genealogical concept of descent offers an alternative account of history as a process rife with contingency and the hidden workings of power. Attention to such details can disrupt homogenizing historical narratives, expose forms of social domination, and reopen questions about history, identity, and subjectivity.

Foucault's reading of Nietzsche as a thinker of descent is more compelling than his claim that genealogy is gray, for Nietzsche did oppose the lingering theological commitments of historians, seek to expose the historical play of contingency and power, and wish to open alternative possibilities regarding who we are and the moral narratives we tell ourselves. But what falls out of Foucault's account is *why* Nietzsche was interested in the question of descent. As we will see in more detail, Nietzsche was interested in offering accounts of descent that exposed the hidden workings of power, domination, and exploitation because he wished to drive home the difference between two ideal types of morality, that of master and slave. One of the key differences between these ideal types was their relationship to existential forms of suffering. Master morality finds ways to affirm suffering, to accept it as a part of life, to not have

[4] Foucault, "Nietzsche," 91-92.

it determine the narratives we tell about ourselves, other people, or society. Slave morality, on the contrary, is largely defined by its need to alleviate suffering through the construction of beliefs, meanings, and habits that result in dangerous compensations for physical, psychological, and emotional harm. For Nietzsche, the question of our orientation to suffering is paramount, and he sought to expose power in terms of its relation to suffering not to criticize it but to force his audience to reflect on their own moral reactions to it.

The moral dimension of the question of descent not only falls out of Foucault's account of genealogy but is omitted in all his major works, and this has opened him up to the charge of "cryptonormativity." In his many methodological statements about genealogy and his work in general, Foucault repeatedly insisted that he maintained a normatively neutral position. This aspect of his work is well known and the subject of considerable criticism, for while Foucault professed normative neutrality in his accounts of historical relations of power, his philosophy is shot through with normative implications. His analyses of historical discourses and the intersections of power and knowledge always take place in relation to those who suffer: the insane, the hospitalized, the incarcerated, sexual minorities. Furthermore, his language constantly rails against inscribed forms of power that are not authorized by those subjected to them. This tension in Foucault's thinking has led several prominent scholars to accuse him of "cryptonormativity," of hiding a normative agenda behind his supposedly neutral method of historical inquiry. The consequences of this, his critics argue, are that Foucault's analysis become relativistic, misleading, imprecise, and reductive, seemingly promising insight into largescale historical processes

while obscuring the real complexities of history and hiding the moral impetus that motivates his thinking.[5]

Against accusations of cryptonormativity, both Foucault and more contemporary practitioners of genealogy have offered a rhetorical defense of his work, curiously in much the same way Nietzsche is defended by scholars against the accusation of the genetic fallacy. In interviews, Foucault claimed his work was much humbler than critics assumed. He acknowledged the partiality of his historical studies, of the fact that he was only trying to isolate specific elements of history, and stated that he was not offering any kind of totalizing narrative or a theory of power.[6] More contemporary scholars have offered a similar defense, insisting that regardless of how strongly Foucault's arguments are worded, they operate with an understanding of the contestability of all largescale historical narratives and are thus rhetorical attempts to tell alternative genealogies of history that have the effect of shaking us out of preconceived notions and dogmatic assumptions, as well as alerting us to hidden forms of domination.

However, the rhetorical defense Foucault and his followers offer is curious because it bases itself on Foucault's rhetoric but ignores one of the most common, near-ubiquitous experiences of reading his work. When one reads the major works of Foucault for the first time, everything up to his final "ethical" years, the impression is completely different from the effect it is supposed to have. For readers are often

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[5] For more on the criticisms of Foucault, see Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," *PRAXIS International*, 3, (1981): 272-287; Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity, 1998 [1985]); Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory*, 12(2), (1984): 152-183.

[6] While there are several such statements in Foucault's oeuvre, one of the clearest is found in Michel Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38-39. For other defenses of Foucault by scholars indebted to his method of genealogy, see William E. Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory*, 13(3), (1985): 365-376; James Tully, "To Think and Act Differently," in James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key Volume I,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 71-132.

struck with the sense that Foucault is speaking definitively about large swathes of history, pinpointing shifts in thinking and the techniques of power that determine entire ages, and that his conceptualizations of power, both in detail and scale, seem to leave no place for agency.[7] In this way, though Foucault tells his readers counter-histories where the overall impression is that he is spinning large historical narratives of his own, in ways that are not entirely unlike that of the typical histories he criticizes in his account of genealogy.

That the success and the internal logical tension in Foucault's work find mirror reflections in Nietzsche and his respective philosophy is no accident. Both thinkers hide normative agendas behind the guise of historical claims, and this is the result of a shared rhetorical commitment, if not intentional, then actual. Both make appeals in the guise of science because it is the discourse of truth in their historical moment. But neither is entirely committed to it. Nietzsche, as we will see, practices it in an intentionally misleading way with the aim to call it into question. And Foucault seems to have broken with it after encountering the rhetorical power of Nietzsche's philosophy, for as he said in a late interview:

> my relation to Nietzsche has not been historical. The actual history of Nietzsche's thought interests me less than the kind of challenge I felt one day, a long time ago, reading Nietzsche for the first time. When you open *The Gay Science* after you have been trained in the great, time-honored university traditions – Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl – and you come across these rather strange, witty, graceful texts, you say: Well, I won't do what my contemporaries, colleagues or professors are doing; I won't just dismiss this. What is the maximum of philosophical intensity and what are the current philosophical effects to be found in these texts? That, for me, was the challenge of Nietzsche.[8]

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[7] Obviously, when the later works are taken into consideration, this impression of Foucault changes. But here I am interested in the rhetorical effect of the works that brough Foucault into a prominent intellectual position.

[8] Michel Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33. [There is another passage that may need to be worked in that I found while editing: "Nietzsche's contemporary presence is increasingly important. But I am tired of people studying him only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilize the writers I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest." In the "Prison Talk," in *Power/Knowledge*, 53].

Here, years after Foucault's famous reading of Nietzsche as a genealogist, he admits that he is not interested in a historical reading of Nietzsche, that is, he is not interested in discerning the substance of Nietzsche's thinking, in looking for something akin to intentionality. Instead, Foucault is drawn to the "philosophical intensity" of Nietzsche's philosophy, of the rhetorical experience of reading it, realizing that this is where the real challenge of Nietzsche lies. Given this, Foucault's tie to Nietzsche is found in his shared fascination with creating the "maximum of philosophical intensity" through the rhetorical delivery of his thinking, not in an account of genealogy as a methodological orientation to the study of history. If this shared rhetorical commitment is really what binds these thinkers together, then it is not surprising that Foucault would seemingly miss the confrontational dimension of Nietzsche's genealogies, for it is simply not what he is after.

However, if the rhetorical strategy of hiding normative aims behind scientific claims is what unites Foucault and Nietzsche, the question remains of what more substantive, confrontational reading of Nietzsche Foucault must disregard. Because such a reading pertains to the moral distinction Nietzsche wishes to draw between master and slave morality, we might question what category Foucault's thinking would fall, or, rather, what aspects of his thinking may still be entangled in aspects of slave morality. Foucault may be unbothered by reading Nietzsche as mainly a source of rhetorical inspiration, but here I am interested in what such a reading misses, of what a more confrontational reading of the *Genealogy* has to say in relation and response to Foucault's interpretation. To that task we now turn.

1.1 A Brief Introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morals*

As a way of introducing the *Genealogy*, I will attend to three comments Nietzsche has made about it. The first thing to note is that there is a special relationship between the *Genealogy* and Nietzsche's previous work, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Walter Kaufmann originally noted that the title page to the *Genealogy* is followed by the words "A sequel to my last book *Beyond Good and Evil*." While Kaufmann identifies Nietzsche's explicit declaration of the close relationship between these texts, Lawrence Hatab has further defined the substantive weight of this connection. Noting that Nietzsche describes *Beyond* as a critique of modernity, Hatab notes that while "questions of ethics and politics are at the core of the *Genealogy* it should be recognized that its critique of "morality" is also a gateway to larger questions of knowledge, truth, and meaning, the traditional approaches to which Nietzsche diagnoses as likewise harboring moralistic judgments against life."[9] That is, there is a great deal happening in the *Genealogy*, and without drawing connections to *Beyond* they are not entirely clear. Indeed, Nietzsche himself notes in the *Genealogy* that some of his arguments will be unintelligible to readers unfamiliar with his other works. Here, I am not fully devoted to mapping all the connections between these texts, but I underscore Hatab's reminder, for a reader of the *Genealogy* must come to the text with some familiarity with *Beyond*. In the reading that follows, I make several contributions to further mapping the connections between these texts and how an understanding of their close relationship illuminates both.

[9] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

Second, Nietzsche tells us what the *Genealogy* is about in *Ecce*.[10] The substance of Nietzsche's comments is about overturning Christianity as itself a stand-in or the most recent manifestation of slave morality. Thus, Nietzsche wishes to reveal a number of disturbing "truths," namely, that the moral psychology of Christianity does not emanate from God but is itself the product of human resentment, that the moral phenomenon of conscience is not the voice of God but the product of the historical process of the inward turning of human cruelty, and that the ascetic ideal has been at the root of all human interpretations of life not because it was commanded by God but because no alternative ideal has ever existed. But, as scholars have noted, Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity are not primarily aimed at Christian believers or even the religious. Instead, Nietzsche criticizes Christianity as an easy target, deriding it in ways his readers are likely to agree with. The rhetorical aim being to get his readers to agree with him about Christianity before he then reveals how the same moral and psychological dynamics at work within it persist in other, secular forms to which they are committed.[11]

Third, Nietzsche does more than announce what each of the essays of the *Genealogy* is about. He also alludes to *how* they are written and provides clues as to what he is trying to *do* with his arguments:

> With regard to expression, intention, and the art of surprise, the three essays that make up this *Genealogy* are perhaps the most uncanny things written so far...In each case, a beginning that *should* be deceptive: cool, scientific, even ironic, intentionally foreground, intentionally evasive. Gradually increasing unrest; scattered moments of sheet

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136.

[11] For more on how Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity are not aimed at Christian believers, see Ken Gemes, "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 193; Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2; Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

> lighting; the muffled roar of very unpleasant truths becoming increasingly audible in the distance – until finally a *tempo feroce* is reached where everything presses forward with a tremendous tension.[12]

In this passage, Nietzsche clues us into the experience of reading the *Genealogy*. He tells us that the opening of each chapter is misleading, that he presents himself in a "scientific" manner – though, we do not yet know why – only to gradually reveal something very different from the opening themes of each chapter. Knowing this, we must bracket the opening topics of each chapter: Nietzsche's debate with genealogists over the origin of the good, his historical account of how human beings became capable of making promises, his typography of different types of people and the meanings of ascetic ideals in their respective ways of life. Knowing that the opening of each essay is misleading and that the real "truths" Nietzsche is interested in gradually emerge with increasing force leads our attention just as much if not more to *how* Nietzsche is making his arguments as to *what* they are about. It is only in exploring this relationship that we will begin to discern the confrontational task of the *Genealogy* and the "tremendous tension" it seeks to create in its readers.

But to understand *how* Nietzsche's text works rhetorically, we must first answer the question to whom they are addressed, for a specific rhetorical dimension of a text only exists in relation to a specific type of reader. With different readers there are different reactions. So, who does the text take itself to be addressing? Luckily, Nietzsche answers this question from the start.

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135-136.

2.0 The Preface: An Honest Account of Oneself

In this section, I highlight how the preface to the *Genealogy* opens as a direct address that names its reader and announces the two levels of discourse that run the length of the *Genealogy*. One is clear, comfortably familiar. It presents itself substantively as an autobiographical preface followed by largely historical arguments that seek to dislodge the remnants of slave morality still stuck within the pursuits of scholarly knowers. But on another level, the *Genealogy* is calling readers to abandon all commitments to truth and morality and confront the dangerous task of self-affirmation, of letting forces larger than oneself find expression in one's life.

From the first words of the preface, Nietzsche cryptically addresses his readers in a disorienting and presumptive manner by naming them, describing them, and associating them with himself: "We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers..."[13] He then continues with a series of bewildering ascriptions. First, Nietzsche compares himself and his readers to bees who gather knowledge rather than honey. This curious identification is then religiously coded when Nietzsche pulls from the Book of Matthew the famous line "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," further implying that such knowers have overlooked what is of true value.[14] Then Nietzsche shifts to yet another description, this time asserting that he and his readers are radically disconnected from their own sensorial experiences. To illustrate, Nietzsche writes that "we" are like people who hear a bell ring, try to count the number of times it tolls, and lose count because of how disconnected we are from ourselves and our experience, unable to keep track of even our most immediate sensations.

[13] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §1.
[14] Matthew 6:21.

All these rapidly applied descriptions leave readers disoriented and confused, wondering: "What does Nietzsche mean by "knowers"? Is this an accurate description of me as the reader of this text? How can he possibly know that I lack self-knowledge? What if I am not such a knower? Is this work for me? What is the function of this curious, rhetorical beginning? Why does Nietzsche include himself in this group of knowers? Does Nietzsche still lack self-knowledge? Are we in this together, we knowers who lack self-knowledge, or is Nietzsche describing something he once had in common with fellow knowers and has now moved beyond?" To these questions, Nietzsche offers no immediate answers, leaving his readers on edge. But he does not leave them there for long.

For initial readers, the threat of this bewildering blitz of questions is assuaged as the next section lets them "off the hook" by engaging in the first of several rhetorical digressions that mark the pages of the *Genealogy*.[15] Dispensing with the curious address of the first section, Nietzsche begins the second in a more familiar way, with a clear thesis statement. Nietzsche states, "the *descent* of our moral prejudices…is what this polemic is about." Then he turns his attention in the rest of the preface to an autobiographical account of his ideas. Interestingly, in his account Nietzsche ties the development of his ideas back to a constant drive within himself, what he suggestively refers to as "my a priori," namely, an incessant skepticism toward all moral values. He relates how, as a child in school, this drive pushed him to seek the origin of moral values, of how it led him to write a juvenile treatise on the origin of evil that laid the blame at the feet of God. He then relates how later he realized that a satisfactory answer to the origin of

[15] Ken Gemes has pointed out this strategy of gradually approaching and then retreating from the full implications of Nietzsche's arguments and has rightly argued that Nietzsche adopts this approach to bypass unconscious resistances on the part of the reader, to keep them attached to a narrative that seeks to precipitate painful self-confrontation. Ken Gemes, "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006): 191-208. Cf. *Meditations*, 237; *Wanderer* §98; *Science*, §381.

moral values could not be found in supernatural entities beyond this world but must be sought in the material and contingent process of this one. And, finally, he relates how the question of origin began to bloom into a second, perhaps even more important question, not about the origin but rather of the value of moral values.[16]

Scholars have noted that the more familiar address of the second section reassures and distracts readers puzzled and perturbed by the address of the first.[17] But if this change of address temporarily lets new readers off the hook, it has the opposite effect for those more familiar with Nietzsche's biography and philosophy. For when we attend to the presumptions Nietzsche is making about who his readers are, what in his own life motivates the content and manner of his address, and how his autobiographical account hangs together with the arguments of his previous work, *Beyond Good and Evil*,[18] we see that Nietzsche is doing a lot more than providing an account of the development of his ideas. Instead, he is silently modeling the form of self-knowledge he will eventually challenge his readers to embrace.

Biographically, Nietzsche was literally a professional "knower," as he held a post in the philology department at the University of Basel from 1869 to 1879. But, as Martine Béland has noted, Nietzsche never felt at home in the ivory tower. As he writes in *Ecce*, Nietzsche never wanted to or even tried to acquire such a post, he just found himself there.[19] But this piece of fate was not fortuitous, as Nietzsche

[16] In this paragraph, I am summarizing the biographical details Nietzsche elaborates throughout §§2-6.
[17] For more on this, see Jeremy Fortier, *The Challenge of Nietzsche*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 23; Ken Gemes, "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 192; Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.
[18] Hatab, *Genealogy*, 2.
[19] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Why I am so clever," §9.

increasingly felt that having an academic career and living a philosophical life were irreconcilable tasks. While there were multiple reasons for this, Béland notes that one of them was that:

> [Nietzsche] noticed that like marriages, successful careers are extremely rare because "one *chooses* a profession when one is not yet able to choose: one does not know the different professions, one does not know oneself." He thereby identified a cause of the failure of a career: one can choose the wrong profession when one does not yet know oneself. While he was speaking on his own behalf, Nietzsche was also considering that most scholars do not have the right job for them: they sit in their chair because they wrongly interpreted their passion.[20]

The problem with wrongly interpreting one's passion and then finding oneself in the academy is that Nietzsche felt that the greater part of his time and energies were increasingly subject to institutional pressures to produce academics commodities. This left him with little time to devote to philosophy, and it changed his relationship to it. He felt he was losing a "living" relationship to philosophy. In place of such a dynamic and personal relationship, a relationship that shapes one's life, philosophy increasingly became something to intellectualize and write books *about* and ceased to be a task to devote oneself to, to be the thing to which one's life gave expression.

And it is more than his biography that stresses the importance of self-knowledge, for there is a muted dialogue between the *Genealogy* and *Beyond*. We see this connection in the shared language between the texts. Throughout the *Genealogy*'s preface, Nietzsche uses the familiar, figurative language of plants, gardens, and growth to speak of the development of his ideas and at one point even ascribes to himself a "will to knowledge":

> The fact *that* I still stick to them today [i.e. his own ideas], and that they themselves in the meantime have stuck together increasingly firmly, even growing into one another, makes me all the more blithely confident that from the first, they did not arise in me individually, randomly or sporadically but as stemming from a single root, from a

[20] Martine Béland, "Vocation and Therapy," in *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching*, eds. Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 20. Interestingly, Hollingdale also puts forth similar passages as the preface to his chapter on Nietzsche as a professor, see R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 47. Cf. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 106.

> *fundamental will* to knowledge deep inside me which took control, speaking more and more clearly and making ever clearer demands.[21]

This invocation of the will to knowledge resonates with the entirety of the first book of *Beyond*, which is devoted to something incredibly similar. There, Nietzsche questions the "will to truth" as the supposed motive all philosophers claim as their own, arguing that it is not truth that is being sought. Instead, Nietzsche argues that the intellectual pursuits of philosophers, seemingly arrived at through cold, insouciant reason, are retroactive rationalizations meant to disguise the true origin of their philosophical systems, namely, the largely unconscious instinctual drives within them that wish to perpetuate a particular form of life.[22]

In the context of *Beyond*, it is tempting to think that Nietzsche is critical of the will to truth, for he seems to disparage philosophers according to their dishonesty. But when he ascribes such a will to himself in an approving tone it becomes clear things are more complicated. Clearly, Nietzsche's criticism of other philosophers is their dishonesty, for he writes "there is not enough genuine honesty about them,"[23] but it is not initially clear what is problematic about it. It cannot be that philosophers are driven by unconscious drives, for in the *Genealogy*, as we have already seen, Nietzsche affirms the working of the will to truth in himself as something instinctual. It also cannot be the mere fact of dishonesty, for in

[21] Nietzsche, *GM*, Preface §2. Nietzsche then goes on to elaborate: "And this is the only thing proper for a philosopher. We have no right to stand out *individually*: we must not either make mistakes or hit on the truth individually. Instead, our thoughts, values, every 'yes,' 'no,' 'if' and 'but' grow out of us with the same inevitability as fruits borne on the tree – all related and referring to one another and a testimonial to one will, one health, one earth, one sun. – Do you like the taste of our fruit? – But of what concern is that to the trees? And of what concern is it to *us* philosophers?"

[22] While almost the entirety of the first section of *Beyond* is relevant here, the most concentrated instance of this argument occurs in §5.

[23] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §5.

Beyond Nietzsche affirms lying and the abandonment of truth as part of realizing a philosophy beyond good and evil.[24]

Nietzsche's problem with the dishonesty of philosophers is not tied to their instinctual motivations or their mendacious arguments. Rather it is tied to how their dishonesty disguises what distinguishes them from scholars or academic philosophers. Because the entirety of the *Genealogy* will be devoted to pulling the figures of the philosopher and the scholar apart, of elucidating the all-important difference between the search for knowledge and embracing the dangers of self-affirmation, we do not yet see the full ark of Nietzsche's argument, but in *Beyond* he is already concerned with this confusion. There, Nietzsche warns his readers that the name "philosopher" covers over the difference between true philosophers and scholars,[25] where the central difference between them is that while scholars have a distant, intellectual relationship to knowledge, philosophers have a living relationship to knowledge such that it is only ever self-knowledge. What this means is that philosophers only seek knowledge as it potentially impinges on their lives. Thus, they learn affectively and emotionally as well as intellectually and are incapable of separating what they know from what they do. Nietzsche characterizes them as individuals who live dangerously, daring to create values and give expression to their unconscious drives. Indeed, the philosopher's search for knowledge is just another name for this expression of unconscious drives.[26]

[24] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §4.
[25] Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §§39, 205, 220.
[26] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §§205, 210.

Contrarily, Nietzsche repeatedly calls scholars "mediocre" because their search for knowledge is not directly tied to an expression of their inner, unconscious drives *nor* is it really a search for intellectual knowledge. For Nietzsche, the issue with the typical scholar is not that they have an intellectual relationship to knowledge but that even the search for knowledge ultimately becomes secondary to their true motivation to attain comfort. Indeed, Nietzsche is scathing toward the figure of the scholar, claiming that it lacks the courage to attain true insight, that its thinking is sluggish, that it has compromised the task of giving expression to itself in exchange for a life of comfort and ease, and that it feels a need for nobility that is itself ignoble, for such a need discloses the lack of prerequisite faith every noble possesses.[27]

Bringing the contrast between philosophers and scholars from *Beyond* to the preface of the *Genealogy* reveals that Nietzsche is starting this text by deliberately putting himself and his work forward as an example of an honest philosopher with a philosophy that is centrally concerned with self-knowledge as a form of noble self-affirmation. While Nietzsche will not give everything away in the preface, we see that he is setting the stage with his bewildering criticism of knowers and his account of the garden of ideas that grow out of him as an expression of something greater than his own individuality. We see this best in the justification of his arguments, for Nietzsche does not claim that his ideas are valuable because they are true but because of the length of time he has held them, because they have continued to grow out of him. This is not a typical philosophical argument or means of justification, but it is Nietzsche's direct confession that he is giving expression to his drives, his "a priori," where his skepticism is itself blooming

[27] For more of Nietzsche's reflections on scholars in *Beyond*, see §§6, 45, 137, 206, 213, 287.

into a self-conscious philosophy of self-affirmation and an attack on the moral obstacles that stand in its way.

2.1 The First Essay: Confronting the Fear behind *Ressentiment*

Seeing Nietzsche's autobiography in the preface as an instance of putting himself forward as a counter example to "knowers," one that can no longer be confused with the scholar, helps us see that the rest of the *Genealogy* will strategically confront readers with the obstacles that stand in the way of their own self-affirmation. In the first essay, this takes the form of confronting readers with their fear of master morality. Indeed, in addition to the more familiar theme of *ressentiment*, I wish to bring into focus the reader's fear of the blonde beast – so often demonized for historical, political, and moral reasons – that represents the challenge of embracing master morality.[28] Too often, readings of the first essay focus almost exclusively on *ressentiment*. It becomes a problem to diagnose, a psychological force to identify in history, in ourselves, and in those around us. Undoubtedly, there is a reason for this, as *ressentiment* is one of the central themes of the essay. But there is another reason for this, namely, that Nietzsche's presentation of *ressentiment* itself embodies a resentful narrative and is meant to rhetorically tap into the affective register of Nietzsche's readers, of scholars who are not too far from the figure of the priest. Thus, the resentment Nietzsche knows is in his readers is invited to express itself in the diagnosis and denigration of the figure of the priest.

A second reason the centrality of fear has been overlooked in readings of the first essay is due to another of Nietzsche's rhetorical strategies, namely, in his appeal to the scholar's feelings of superiority over religion. In *Beyond*, Nietzsche writes of the scholar that they condescend to religion, seeing it

[28] For more on the overrepresentation of *ressentiment*, see Mark Alfano, *Nietzsche's Moral Psychology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26.

beneath themselves and struggling to take it seriously as anything other than a historical artifact.[29] Knowing this, Nietzsche's criticism of *ressentiment* as an attribute of the religious figure of the priest feeds into these feelings of superiority, making it easier for his readers to believe him. Though Nietzsche only means to draw his readers in this way, ultimately revealing that his criticisms of the priest extend to his readers as well, it is tempting for scholarly readers to miss or overlook this shift in Nietzsche's argumentation and remain fixated on the figure of the priest. Likewise, it is too easy for them to avoid the fact that Nietzsche's diagnosis of *ressentiment* is meant to lead them a step further, to confront the beast-like qualities of master morality that are rightly perceived as terrifying.

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In *Ecce*, Nietzsche writes that the "truth of the *first* essay is the psychology of Christianity: the birth of Christianity out of a spirit of *ressentiment*, *not*, as is believed, out of the 'spirit.'"[30] Substantively, this is true. The first essay is about *ressentiment* as the psychological mechanism or motivation that underwrites Christian morality, which is itself an instance of the ideal type of "slave morality." Essentially, over the course of the first essay Nietzsche argues that there are two opposed ideal types of morality, master and slave. The central features that distinguish between them are either a psychology that is primarily self-focused, seeking to affirm oneself, one's values, and one's actions, or else a psychology of resentment that is focused on the figure of another as something threatening than must be declared "evil" and rendered harmless through the creation of a reactive morality that makes their existence socially impossible.

[29] For more on the scholar's feelings of superiority, see *Beyond,* §§58, 204, 263.
[30] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, p. 136.

But if *ressentiment* is what the first essay is *about*, it does not account for all that Nietzsche is rhetorically *doing*. To understand the rhetorical complexity of the first essay, we need to recognize that Nietzsche draws his readers in by loosely adopting more familiar scholarly modes of argumentation. As Hatab has noted, part of the reason for the growing popularity of the *Genealogy* is that it more closely resembles a scholarly text, and we see this in how Nietzsche adopts several familiar conventions.[31] In the first half of the essay, Nietzsche directly engages with "fellow" genealogists (§§1-3), makes historical claims about master morality based on etymological evidence (§§4-5), and constructs a counterfactual account of the historical development of the moral notion of "goodness" (§§6-8). All these familiar forms of argumentation put the scholarly reader at ease. But, as we know from Nietzsche's comments in *Ecce*, all this is misleading.

In addition to utilizing familiar modes of address, Nietzsche is rhetorically playing into the scholar's superiority over religion. As soon as Nietzsche begins to tell his counterfactual history, it immediately focuses on the figure of the priest. The priest is described as sickly and conniving and while there is a certain level of ambivalence in Nietzsche's account for the reader, an initial reader feels the overwhelming, nearly insulting force of Nietzsche evaluations, of his judgment of the priest. This initial impression is partly due to how fast and intensely Nietzsche's animosity toward the priest ramps up, for over the course of only three sections (§§6-8) he moves from a more ambivalent account that stresses the inaction and ill health of the priest as well as their contribution to the cleverness of humanity to an

[31] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

outright condemnation of the priest as a figure that represents the hatred and resentment of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its daring attempt to code these affects as "love."

The growing intensity of Nietzsche's criticism of the priest comes to a sudden stop at the pivotal §9. Here, Nietzsche breaks the flow of his writing to ventriloquize a democratic objection to his own argument. The objection runs: "What is the point of this historical story, of this desire to retrieve noble morality? The fact is that democracy is here, and nobility is gone. Why criticize the church when no one is a believer anymore, when the church with its antiquated ways more often releases rather than enslaves people to its morality?"

Nietzsche's response to this objection is initially cryptic, as he ends the section stating that the objection comes about as the result of his silence. But there are things to glean here. First, Nietzsche embeds a feeling of superiority over religion into this objection and sets himself up to respond to the question of the true purpose of his religious arguments. Next, Nietzsche calls the objection an "epilogue" to his argument, suggesting that at the end of §8, his argument has come full circle. Thus, when he picks things up again in §10, he is not simply continuing the argument he interrupted in §9 but is beginning again, this time in response to the objection he has posed to himself. If part of the objection Nietzsche is staging is that religious criticism is ineffectual, his response is that the figure of the priest is a stand in for a type of psychology, one intimately tied up with *ressentiment* and slave morality. This is not something the reader needs to surmise, but is what Nietzsche announces at the end of the essay:

> Let us draw to a close. The two *opposing* values [of master and slave morality] 'good and bad,' 'good and evil' have fought a terrible battle for thousands of years on earth; and although the latter has been dominant for a long time, there is still no lack of places where the battle remains undecided. You could even say that, in the meantime, it has reached ever greater heights but at the same time has become ever deeper and more intellectual; so that there is, today,

> perhaps no more distinguishing feature of '*higher nature*,' the intellectual nature, than to be divided in this sense and really and truly a battle ground for these opposites.[32]

Here Nietzsche transforms the historical tension between master and slave morality into a psychological dynamic operating within all modern subjects. That is, at the end of the essay, Nietzsche reveals that his entire discussion of the figure of the priest and the noble warrior, the representatives of slave morality and master morality, has been a way of talking about the inner, moral tension of different drives within the modern subject. Thus, we see that Nietzsche's supposedly historical argument has had psychological and confrontational aims all along, that the priestly figure of *ressentiment* is a part of our very selves.

The shift from a historical argument to a psychological one begins at the start of §10, as Nietzsche ceases to be silent and introduces the concept of *ressentiment*. Interestingly, just as Nietzsche gives his most detailed account of the psychology of *ressentiment*, of that which defines slave morality, the historical figure of the priest drops out of his account. Instead of staying focused on the figure of the priest, Nietzsche provides an abstract account of master and slave morality, where the former is characterized by its self-affirmation and the latter by its denigration of the other.

Nietzsche's shift into a psychological register forces an interpretative choice on the reader. On the one hand, Nietzsche's account of *ressentiment* can be read as a further elaboration of the priest and of slave morality. If this approach is taken, Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment* can be extrapolated to other contexts. But to read Nietzsche this way covers over that his own account of the priest is subject to the same analysis he offers of *ressentiment*. That is, Nietzsche's account of *ressentiment* can be read as either a further elaboration of the priest and/or as the confession of his own manner of treating the figure of

[32] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§16.

the priest. Up to this moment, the figure of the noble and of self-affirmation has been thin at best. Nietzsche's focus has been the figure of the priest, and the amount of hatred aimed at it – even considering Nietzsche's ambivalent remarks – orients the reader to what should be rejected rather than what should be affirmed.

When we realize that the figure of the priest is a rhetorical strategy that invites us to criticize ourselves, our own psychologies of *ressentiment*, it becomes clear that our task is not to search out other instances of *ressentiment* but to confront and overcome it. Nietzsche is clear about how *ressentiment* must be overcome: through self-affirmation. And he offers a model of this, for in his account of *ressentiment* are several sections devoted to fleshing out what a noble psychology of self-affirmation requires. But while the direction of Nietzsche's argument is clear, few have been able to follow it because it leads us to the figure of the blonde beast.

The figure of the blonde beast has not escaped notice or scholarly comment. But given that it illustrates the desire to commit heinous crimes without remorse and its historical and political association with Aryanism, the blonde beast has been a problem for interpreters of Nietzsche. Most commonly, the figure is either denounced or else its rough edges disappear in rhetorical readings that turn it into the symbol of a psychological drive.[33] What such interpretations miss is the question of the *function* of the blonde beast. Scanning the second half of the first essay (§§10-17), it is surprising given the amount of weight placed upon it in the secondary literature, that Nietzsche's discussion of *ressentiment* takes place in only a single section (§10) while his account of the blonde beast occupies him

[33] For an example of the latter, see Richard White, "The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals,"" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 48(4), (1988): 683-696.

for four (§§10-13). Moreover, Nietzsche's emphasis on the beast is twofold. There is the more readily acknowledged part of Nietzsche's argument that deep down, if we were to find ourselves in the right circumstances, we would all give in to deep desires to commit heinous crimes:

> the same people who are so strongly held in check by custom, respect, habit, gratitude, and even more through spying on one another and through peer-group jealousy, who, on the other hand, behave towards one another by showing such resourcefulness in consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship – they are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey in the world outside where the strange, the foreign, begin. There they enjoy freedom from every social constraint, in the wilderness they compensate for the tension which is caused by being closed in and fenced in by the peace of the community for so long, they *return* to the innocent conscience of the wild beast, as exultant monsters, who perhaps go away having committed a hideous succession of murder, arson, rape and torture, in a mood of bravado and spiritual equilibrium as though they had simply played a student's prank, convinced that poets will now have something to sing about and celebrate for quite some time. At the center of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey, the magnificent *blonde beast* avidly prowling round for spoil and victory; this hidden center needs release from time to time, the beast must [get] out again, must return to the wild...[34]

In this passage Nietzsche shocks us. But what so many commentators miss is that he is trying to. There is no denying that Nietzsche's blonde beast is terrifying. It unnerves us, and his argument that such drives dwell within us is treated as preposterous, immoral, or dangerous. But danger is exactly what Nietzsche wishes to bring to the surface. While it is a question whether Nietzsche would stand against the reemergence of such beasts, the function of his argument, of his invocation of the blonde beast, is to make his ideal readers afraid – afraid of themselves.

That Nietzsche is drawing his readers attention to their fear of themselves is not necessarily clear at the outset. But that he is most interested in the fear the noble beast creates is obvious. The argument Nietzsche repeats in his account of the blonde beast is that it would be better to once again be afraid of our fellow human beings than to be bored with them. This argument can appear (and in some sense is) elitist, based on an open disdain of democracy as rampant mediocrity. The idea that it would be better

[34] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§11.

to return to a state of human beasts raises the question, "better for whom?" and can easily lead the reader to perceive Nietzsche as someone only interested in the reemergence of great individuals at the cost of the safety of the general populace. But such readings are often the product of the historical and political uses the blonde beast has been put to as a symbol of fascisms old and new. The fact is that Nietzsche is not writing to anarchists, skinheads, or militant rebels. He is writing to "knowers." That such figures would turn into literal blonde beasts is possible, but unlikely. Thus, the function of the blonde is a challenge to such readers to be honest with themselves about not only their true desires but their fear of surrendering to them. Such desires may be a parade of heinous crimes, but they may also just as likely be actions that run counter to moralities that have circumscribed their action all along. To trespass such moral boundaries would certainly *feel* as terrifying as succumbing to beast-like drives, for after all they are, by definition, immoral. To affirm ourselves is to open ourselves to such dangers, the danger not only of the social consequences of one's actions but the challenge to affirm what is immoral in oneself. Read this way, the blonde beast is the rhetorical device Nietzsche uses in the first essay to begin to explain why we knowers remain unknown to ourselves – because we are afraid to discover, foster, and "create" such a self, to give into it not as a form of reckless abandon, where we satisfy our every evil desire, but as something within us, greater than us, yet unknown to us, that we must submit to from the perspective of a morality that resents, fears, and castigates it.

Nietzsche's argument about the blonde beast leads to one of the most famous arguments of the first essay, namely, that there is no doer behind the deed. The argument runs that Christian morality has us believe a false casual story about our actions. It has us believe that there are drives and impulses within us but that there is also a sovereign soul, spirit, or mind that is in control of these impulses and can choose

whether to act on them or not. This understanding of the self and of causation makes it possible to hold ourselves responsible for our actions, to denounce ourselves as guilty of "evil" when we willfully transgress moral values. But Nietzsche argues that this is a moral fabrication, something invented by sheepish slaves to domesticate wild, threatening beasts of prey. Against this false moral narrative, Nietzsche argues that there is no doer behind the deed, there is no spirit, mind, or soul that sovereignly decides what drives and instincts to give into and which to control. On the contrary, Nietzsche argues that the drives and instincts are all there is, that there is no separation between doer and deed but that the "deed is everything." Often scholars have often taken Nietzsche's arguments in an ontological direction, either questioning the plausibility of his account or else using his arguments to denounce essentialism.[35] But this reading of Nietzsche's argument misses the fact that he is not primarily interested in nor is he making an ontological argument. He is pressing upon his readers that the drives within themselves that feel like beasts of prey, furiously searching for a way out, a way to express themselves, drives so furious that they terrify us – that these drives are essentially us, and that the fear we experience in relation to them is because of morality and how it divides us against ourselves.

It is true that giving expression to such drives could lead to terrible consequences, but it is also true that any self-affirmation beyond the pale of slave morality will come with the same feelings of fear. That is, we do not need to be on the edge of becoming homicidal beasts for the potential immorality of self-affirmation to feel just as terrifying. This is the nature of fear, to defend us from physical, moral, and

[35] For an example of each, see Robert B. Pippin, "Lightning and Flash, Agent and Deed," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006): 131-145; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

social harm by making the danger feel overwhelming such that we must either flee from it or set ourselves against it. Nietzsche knows that a return to noble morality, to true self-affirmation, this is going to induce fear. But he calls us to be honest with ourselves, with the fact that what we fear most is ourselves.

2.2 The Second Essay: Confronting the Fact of Cruelty

In this section, I argue that the second essay short circuits the rhetorical confrontation at the end of the first by returning to the familiar mode of yet another historical inquiry, this time telling the story of how the phenomenon of a guilty conscience emerged out of cruelty in the context of debt relations. While the substantive content of the chapter argues that our experiences of guilt are little more than our own instinct for cruelty turned back on ourselves and that we should, thus, overcome them on our way to greater self-affirmation, rhetorically Nietzsche continues to push his readers toward the dangerous and terrifying reality of self-affirmation that he emphasized in the first essay with the figure of the blonde beast. However, this time our fear of the beast is not where Nietzsche places the accent. Instead, Nietzsche at one and the same time constructs a narrative where cruelty seems to be the cause of everything while also calling the veracity of such an interpretation into question. Nietzsche does this because he is putting forth the "will to power" as an interpretation of life in a new rhetorical mode. A controversial, much discussed, and little understood term, the "will to power," I argue, is a self-conscious interpretation of life that focuses all its energy on the one aspect of existence that slave morality cannot affirm, namely, suffering, and in this way calls attention to the limit that must be overcome on the way to self-affirmation.

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In *Ecce*, Nietzsche writes that the "*second* essay gives the psychology of the *conscience*: conscience is *not* as it believed, 'the voice of God in man.' – it is the instinct of cruelty that is turned inwards after it cannot discharge itself outwards anymore. Cruelty is first brought to light here as one of the oldest and most

persistent underpinnings of culture."[36] Once again, this is substantively what the essay is about. Nietzsche tells his readers a complicated and somewhat discombobulated story about how the human desire for cruelty operates in relationships of debt and how the development of these relationships -- from exchange between individuals, to the contract between citizens and society, and finally the relationship of indebtedness between people and their ancestors – eventually gives rise to the human capacity for guilt and the Christian notion of sin as a permanent indebtedness to God.

But as in the first essay, while the story of cruelty, debt, and guilt is what the essay is about, it does not account for all that Nietzsche is doing. Rhetorically, the second essay seems to start over, tearing readers away from the confrontation Nietzsche stages at the end of the first essay, the confrontation with the fear of the noble beast within us. In its place, Nietzsche again posits a misleading beginning, raising questions about the historical development of human beings, of how they became capable of promising and how the psychological realities of conscience and bad conscience arose. Initially, the approach mirrors that of the first chapter, as Nietzsche adopts more familiar modes of scholarly and historical inquiry. He also again plays into the scholarly feeling of superiority over religion, placing the emphasis on yet another religious object, that of a bad or guilty conscience. By doing these things, Nietzsche temporarily relieves the tension of the previous essay and puts his readers at ease.

But unlike the first essay, which only begins to reveal its true intent at the very end, the historical narrative of the second essay begins to show signs of fraying almost from the start, as Nietzsche begins to comment on the incredibleness of his narrative. Examples are everywhere. When he puts forward the

[36] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, p. 136.

central idea that cruelty and debt were historically woven together and the result was guilt, he not only admits that he says this in speculation – "I say all this in speculation: because such subterranean things are difficult to fathom out" – but even begins to undermine the first essay's narrative of *ressentiment*: "anyone who clumsily tries to interject the concept 'revenge' has merely obscured and darkened his own insight, rather than clarified it (revenge itself just leads us back to the same problem: 'how can it be gratifying to make someone suffer?)." When Nietzsche writes of a creditor's desire to seek compensation for an unpaid debt by inflicting harm on the indebted, he notes that this is a "strange notion," then, in the next section, he admits that this same idea is "pure speculation." Later, he claims that human suffering did not hurt as much in the past as it does now, only to admit that this is an obvious lie and that he only says it to appease the squeamish. He tries to defend the dubious idea that richer societies are less likely to punish criminals by suggesting that it is "not impossible to imagine," and he admits that the transformation of the relationship between creditor and debtor into a relation between generations could only happen in an "extremely strange and curious manner." And when he finally articulates his own theory of the origin of bad conscience, he puts forth assertions that beg the question of his arguments about cruelty as the origin of bad conscience and that effectively avoid the task of providing an explanation.[37]

As the historical narrative becomes tenuous and the reader can guess that Nietzsche is telling a story about bad conscience on to the end of precipitating another moral confrontation, what becomes evident is that Nietzsche's desire to confront his readers with their fear of the noble beast has not disappeared

[37] Nietzsche, Genealogy, 2§§5, 6, 7, 10, 17, 19.

but transformed. In the place of the noble beast, Nietzsche turns to the theme of cruelty. Throughout second essay, Nietzsche argues that cruelty is a drive within us all, something we derive pleasure from, and is an ineluctable aspect of life, a need we must satisfy. To flesh this out, Nietzsche extends cruelty well beyond the figure of the beast and makes it the galvanizing force of seemingly everything. It is cruelty in primitive societies that facilitates economic exchanges. It is cruelty in these exchanges that leads to the development of memory. It is the cruelty of blonde beasts who conquer and subjugate weaker peoples that establishes society. It is cruelty that operates in the retributive justice system these beasts establish, where any transgression against society leads the offender to be treated like a public enemy. It is cruelty that gives birth to feeling of guilt as the socially subjugated find themselves unable to satisfy their own desires for cruelty and so begin to inflict it on themselves. It is cruelty that hijacks the legal distinction between actor and action and the relationship between citizens and ancestors that establishes the conditions for religious guilt.

Nietzsche's continual reference to cruelty as the cause of seemingly everything in his narrative leads to a readerly experience in which the phenomenon is suffocating. Everywhere readers turn they see it at work. Part of what Nietzsche is doing here is obvious, as he is substantively telling us that the desire to be cruel is something intrinsic to life and to our own being, that expressions of it have been socially distorted, and that we need to cease turning it on ourselves in the form of bad conscience. But that is not all Nietzsche's narrative of cruelty is doing.

Nietzsche's theory that guilt is nothing more than inwardly turned cruelty is evocative and even seductive, as it provides us with a story that allows us to dismiss the legitimacy of our experiences of guilt and search for ways to overcome them. But logically it is not a convincing argument, and Nietzsche

almost seems hell-bent to point this out himself. The most obvious example of this is when Nietzsche takes up the question of interpretation and invokes the "will to power."[38] Here, amid a discussion of punishment that is trying to free us from notions of moral responsibility, Nietzsche argues that the nature of interpretation is domination, and he gives this central aspect of life the name the "will to power." He argues that the meaning of things cannot be found in their current uses or in an overly simple idea of their origin, for history is the story of forces of domination creating new meaning and putting things to new uses. While this statement is perhaps one of the most important for genealogical interpretations of Nietzsche and comes close to Foucault's own methodological statement about the forces of history genealogy studies, what is often overlooked is that Nietzsche is not putting forth a methodology of genealogy but is offering an interpretation of life in the context of an essay that calls attention to the tenuousness of its own interpretation.

To understand what Nietzsche is up to, it is helpful to turn to his previous comments about the will to power, interpretation, and their relationship to one another in *Beyond*. There are two such moments. The first occurs in a context where Nietzsche is calling attention to both the inescapability of needing to offer interpretations of life and the fact that all interpretations remain interpretations that should not themselves be confused with the "text" of life. Arguing that even the science of physics is such an interpretation, Nietzsche writes:

> But, as I have said, this is interpretation, not text; and somebody with an opposite intention and mode of interpretation could come along and be able to read from the same nature, and with reference to the same set of appearances, a tyrannically ruthless and pitiless execution of power claims. This sort of interpreter would show the unequivocal and unconditional nature of all "will to power" so vividly and graphically that almost every word, and even the word 'tyranny,' would ultimately seem useless or like weakening and mollifying metaphors – and too humanizing. Yet this interpreter might nevertheless end up claiming the same thing about this world as you, namely

[38] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 2§12.

> that it follows a 'necessary' and 'calculable' course, although *not* because laws are dominant in it, but rather because laws are totally *absent*, and every power draws its final consequences at every moment. Granted, this is only an interpretation too – and you will be eager enough to make this objection? – well then, so much the better.[39]

Here Nietzsche seems to caricature himself, putting forth an interpretation of life as will to power as if it is not the very thing he will put forward later as his own interpretation.[40] After presenting his account of the will to power, Nietzsche anticipates the objection that he himself is offering nothing more than an interpretation, to which he cryptically responds, "so much the better." What this means is not entirely clear. Perhaps Nietzsche is suggesting that an objection to his interpretation of life as will to power is itself an example of such a will, that to object to his theory is to demonstrate the will to dominate, the will to overcome his own interpretation. Maybe. But what is more evident is that Nietzsche is comfortable responding to an objection to the will to power by leaving things in a place where everyone must acknowledge the distinction between interpretation and text, where everyone must begin to acknowledge that their interpretations are just interpretations.

Why this acknowledgement of the seeming relativism of all interpretations is important becomes clear the second time Nietzsche introduces the will to power and explores its relation to interpretation. There he writes:

> life *is* precisely will to power. But there is no issue on which the base of European consciousness is less willing to be instructed than this; these days, people everywhere are lost in rapturous enthusiasms, even in scientific disguise, about a future state of society where 'the exploitative character' will fall away: – to my ears, that sounds as if someone is promising to invent a life that dispenses with all organic functions. 'Exploitation' does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of being alive as a fundamental organic function; it is a result of genuine will to power, which is just the will of life. – Although this is an innovation at the level of theory, – at the level of reality, it is the *primal fact* of all history. Let us be honest with ourselves to this extent at least! – [41]

[39] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §22.
[40] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §36.
[41] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §259.

What is crucial about this passage is that Nietzsche draws a distinction between exploitation as a *phenomenon* endemic to life and exploitation as an *interpretation* of life. That is, there is a difference between the fact that acts of exploitation occur in life and have always occurred and the interpretive claim that life should be understood, in something like its essence, as fundamentally exploitation, that exploitation is the very nature of life. Nietzsche draws this distinction because while he is ready to admit that his interpretation is just an interpretation, that this is the innovation he brings as a philosopher, there is nothing new about phenomenological acts of exploitation. The function of this distinction is to call readers to be honest about it. Nietzsche offers an innovative theory of life as will to power, fully conscious of its interpretive and thus contestable nature, because characterizing life in this way, even at the risk of seeming to assert some kind of metaphysical doctrine, emphasizes an aspect of life that we are often unable or simply unwilling to affirm.

In *Beyond*, Nietzsche is explicit about *what* it is we do not wish to affirm, about our desire to deny or alternatively interpret forces of power that cause suffering, that are themselves cruel, and, in the *Genealogy,* he alludes to why we do this. Slave morality, especially in its secular, democratic form, is unwilling and incapable of affirming suffering. In fact, the existence of slave morality is predicated on the need to respond to suffering. Thus, it moralizes. It tells us stories about the meaning of suffering, it denigrates those who cause it, it elevates and spiritually compensates those who suffer. It is dishonest about suffering, about its amoral nature. Slave morality's *raison d'être*, as Nietzsche will make painfully clear in the next essay, is to lie about suffering. Thus, Nietzsche offers an interpretation of the will to power, often in the strong language of metaphysics, not to put forth an ontological doctrine but to push into the foreground the number one aspect of reality that slave morality constitutively excludes from its

interpretation of the world. In *Beyond*, Nietzsche puts forth the will to power in an explicit call for honesty. But in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche takes a different rhetorical approach, submerging us in the ubiquity of cruelty and continuing to apply pressure so that we see it as amoral, see it as something that is essentially us, something we can no longer let either fear or guilt keep us from affirming, from accepting it as an aspect of life that is no longer morally distorted.

Proof that his emphasis on cruelty is meant to get us to realize and affirm its ineluctability is seen clearly at the end of the second essay where Nietzsche writes:

> I shall conclude with three question marks, that much is plain. 'Is an ideal set up or destroyed here?' you might ask me...But have you ever asked yourselves properly how costly the setting up of *every* ideal on earth has been? How much reality always had to be vilified and misunderstood in the process, how many lies had to be sanctified every time? If a shrine is to be set up, a *shrine has to be destroyed*: that is the law – show me an example where this does not apply! ...We moderns have inherited millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture inflicted on ourselves: we have had [the] most practice in it, are perhaps artists in the field, in any case it is our *raffinement* and indulgence of our taste. For too long man has viewed his natural inclination with an 'evil eye,' so that they finally came to be intertwined with 'bad conscience' in him[42]

For the scholarly reader who wishes to read Nietzsche as a gray genealogist, this passage comes as something of a surprise. Given the subject matter of the second essay, how it has traced the rise of bad conscience and now seems devoted to overcoming it toward the realization of some new ideal, Nietzsche's initial question of whether an ideal has been set up or destroyed in this essay seems intuitive. But Nietzsche asks the question only to dismiss it. In the end, he is not interested in whether an ideal has been set up or destroyed but rather in whether the reader has understood the cruelty that is needed to accomplish either task. For the reader more attuned to the rhetorical complexity of the chapter, with how Nietzsche has called his own interpretation into question to push to the fore the importance of cruelty through exaggeration, this conclusion makes sense. Just as the fear of the noble beast was what

[42] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 2§24.

Nietzsche wished to confront his readers with at the end of the first essay, so here he seeks to confront them not only with their guilt but with the means to overcome it through the affirmation of cruelty.

2.3 The Third Essay: Confronting How We Suffer from the Pursuit of Meaning

In this section, I argue that Nietzsche releases the tension of his previous argument one last time as he sets himself up for his final confrontation with the reader. Abandoning any pretense of a historical narrative, Nietzsche spends most of the third essay moving through a typology of different characters to answer the question of what the ascetic ideal means for each of them. After unpacking various meanings and techniques of asceticism, Nietzsche's argument shifts to an altogether different question, namely, whether *Wissenschaft* – the systematic pursuit of knowledge – offers a counter-ideal to asceticism. Nietzsche answers this question with a resounding "no" and finally returns to the confrontation he staged with "knowers" on the very first page of the *Genealogy*. Ultimately, Nietzsche argues that *Wissenschaft* does not break with but rather continues to house asceticism. While he tracks the connection between asceticism and *Wissenschaft* in several forms, it is their shared commitment to truth that is most important. Nietzsche's objection to the pursuit of truth has little to do with the distinction between true and false but with the subtle moral assumption that slips into all commitments to truth, namely, the idea that avoiding deception and acting only where we know it is in our best interest will save us from harm and suffering. For Nietzsche, the consequences of this assumption are that it recapitulates the moral bifurcation of good and evil actions and keeps us totally within our conscious minds, unable to act in ways that would lead us to self-knowledge beyond the prescriptions of morality.

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In *Ecce*, Nietzsche writes, "the *third* essay gives the answer to the question of how the ascetic ideal, the priestly ideal, acquired such incredible *power* even though it is the *detrimental* ideal *par excellence*, a will to the end, a decadent ideal. Answer: *not* because God is at work behind priests, as is believed, but

instead [for want of anything better], – because it has been the only ideal so far, because it has not had any competition."[43] As before, Nietzsche clearly states what the essay is about, as we see him throughout most of it discussing different types of human beings – artists, philosophers, priests, scientists – and their relationship with asceticism. But while his accounts of artists, philosophers, and priests seek to understand the meaning of asceticism in terms of why each of these types of people adopt such practices, when it comes to the scientist Nietzsche is no longer interested in the meaning asceticism has within *Wissenschaft.* Instead, he frames his discussion in terms of whether *Wissenschaft* possesses a counter-ideal to asceticism and sets for himself the task of demonstrating that it does not.

To demonstrate that asceticism and *Wissenschaft* are connected, Nietzsche points to three shared traits. In religion, asceticism is often tied to a belief in God, an exclusive worldview, and an unquestionable adherence to the value of truth. Nietzsche argues that *Wissenschaft* is no different. It just makes substitutions. *Wissenschaft* replaces the worship of God with that of the never-ending Question, that is, with the constant search for more knowledge.[44] Concomitant with this new god is an exclusive worldview, for the pursuit of the Question fosters an ethos that at once dismisses any idea of final and absolute answers and yet asserts the imperative of an asymptotic perfectionism that cannot itself be questioned. That is, the worship of the Question leads to an exclusive worldview where every discussion must be left open-ended and the means to contribute to it are barred by the epistemological parameters of knowledge, of those things that can be demonstrated rationally, logically, and empirically.

[43] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, p.136.
[44] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§25.

While the Question acts as God and the scientific methods of *Wissenschaft* set the parameters of discourse, it is the third common feature between religion and *Wissenschaft* that becomes the focus of Nietzsche's analysis, namely, the pursuit of truth. Initially, the idea that science and religion share a similar conception of truth seems farfetched. Religious truth is absolute, otherworldly, predicated on faith, while scientific truth is falsifiable, empirical, and based on evidence. But Nietzsche teases out the common thread that runs between them, albeit in an unexpected place:

> When the Christian Crusaders in the East fell upon that invincible order of Assassins, the order of free spirits *par excellence*...somehow or other they received an inkling of that symbol and watchword that was reserved for the highest ranks alone as their *secretum*: 'nothing is true, everything is permitted'...Certainly *that* was *freedom* of the mind, *with that* the termination of the belief in truth was *announced*. [45]

It is here, in this reference to the order of Assassins, that Nietzsche finds the connection between asceticism and *Wissenschaft*. For here truth is what stands in the way of acknowledging that "everything is permitted," that is, truth reasserts a moral divide between permitted and proscribed actions. In religious forms of asceticism, the dividing line between what is permitted and what proscribed is determined by a divinity, and the consequence of transgressing it is harm at the hands of this god. In science, this same dynamic persists. In service to the divine Question, the reason for our pursuit of truth is also to draw a line between permitted and proscribed actions in an attempt to avoid harm, for it presupposes that error and harm hang together: "one does not want to let oneself be deceived because one assumes it is harmful, dangerous, disastrous to be deceived; in this sense science would be the long-range prudence, caution, utility, and to this one could justifiably object."[46] The reason Nietzsche believes

[45] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§24.

[46] Nietzsche, *Science*, §344. Throughout this chapter, I have avoided the common "magpie" tendency in Nietzsche scholarship to bring together ideas from separates works without contextualization. At this moment and over the next few pages I draw from passages in *Science* and *Daybreak* because Nietzsche instructs those of his readers who feel that his ideas are moving too quickly in these passages. Nietzsche states this at the end of §24.

it is justifiable to object is that here this " 'will to truth' does *not* mean 'I do not want to let myself be deceived' but – there is no alternative – 'I will not deceive, not even myself'; *and with that we stand on moral ground*."[47]

The idea that *Wissenschaft* pursues truth to avoid harm is the link that ties it back to religious asceticism, for Nietzsche argues that the ascetic ideal's function, time and again, the very reason it has become so prominent and powerful, is because it has been the only means human beings have had for dealing with the problem of suffering. The problem of suffering, on the one hand, is the obvious problem with how to deal with pain, with why it exists, how to bear it when it seems entirely negative and throws into question our attachment to existence. But, on the other hand, the problem of suffering is not solely the problem of physical or emotional pain, for Nietzsche rightly acknowledges that people can put up with suffering if it has a meaning.[48] Whether suffering is interpreted as punishment for sin, the persecution that followers from one's righteousness, or a step on the way to a greater mode of being – as long as suffering means something, people can bear it. But Nietzsche knows that this only makes the problem worse, for the adoption of these meanings does not simply dull the pain of suffering but brings "new suffering with it."[49]

The new forms of suffering asceticism bring about are most obviously seen in its self-denying practices, practices such as fasting, abstinence, and charity. But the new suffering Nietzsche is most interested in is seen in the effects of pursuing truth. Here there is another form of asceticism, one that

[47] Nietzsche, *Science*, §344.
[48] "Man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does *not* deny suffering as such: he *wills* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering." Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §28.
[49] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §28.

cuts us off from ourselves. To understand this, we must recognize that the ascetic pursuit of truth is always a conscious behavior, after all it is often "truth" that gives such suffering meaning. But Nietzsche is eager to point out that when it comes to consciousness "we can do without it...For we [can] think, feel, will, remember, and also 'act' in every sense of the term, and yet none of this would have to "enter our consciousness.'"[50] Nietzsche surmises from this observation that consciousness is not something we need to act, that it must have arisen in situations of great "need and distress," where communication between human beings was necessary for survival. Given this, consciousness emerged as a bridge between people, a means of social communication, something that "is really just a net connecting one person with another." Seeing consciousness as a tool that connects people together means that it, like language, does not give us access to hidden worlds, either spiritual or psychological. To seek ourselves in consciousness is to demonstrate confusion, as we are simply misusing a social tool for a "spiritual" purpose. Thus, Nietzsche writes, "'to know ourselves' will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is 'non-individual,' that which is 'average'; that due to the nature of consciousness...our thoughts themselves are continually...*outvoted* and translated back into the herd perspective." What this means is that, if we seek self-knowledge in conscious thought, not only are we misunderstanding the function of consciousness, but we continually seek ourselves in a medium where we can only code ourselves in a way devoid of what is idiosyncratically us.

If we are not to look for ourselves in truth or consciousness, Nietzsche insists self-knowledge is to be sought instead in action, for "all our actions are incomparably and utterly personal, unique, and

[50] This and the other passages in this paragraph are from Nietzsche, *Science*, §354.

boundlessly individual, there is no doubt; but as soon as we translate them into consciousness, *they no longer seem to be*..."[51] But Nietzsche has a peculiar notion of action, one devoid of intention. Normally, we think of action in terms of intentionality, especially when we are prescribing an action to ourselves, say, for instance, on to the end of self-knowledge. That is, we have a conscious thought with a clear aim in view, and we believe that action proceeds because of setting that goal. In this model, it is the end that motivates and determines action. But Nietzsche draws a distinction between the goal of action and what he insists is its actual cause.[52] Contrary to a more intuitive understanding, Nietzsche argues that the goal of an action has little to do with its cause, that the aim is due to some "small accident," something "random, arbitrary, nearly indifferent in relation to the enormous force of energy that presses on." He likens these accidents to matches that set off a powder keg. Yes, they ignite an explosion, but the match itself is not what explodes. Thus, if "accidents" determine the goals of our actions, whether conscious or not, Nietzsche argues that the actual cause of our actions is "a quantum of dammed-up energy waiting to be used somehow, for something." That is, the cause of action is backed up energy, something mysterious within us looking for a way out. This energy does not have a predetermined object, only the desire to be discharged. Given this, the self-knowledge we come to learn through our actions does not pertain to our conscious goals, themselves often confused refractions of social morality. Rather we come to self-knowledge through a retroactive understanding of our actions, of what finds release in them, regardless and sometimes despite their object.[53]

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[51] Nietzsche, *Science*, §354.

[52] Nietzsche uses the language of the "cause of acting in a certain way" for the accident that determines the object of an action and the "cause of acting" as the bottled-up energy within oneself.

[53] Nietzsche, *Science,* §360. Cf. *Twilight*, "The Four Great Errors," §3.

If we find self-knowledge in action and action is simply the release of built-up energy where the aim is accidental, then it can seem as though there is no great difficulty in acting and the attainment of self-knowledge should be easy – for everything we do should bring this about. However, while the "accidents" that set off our actions are external to us, they can also become problematic. This is especially the case with slave morality, for Nietzsche states that it "knows how to inspire," how to "seduce."[54] While slave morality is one accident among others there is something peculiar about it, namely that it is "like the scorpion" who "drives its sting into its own body." As we have already seen, slave morality uses ascetic practices to turn our own cruelty back on ourselves and to cut us off from realms of action that would not simply release the mysterious drives within us but would do so in an affirmational rather than detrimental way.

It is because of the self-undermining nature of morality that Nietzsche seeks to "undermine our *faith in morality*," and that he does this work philosophically reveals that there is still a role for consciousness, albeit a limited, negative one. Seeking self-knowledge in consciousness is not possible, but seeking knowledge of slave morality, of asceticism, of the "accidents" that have turned our drives against us, of the psychology of the herd within our own minds – this work can still be done. Consciousness is intimately tied up with slave morality, as the repository of all that is "common." As such, consciousness is a world we explore to learn about and root out the influence of morality, of all that is not us, of all that stands in the way of self-affirmation.

[54] As does "truth." Nietzsche, *Beyond*, Preface.

This work of rooting slave morality out of ourselves is part of what Nietzsche refers to as the "overcoming" or "*self-sublimation of morality*": "All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of *necessary* 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life – the lawgiver himself is always ultimately exposed to the cry: [submit to the law you have yourself made]," [55] for "morality will be *destroyed* by the will to truth's becoming-conscious-of-itself." [56] The self-sublimation of morality brings us back to the topic of truth, for as we seek the truth of ourselves in consciousness what we find instead is the nature of truth, the fact that it does not deliver on its promises, does not spare us from suffering or allow us to engage in actions that would bring about self-knowledge. Instead, it keeps us trapped, trapped in ascetic practices, in our minds, in circuits of self-inflicted cruelty that are ironically incapable of affirming suffering. In time, Nietzsche believes that the pursuit of truth will reveal its qualities, and, once we see what it costs us to pursue it, we will finally overcome it by becoming "indifferent to hardship, cruelty, deprivation, even to life." [57]

But this work of overcoming is not as easy as consciously following the logic of truth Nietzsche outlines, nor does it bring us to a place of delighting in the free release of our drives. It is all too easy for the problem of meaning to reassert itself, for Nietzsche and his readers to begin to wonder what they "mean." [58] But such a question is a distraction from the real task, the confrontation with our own conscience. Building on the rhetorical effects of his arguments, how they bring us to reflect on and feel the fear and guilt that keeps us trapped in slave morality, Nietzsche pushes us once again to acknowledge

[55] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§27.
[56] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§28.
[57] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Skirmishes," §38.
[58] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §27.

these affects and confront our conscience. We, those under the yoke of slave morality, do not hear the idea "everything is permitted" as a call to freedom but as the terrifying fate to confront our conscience. Nietzsche asks whether we "know the minotaur of this cave *from experience*?"[59] that is, whether we know what it means to move beyond the mere idea that everything is permitted, that life is essentially "amoral," that truth has no absolute value. To know these things from experience is to risk being torn apart, overcome though not overwhelmed by fear, guilt, and meaninglessness. The terror of confronting our conscience, the idea that it is a minotaur we must slay, should not lead us to think that it has begun to *feel* like something external to us, a mere obstacle to overcome. Our conscience, even in the act of transgressing it, continues to be our conscience, to feel like us. This is a painful passage to take against and yet for oneself. Nietzsche knows that confronting such a "minotaur" is rare, as is the independence that follows from it, for, as he writes in *Beyond*:

> Independence is an issue that concerns very few people: – it is a prerogative of the strong. And even when somebody has every right to be independent, if he attempts such a thing without *having* to do so, he proves that he is probably not only strong, but brave to the point of madness. He enters a labyrinth, he multiplies by a thousand the dangers already inherent in the very act of living, not the least of which is the fact that no one with eyes will see how and where he gets lost and lonely and is torn limb from limb by some cave-Minotaur of conscience. And assuming a man like this is destroyed, it is an even so far from human comprehension that people do not feel it or feel for him: – and he cannot go back again! He cannot go back to their pity again![60]

Such a challenge is where Nietzsche wishes to bring his readers, bringing them to the realization that until they abandon their moral commitments to knowledge and truth and risk themselves in a battle with their own conscience, they have not attained self-knowledge. They have not begun to act.

[59] Nietzsche, *Genealogy,* 3§24.
[60] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §29.

3.0 Conclusion: Confronting Nietzsche as a Genealogist

The aim of this chapter has been to approach the *Genealogy* as a text that rhetorically attempts to induce self-confrontation in scholarly readers, those practitioners of genealogy. I have pointed out that the text addresses itself to such "knowers" and seeks to confront them with their lack of self-knowledge, that it adopts rhetorical strategies of repeatedly using and then subverting familiar academic modes of address, that it invites readers to tap into feelings of superiority and resentment only to reflect them back on themselves, that it draws attention to itself and its own hyperbole in an attempt to get readers to reckon with the moral implications of interpretation, and that it traces the common thread of truth from religion through *Wissenschaft* to evoke how monstrous a challenge it is to confront our own conscience with an amoral depiction of existence.

For such "knowers," those who identify with the Nietzsche Béland presents, a figure who finds himself within the academy unable to affirm himself and pursue his philosophical calling, it is clear that "gray" genealogy is misleading. It is also clear that Nietzsche's interest in descent is not to set up a new way to study history, to exposure contingencies, mechanisms of power, and the interactions between power and knowledge. Rather, Nietzsche's account of descent seeks to confront the reader with the aspect of reality that all slave moralities are unable to affirm. This is what Nietzsche denotes with his self-conscious theory of the will to power, meant to push forward a notion of power deeply tied to suffering in all its forms: cruelty, exploitation, domination. This interpretation is not metaphysical but confrontational, exposing the effects of the moral prejudices we denounce yet obviously still hold onto. This awareness of the hiddenness of morality, then, finally brings us to morality's last grasp on truth. No longer that of religion, of a dogmatic doctrine, even the humble, approximate truth of science still clings

to slave morality insofar as it insists on their being ever "better" approximations of truth. Against this, Nietzsche posits a picture of existence as amoral, one that reveals readers to themselves depending on *how* they read it. To see in Nietzsche's depiction a Hobbesian world of terror is to see things like a slave, where the desire for morality is the search to escape suffering, when what Nietzsche is trying to do is get us past morality to a place where we can begin to affirm ourselves.

Thus, what comes forward at the end of the *Genealogy* is a radical picture of self-affirmation. Self-affirmation is not simply overcoming resentment. Self-affirmation is overcoming the fear, guilt, and meaninglessness that stand in the way of affirming ourselves. The idea that we are afraid of ourselves, that the overcoming of guilt comes with the refusal to respond to suffering with moral presuppositions that seek to lessen it, and that the abandonment of truth comes with a meaninglessness that opens us up to suffering as that which we must endure and which we may even inflict – this is the challenge of Nietzsche, of the *Genealogy*.

Having traced the implications of Nietzsche's rhetoric and its relation to his arguments to gain a sense of the confrontational message it has for scholarly readers, we can now see why Foucault, our stand-in for the scholarly type, may have been drawn in by Nietzsche's initial arguments. This is because Nietzsche crafts the beginning of each chapter to invite the kind of genealogical reading Foucault offers us. We can also see what Nietzsche's philosophy has to say to such a reading. It says that the very pursuit of knowledge and truth it seems to invite is a continuation of slave morality, of asceticism, of self-denial.

Foucault took genealogy to be the analysis of historical discourses, of the interplay between knowledge and power. He took it to be attentive to documented history, a challenge to grand narratives that brought to light the mechanisms of power at the extremities of society. He took it to be a way to

analyze and resist domination. But as he himself questioned in 1976, so much of his work seemed to transform into the very mechanisms of power and knowledge he was trying to resist: "is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonization?"[61] In time, the fragmented genealogical histories Foucault told have become grand narratives themselves, and the writer of resistance has become an authority in regards to the popularization of an entire genre of academic writing.

Foucault's legacy stands in sharp contrast to Nietzsche's. While Nietzsche has routinely been tamed, there persists something mysterious and dangerous lurking in his thinking. In fact, it is because of these dangers that many feel that Nietzsche's work needs to be domesticated.[62] There is something that continues to be upsetting about him, something controversial, something uncategorizable. However, observing the contrast between Nietzsche and Foucault is not meant as criticism of the latter, nor is my reading of the missed conversation between knowers and the *Genealogy*. The value of Foucault's genealogies or of the genealogies that have followed in the wake of his influence remains an open question. To answer it in advance would be to fall prey to a genetic fallacy. Besides, despite Nietzsche criticisms of scholars, there are other moments in his philosophy when he recognized their usefulness and even admits to the useful influence of his own studies in philology. But the rhetorical response to

[61] Foucault, "Two Lectures," 86.
[62] Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, "Domesticating Nietzsche: A Response to Mark Warren," *Political Theory*, 27(1), (1999): 121-125.

such knowers is not trying to question the value of their knowledge but to question what moral commitments underwrite it.

In interviews, Foucault confessed the normative aims of his work, his desire to seek knowledge as a tool to wage war against domination. Contemporary genealogists continue this project, though with even greater emphasis on the neutrality of their methodologies and the humility of their claims.[63] Such projects are still normatively invested. As Colin Koopman notes, there is no way to get that little remainder of normativity out of our scholarship.[64] But Nietzsche does not want us to be amoral. He wants us to question the morality that inspires us, the accidents that sets us in motion. Questioning this morality is, on one level, a personal question, a question about the extent to which we have given ground to our desire. But it is also a question about the role played by the figure of the scholar today, the genealogist. Here the personal challenge reemerges in the form of a question about whether scholars invested in truth are still attached to slave morality. If the answer is "yes," then genealogical "truths" are just as much a resentful discourse aimed at avoiding a nobler orientation to the problem of suffering. It is not a secret that genealogies aim at alleviating suffering, disrupting domination, waging an unspoken war against what is perceived to be in some sense "evil."[65] But if this is their role, then we, the scholars who write them, face Nietzsche's question, namely, whether we are not the new priests of an old morality.

[63] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 87.
[64] Koopman, *Genealogy*, 91.
[65] Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 285.

Chapter 3

Nietzsche and Democracy: Confronting Our Ethos of Vanity

In the previous chapter, I looked at how Nietzsche's philosophy addresses a scholarly type of reader, how it hooks their desire for knowledge and seeks to confront them with the fear they possess of themselves. Doing so, such readers begin to see slave morality at work in themselves, as their pursuit of knowledge and truth leads them to a moral relation toward life that cannot affirm the existence of suffering and comes to define itself in opposition to this aspect of life. In this chapter, I turn to the question of how Nietzsche's philosophy addresses another type of reader, the democrat. This type of reader is attracted to Nietzsche's elitist figure of the noble, seeking to level the playing field by transforming nobility into a democratic ethos attainable by all. But Nietzsche's philosophy wishes to confront the typical democrat with the vanity they put on display. To assume the position of nobility as a disposition toward existence can only be truly noble if it is grounded in an affirmation of suffering. To assume the position on any other basis reveals the vanity of democratic type, both in terms of how its pride hides from itself the still slavishly moral foundation on which it builds its ethos and in terms of the futility of such a project.

While several noted scholars have contributed to the democratic interpretation of Nietzsche, here I focus on the work of William E. Connolly. Connolly is not only one of the figures who began to popularize such democratic reading. He also offers one of the most influential versions of this interpretation. While Connolly is often an attentive reader of Nietzsche, he also openly admits that his fidelity is limited, choosing to see Nietzsche's ideas as a "fertile ground for plagiarization and

transfiguration by democrats."[1] In this chapter, as in the last chapter, I am interested in reading the space between reader and text, asking what more confrontational reading of Nietzsche Connolly willingly sidesteps to offer his own. Ultimately, I argue that the confrontational reading Connolly passes by reveals that the democratic posture he adopts tries to walk an impossible line between the affirmation and alleviation of suffering that can too easily lead to an ascetic "torsion" within the self. While Connolly sees this internal dynamic as an appropriate ethical response to the politics of democratic pluralism, Nietzsche reveals that it follows a familiar pattern of asceticism that rejects the centrality of noble self-affirmation and silently replaces it with a psychology of vanity that risks intensifying the very hostilities the democrat wishes to tame.

In what follows, I first provide an account of Connolly's reading of Nietzsche (1.0), and then place it under further analysis (1.1). Because the aim of Connolly's work is to promote the contestability of all faiths, doctrines, and religious beliefs on to the end of overcoming *ressentiment*, Connolly must acknowledge the contestability of his own argument. While there are several interrelated rhetorical strategies operating in Connolly's thought, one of his central appeals is to the problem of suffering. Seeing this, I then contrast Nietzsche and Connolly and their respective relations toward suffering to reveal the differences between them and articulate the phenomenon of vanity as an aspect of slave morality that plagues the democratic type (1.2).

Next, I turn to an account of how Nietzsche's philosophy rhetorically appeals to vanity through the figure of the noble (2.0). Nietzsche argues that vanity is endemic to democracies and shapes social

[1] William E. Connolly, "The Nobility of Democracy," in *Vocations of Political Theory*, eds. Jason A. Frank and John Tambornino, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 322.

psychology. Thus, it is not surpring that democratic readers might put themselves in the awkward position of being attracted to the figure of the noble, despite the apparent inegalitarianism it represents. Then, I turn to a reading of *Antichrist* where Nietzsche not only presents a "genealogical" account of the origin of democratic vanity but presents us with his most detailed account of the noble psychology democracy has obscured. Surprisingly, Nietzsche turns to the figure of Jesus to articulate this noble psychology, one free from vanity and able to affirm and act amid to its own experiences of suffering. Finally, I return to Connolly to draw out the implications of his democratic reluctance to take the confrontational dimension of Nietzsche's philosophy seriously, thereby passing by Nietzsche's critique of vanity and how it illuminates the democratic type's loss of self-affirmation as it slips into a moralized asceticism.

1.0 The Democratic Interpretation: Connolly's Democratization of Nobility

While the first democratic reading of Nietzsche in political theory occurred in 1975 with Tracy Strong's *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, it was not until the late eighties that this way of reading Nietzsche started to take hold. After the work of William E. Connolly and Mark Warren, the democratic interpretation of Nietzsche continued to expand and develop throughout the nineties. What unites these readings is the desire to democratize Nietzsche's elitist conception of nobility, refashioning it into an ethos attuned to the contingencies and inescapable conflicts of politics. Coming to terms with these aspects of life is meant to release democratic citizens from the psychological and political dangers of resentment and grant them an appreciation of diversity such that they fold respect and generosity into their political disagreements with others.[2] In this section, I sketch Connolly's reading of Nietzsche, for he offers one of the first, most influential and developed instances of such an interpretation.

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[2] Examples of democratic interpreters of Nietzsche include: Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Romand Coles, "Liberty, Equality, Receptive Generosity: Neo-Nietzschean Reflections on the Ethics and Politics of Coalition," *The American Political Science Review*, 90(2), (1996): 375-388; William E. Connolly, "The Nobility of Democracy," in *Vocations of Political Theory*, eds. Jason A. Frank and John Tambornino, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); William E. Connolly, "Debate: Reworking the Democratic Imagination," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 5(2), (1997): 194-202; William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Paul Franco, "Tocqueville and Nietzsche on the Problem of Human Greatness in Democracy," *Review of Politics,* 76, (2014): 439-467; Lawrence J. Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1995); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer, *Agonistics*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997); David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason*, (London: Sage Publications, 1995); Paul Patton (ed.), *Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1993); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Herman W. Siemens, "Reassessing Radical Democratic Theory in the Light of Nietzsche's Ontology of Conflict," in *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 81-105; Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Connolly's democratic reading of Nietzsche starts with an acknowledgment of the ever-accelerating tempo of contemporary social and political life. Contrary to the "slow" lifestyle of aristocratic societies, where hierarchies were seemingly immutable, occupations lasted a lifetime, and there were no technological means of connecting people across distance, Connolly notes along with Nietzsche that in modern democracies "one lives very fast."[3] Nietzsche uses the figure of the actor to illustrate how acceleration has changed the character of citizens. Unlike citizens of old, contemporary citizens are like actors in that they have a new sense of freedom, the freedom to try on different roles, to become different people, to change, develop, explore. Possibilities seem endless and there is no reason to stay fixed to any single position or role within society. While Nietzsche is critical of this development, seeing in it the loss of an older way of life capable of building culturally great societies, Connolly affirms it.[4] With the development of technology and the increasing pluralization of populations, Connolly sees that speed has changed the world in ways that cannot be reversed, where different identities along the axes of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and ableness continue to encounter one another. This situation gives rise to new opportunities and challenges.[5]

For Connolly, one of the greatest political challenges in our modern world is the problem of resentment operating between different identities. To theorize this challenge, Connolly draws on Nietzsche's thinking about *ressentiment*. Nietzsche describes *ressentiment* as the moral condemnation

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[3] Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Raids," §39 in William E. Connolly, "The Nobility of Democracy," in *Vocations of Political Theory*, eds. Jason A. Frank and John Tambornino, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 307.

[4] For more on Nietzsche's critique of actors, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §356.

[5] For other instances of Connolly's discussion of speed, see William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 39, 44; William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 2, 156.

of an "other" when they are perceived as a threat that cannot be responded to with physical force. While marshalling morality against an enemy can be an effective weapon, Nietzsche is more interested in the deleterious effects it has on those who choose to adopt it as a means of defense. Foremost among these effects is that moral values designed for the demonization of an "other" invariably find their way into the interior world of those who create them. Such values wreak havoc on the ability to adopt genuine self-affirmation and inevitably turn one against oneself.[6]

Connolly then takes Nietzsche's understanding of *ressentiment* and redeploys it in the context of a nuanced understanding of identity politics. Connolly argues that identities are defined by a differential logic, that is, they are what they are insofar as they differ from something else. This logic distinguishes different identities from one another and makes their opposition constitutively necessary. Nothing about this logic necessitates conflict, but it leaves that possibility open. When identities feel threatened by the contingencies of life, when the faith, doctrine, or culture that serves as their foundation is challenged or the relationship of difference that defines them shifts, there is a temptation to resent the "other," to hold them accountable for the suffering or "evil" one has experienced. Here the demonization of the other as "evil" is not only the attempt to blame them for the threat to one's identity but also tries to permanently fix relations of difference to maintain one's own identity. Connolly refers to the use of

[6] This account of Nietzsche's view is intentionally sparse. Close attention to Connolly's treatment of resentment reveals that while he has consistently appealed to it for decades as one of if not *the* most important problems his thinking tries to tackle, he has no detailed, textual account of Nietzsche's formulation but tends to read *ressentiment* in terms of a more common understanding of resentment. Indeed, in many of his works, Connolly makes no distinction between resentment and *ressentiment*. In what follows, I will dive into the specifics of Nietzsche's account to contrast the respective views of Nietzsche and Connolly. Throughout this essay, I have used "resentment" whenever I am referring to Connolly's views and *ressentiment* when referring to Nietzsche. For further reflections on the difference between these terms, see Bernard N. Meltzer and Gil Richard Musolf, "Resentment and Ressentiment," *Sociological Inquiry*, 72(2), (2002): 240-255.

resentment as a political tactic as the "problem of evil," one that "flows from diverse political tactics through which doubts about self-identity are posed and resolved by the constitution of an other against which that identity may define itself."[7] Thus, Connolly names two evils in the political problem of resentment. There is the ascription of evil, the moral condemnation of the other, and there is the perpetration of evil, that is, the evil done by attempts to secure one's own identity. Both are the result of resentment and threaten to foment political conflict between identities.[8]

To face the problem of evil, Connolly argues that we must understand human psychology. Drawing on Nietzsche, Connolly draws attention to the unconscious dimension of human psychology, for "Man…thinks continually without knowing it: the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of all this."[9] Combining Nietzsche's claim with recent research in neuroscience, Connolly explains that there are not only conscious and unconscious mental processes but that there is a "half-second delay" between the activation of human thought and a conscious awareness of what is happening. What this means is that there are habitual, culturally imbued scripts that organize perception prior to conscious thought. Such scripts shape what we perceive and what we do not, what associations we make, how we affectively and behaviorally respond to a stimulus. Recognizing this, we see that thinking is shaped by cultural and biological processes we do not perceive.[10]

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[7] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ix-x.
[8] Connolly, "Nobility," 310.
[9] Nietzsche, *Science*, §354 cited in Connolly, "Nobility," 314.
[10] Nietzsche, *Science* §§8, 290, 354; *Antichrist* §39; *Twilight*, "Raids," §26, in Connolly, "Nobility," 314-315. While neuroscience literature often plays a much larger role in Connolly's account of human psychology, Ruth Leys has argued that philosophical thinkers such as Nietzsche are the real motivations for such interpretations/claims. See Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," *Critical Inquiry*, 37(3), (2011): 434-472.

For Connolly, coming to terms with the unconscious processes that shape our thoughts and perceptions leads us to realize that we must find a way to influence them. This is where Connolly turns to Nietzsche's conception of nobility. Nietzsche conceives of nobles as those who are willing to embrace the contingencies of life, who do not subscribe to the universal or absolute claims of human moralities, and who endure suffering without resentment. While Nietzsche emphasizes the spontaneous self-affirmation of nobility that makes all this possible, Connolly is interested in repurposing the ethos of nobility:

> I find it noble to treat one's own faith as contestable in one's own eyes, not just to affirm that it is so in the eyes of others. Strive to render oneself a question to oneself, while appreciating that your efforts will meet with partial and limited success...it is noble to sustain a certain torsion between the nourishment your faith provides and the periodic call to probe dimensions of its comparative contestability.[11]

Connolly advocates fostering such an ethos or inner "torsion" through the adoption of what he calls "arts of the self." Drawing on Nietzsche's reflections about giving style to oneself and attending to the small, everyday practices and habits we adopt, Connolly follows Nietzsche in recommending that we practice "little deviant acts" against the customs of our society and our own habits to open us up to the contingencies of life, to alternative ways of being and becoming, to the plurality inherent in our world.[12] Opening ourselves to new experiences and possibilities is meant to alter more than our conscious thought but to also reach down into the "bio-cultural" assumptions, biases, and "proto-thoughts" that inform our dispositions and reactions toward what is foreign, strange, or simply "other."

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[11] Conolly, *Identity\Difference*, xxiii. Cf. Connolly, *Neuropolitics,* 164-165.

[12] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §149 in William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 144; William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 68; *Secularist* 145-150. Nietzsche, *Science*, §290, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, in *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §6.

The aim of these arts of the self is moderation in two senses. The first, as already stated, is to temper our resentment towards contingency and promote an awareness of the contestability of our identity, faith, or doctrine. But as these techniques aim at promoting moderation, so, too, must they be moderate. Connolly acknowledges that exposure to contingency can galvanize resentment and that his techniques aim at exactly this kind of exposure. Connolly also knows that his techniques can backfire, that not everyone in society has the same resources to deal with contingency, that certain forms hit some of us harder than others. Because he is inviting his readers to accept a degree of "torsion" within themselves, he repeatedly stresses moderation, a gradual release of our hold on identity and an openness to becoming. Connolly provides examples of such techniques, which include things like watching movies, reading books, listening to music, engaging in altered states through the use drugs or meditative practices, and getting us to experiment with ideas, practices, and social situations where we may feel uncomfortable or be unsure of ourselves.[13] With the right dose of moderation in our techniques, he hopes to foster more moderation and curb the dangers and potential "evil" of resentment.

Connolly's advocacy of the "arts of the self" makes up one-half of what he refers to as the "bicameral orientation" he urges democratic citizens to adopt.[14] In addition to the "arts of the self" that aim at cultivating a "critical responsiveness" to a world of constant becoming, Connolly also draws on Nietzsche to articulate "agonistic respect." Drawing on one of Nietzsche's early, unpublished essays, Connolly takes Nietzsche's thinking about the *agonism* of ancient Greece, of the redirection of ambition away from war and strife toward various forms of contests to channel competition in ways that

[13] For Connolly's most detailed list of examples, see Connolly, *Neuropolitics,* 100-103.
[14] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

moderated violence and benefited the state, to flesh out the external or social side of his envisioned political ethos. Such agonism is aimed at curbing the excesses of political and moral claims that refuse to acknowledge the fundamental contestability and fragility of identities. Against such claims, it deploys genealogical critiques that serve to illuminate the contingencies that fanatical political and moral claims and narratives attempt to deny through the demonization of the other. However, just as agonism seeks to assert contestability as a means of creating and sustaining socially beneficial relationships of competition, it is also respectful of the moral sources different identities draw upon to infuse their world with meaning and derive their sense of identity. Connolly himself, again drawing on Nietzsche, confesses his own moral source of inspiration in the idea of non-theistic gratitude, a gratefulness for the diversity, richness, and surprises of a universe that is continually coming into being. While Connolly offers such a moral resource, he acknowledges that it is one moral resources among many, one that must exist in a plural universe. Thus, Connolly mixes in further moderation even into his agonism.[15]

[15] The moderation of agonism can be taken a step further, for Connolly draws a distinction between the agonistic relationships he maintains with other views that have not devolved into fanaticism. Against such fanatical views, Connolly has only one, consistent albeit reluctant response, namely, militancy. See Connolly, *Pluralism*, 35.

1.1 The Democratic Interpretation: Connolly's Rhetorical Appeal to Suffering

Having sketched Connolly's reading of Nietzsche, in this section I take a closer look at how Connolly's commitment to contestability informs the rhetorical dimension of his argument. Because Connolly aims at contestability and he, thus, acknowledges the contestability of his own argument, the persuasiveness of his arguments must at least partially rely on rhetorical appeals to his audience, appeals to their preexisting values. In this section, I am interested in exploring one of these appeals and the reason other democrats might find it compelling. Ultimately, I find that while Connolly does successfully avoid the universalizing claims of slave morality, the persuasiveness of his argument is still partially dependent on a rhetorical appeal to a moral attitude toward suffering.

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One way into the question of who Connolly's audience is can be discerned in his response to the criticism that he is elitist. When faced with this objection, Connolly leans into it: "in a highly stratified society many individuals and constituencies are in an unfavorable position to pursue such experiments. This latter fact, however, can easily be exaggerated. And it does not diminish the importance of such work on the part of those who do find themselves in a favorable position. It increases it."[16] Here Connolly is not advocating vanguardism, but is suggesting that he takes his audience, or he takes those within his audience who will be receptive to his ideas, to be a relatively privileged segment of a larger pluralist society. These people will be in a suitably "favorable" position in that they have the resources to weather at least some forms of contingency and the time and resources to adopt arts of the self.

[16] Connolly, *Secularist*, 149-150.

This audience shares commitments to democratic pluralism, truth, and compassion. The first of these is the most obvious. Connolly's audience has a commitment to democracy, sympathy for a pluralist view of contemporary politics, and a desire to tackle the political problem of resentment. The second, less so. Connolly does not appeal to truth with a capital "T," for this would take him beyond the realm of contestability. But much of his argument is devoted to delineating what the world is like. We see this in his accounts of speed, resentment, and psychology. If we are on board with democracy and pluralism, then Connolly's account of what the world is like suggests that we should align ourselves with the facts and respond to them through the adoption of arts of the self to alter not only our thinking but our embodied modes of being and become better able to address the political challenges of our times.

Connolly's rhetorical invocation of the need for compassion in the face of suffering is his most salient and important appeal. It is obvious that Connolly is worried about the suffering that will result from the "evil" of resentment, that this is the political problem his works seek to address. About it, he writes:

> The most complex ethical issues arise in those contexts where suffering is intense and its visitation upon some is bound up with securing the self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence, or cultural merit of others. That is, the most intense, intractable cases of suffering are political in character. They often revolve around what I will call the 'politics of becoming.' / The politics of becoming occurs when a culturally marked constituency suffering under its negative constitution in an established institutional matrix, strives to reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity\difference then in place.[17]

Unpacking what Connolly means by the "politics of becoming" illustrates the power of his rhetorical appeal. With the concept of the "politics of becoming," Connolly is taking the usual framework of identity politics one step further, for he is not just concerned with existing identities but emergent identities. This is why Connolly emphasizes techniques of the self to alter our reactions to what is literally

[17] Connolly, *Secularist*, 51.

unidentifiable. Connolly gives past examples of the politics of becoming in terms of political identities that are now entrenched after the struggles of "antislavery movements, feminism, gay/lesbian rights movements, the introduction of secularism, the effort to place "Judeo" in front of the "Christian tradition," the right to die, and so on."[18] As few would contest the "justice" attained by such movements, Connolly uses them to emphasize the importance of the politics of becoming, of being attentive to similar movements in the future to avoid a situation where we might unknowingly or unthinkingly perpetuate suffering.

To think through the problem of suffering and find a solution, Connolly turns to Nietzsche. Drawing on *Zarathustra*, Connolly captures resistance to the politics of becoming through the imagery of "winter thoughts." Zarathustra relates that when a river is flowing, makeshift bridges are created, and everyone says the world is in flux. But when winter comes and the water freezes "then verily, not only the blockheads say, 'Does not everything stand still?'"[19] Zarathustra declares that this can only be a winter doctrine, and Connolly adopts this concept as a way of speaking about the futility of trying to insist on the stability of one's identity. The desire to freeze one's identity, doctrine, or faith leads to the evil of resentment, to the perpetuation of suffering on the part of those who have been refused recognition. Connolly then argues that Nietzsche draws a "critical division *within* suffering."[20] On the one hand, Nietzsche "resists pity for those who demand a winter doctrine to redeem the suffering that comes with life...For such doctrines, he thinks, express persistent resentment against the flesh,"[21] while, on the other

[18] Connolly, *Secularist*, 59.
[19] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "Old and New Tablets," §8 in Connolly, *Secularist*, 53.
[20] Connolly, *Secularist,* 55.
[21] Connolly, *Secularist,* 55.

hand, Nietzsche affirms the "suffering that the self must impose upon itself to become something distinctive and admirable."[22] For Connolly, the importance of this distinction is that it allows us "to overcome the drive to convert that suffering needed to keep you aloft from fueling resentment against those internal and external differences that help to define what you are through contrast to them."[23] That is, Connolly locates in Nietzsche a division between the suffering we inflict on ourselves on to the end of developing an ethos attuned to becoming and the suffering we inflict on others to keep our identities frozen in place.

With this division between two kinds of suffering and two distinct attitudes toward them, Connolly then pushes his reading of Nietzsche even further toward an embrace of compassion. Connolly writes "My Nietzsche…is not against compassion…He resists compassion for selective modes of suffering to express it actively for others."[24] Connolly's invocation of "my Nietzsche" is his way of noting that he is glossing over the moments when Nietzsche would actively resist such an interpretation. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this. But such passing by entails closing off the opportunity to read Nietzsche's philosophy existentially and through assumed values into question. A closer look at this instance of Connolly's Nietzsche as a missed opportunity reveals something curious, for Connolly seems to turn to Nietzsche to make the otherwise difficult claim that there are those to whom compassion should not be given. But while Connolly may need Nietzsche to endorse such "tough love," in the end it is his desire

[22] Connolly, *Secularist*, 56.
[23] Connolly, *Secularist*, 56.
[24] Connolly, *Secularist*, 56.

to turn Nietzsche, the philosopher of cruelty, exploitation, and domination, into a proponent of compassion.

1.2 The Democratic Interpretation: Suffering, *Ressentiment*, and Compassion

In this section I map the differences between Nietzsche and Connolly to see what falls out of Connolly's account. To that end, I contrast Connolly and Nietzsche in relation to the concepts of suffering, *ressentiment*, and compassion. What comes to light in this discussion is that there are two forms of self-affirmation in Nietzsche's thinking. There is the familiar self-affirmation of noble morality and the less commonly acknowledged self-affirmation of vanity within slave morality. Understanding the relationship between these reveals a locus for the potential confrontation with Nietzsche's philosophy Connolly avoids.

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Connolly claims Nietzsche draws a distinction between two kinds of suffering, but this is misleading. For Connolly, there is a distinction between the suffering we should affirm in the use of moderate techniques of the self and the suffering we should condemn in the attribution of evil and the perpetration of harm. When it comes to the first, it is true Nietzsche affirms the suffering nobles willingly embrace. In fact, the relationship between suffering and nobility is so important that Nietzsche posits a causal relation between them: "suffering makes you noble; it separates."[25] But unlike Connolly's call for moderation, Nietzsche stresses noble suffering is intense, for nobles possess a daring that demonstrates "their unconcern and scorn for safety, body, life, comfort, their shocking cheerfulness and depth of delight in all destruction."[26] In fact, the amount of harm nobles face means that the "ruin, the destruction of higher people, of strangely constituted souls, is the rule."[27]

[25] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §270.
[26] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§10. Cf. Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §57.
[27] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §269.

Nobles willingly endure intense forms of suffering with a disregard for the harm they may do to themselves and others because they possess a different understanding of evil. Both Connolly and Nietzsche think about evil on two registers. They see evil as a moral attribution to another caused by *ressentiment*, and they use it to describe forms of harm and destruction. But they morally evaluate both uses of "evil" differently. For Connolly, evil as harm is simply intolerable. To call it "evil" is to denote that it is merely destructive, both physically and psychologically, and it is also to give it a moral overtone. In contrast, Nietzsche uses the language of "evil" as harm to argue against Connolly's position. Against the idea that evil is simply harm, Nietzsche repeatedly makes arguments about the benefits of destruction, both for individuals and humanity. He notes that all great innovations are deemed evil, and, even when they emerge through the destruction of something else, he regularly stresses that this only reinvigorates life, leading to fructification, the creation of even greater things. [28]

Just as Connolly and Nietzsche differ in their evaluations of evil as harm, so, too, do they disagree in their evaluations of *ressentiment*. Both agree that people driven by *ressentiment* attribute evil to others, and both acknowledge that this is ignoble. But for Connolly this leads to a categorical rejection of *ressentiment* as something that must always be fought. For Nietzsche things are more complicated. While Nietzsche is a critic of *ressentiment* from the perspective of nobility, seeing it as an illness to be avoided, he does not condemn it as evil. Instead, *ressentiment* is one of the dominant psychological dispositions within slave morality, and slave morality itself is life-affirming. This claim may sound strange because slave morality is frequently interpreted as life-negating, and because we usually attend

[28] Nietzsche, *Science,* §19, *Beyond* §§262, 269, 270, 282, 290, *Antichrist*, §57.

to it from the perspective of nobility Nietzsche most often articulates. But such a reading oversimplifies Nietzsche's account, failing to distinguish between self-affirmation and life-affirmation.

To illuminate the distinction between self-affirmation and life-affirmation, first we must locate where the confusion lies. This requires us to differentiate two levels on which Nietzsche writes about affirmation and negation, saying "yes" and "no." In his first and most influential account of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche contrasts slave morality with noble morality. While Nietzsche draws numerous distinctions between the two, at the center of his account is the distinction between saying "yes" and "no": "Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside,' 'other,' 'non-self."[29] Nietzsche does write that slave morality says "no" to "everything." But when we look closely at the context in which this statement appears, both the specific section and the larger essay, we do not see what Connolly would call "existential resentment," that is, resentment not only against what we may suffer at the hands of others but from any aspect of existence.[30] Instead, Nietzsche's emphasis is on the moral psychology of nobles and slaves and their relationship to one another. Nobles say "yes" to themselves first and foremost, meaning that they affirm themselves, relate to other people in a secondary and incidental way, judging such people to be either "good" or "bad," not in themselves, but in relation to what they define as their own conception of "health."[31] In contrast, slaves say "no" in that they first and foremost take aim at those they deem a threat, they morally condemn the strength and defining characteristics of the other as

[29] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§10.
[30] Nietzsche also makes similar comments in *Antichrist* §24.
[31] Health, too, is a relative concept. See Nietzsche, *Science*, §120.

"evil" in themselves, they invent notions of freedom and responsibility that instill guilt in the other, and it is only once they have set in motion their designs to destroy their "enemy" that they subsequently come back to themselves, affirming their weaknesses as morally "good" virtues. Thus, here yes-saying and no-saying is operating in the context of self-affirmation, of the moral relationships we have with ourselves and other people.

Thus, at the level of self-affirmation, *ressentiment* is the no-saying force operative in slave morality where one must say "no" to the other to validate oneself, but at the level of life-affirmation Nietzsche comes to admit that the no-saying of slave morality is only apparent. Early in the first essay of the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche argues that slave morality is the creation of priests. The regime they create is one of asceticism, replete with dieting, fasting, abstinence, and solitude.[32] But while the ascetic dimension of slave morality seems complicit in saying "no" to "everything," later in the *Genealogy* and elsewhere in his philosophy Nietzsche qualifies this comment, seeing a hidden affirmation of life residing there:

> A self-contradiction such as that which seems to occur in the ascetic, 'life *against* life,' ...can only be *apparent*; it has to be a sort of provisional expression, an explanation, formula, adjustment, a psychological misunderstanding of something, the real nature of which was far from being understood, was far from being able to be designated as it is *in itself*...*the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life*, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence...the ascetic ideal is a trick for the *preservation* of life...The ascetic priest is the incarnate wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere, indeed, he is the highest pitch of this wish, its essential ardor and passion: but the *power* of his wishing is the fetter which binds him here, precisely this is what makes him a tool, who now has to work to create more favorable conditions for our being here and being human, – it is precisely with this *power* that he makes the whole herd of failures, the disgruntled, the under-privileged, the unfortunate, and all who suffer from themselves, retain their hold on life by instinctively placing himself at their head as their shepherd. You take my meaning already: this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this *negating one*, – he belongs to the great *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life..."[33]

[32] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§6.
[33] Nietzsche, *Genealogy,* 3§13.

Seeing that the prescribed asceticism of the priest is a clandestine form of yes-saying hidden behind an apparent no-saying to everything, we see that slave morality is life-affirming. It does not affirm life with the honesty or the strength of nobility. It needs lies, asceticism, and *ressentiment*. But with the apparent no-saying force of these things, it finds a way to sustain – to affirm – ignoble forms of life that lack such strength and honesty.

Ressentiment contributes to the life-affirmation of slave morality by dividing the self against itself and giving rise to the possibility of vanity as an ignoble form of self-affirmation that can compensate for suffering. Throughout the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche repeatedly insists that the problem of suffering, the inability of ignoble forms of life to affirm it, has only been dealt with by giving it meaning through asceticism. The priest is once again the key figure here, for it is the "*direction-changer* of *ressentiment*."[34] To ease the pain of suffering, the priest creates other, more moderate forms of suffering, ascetic practices, that redirect *ressentiment* back onto the self. That is, the redirection of *ressentiment* through the prescription of ascetic practices bifurcates the self, such that it can release its wrath on itself. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche stresses that such ascetic practices "*anesthetize pain through emotion*," and his earlier reflections on the relationship between vanity and asceticism further illuminate what this means: "This division of oneself, this mockery of one's own nature...is a very high degree of vanity...man takes real delight in oppressing himself with excessive claims and afterwards idolizing this tyrannically demanding something in his soul. In every ascetic morality man worships a part of himself as God and for that he needs to diabolize the other part."[35] Here vanity is the result of the inward turning of

[34] Nietzsche, *Genealogy,* 3§15.
[35] Nietzsche, *Human*, §137.

ressentiment that creates a division within oneself, and this desire to dominate oneself is vanity because we tie a sense of our own power and strength, our own self-affirmation, to our capacity to tear ourselves apart. This "lust" for power is an attempt to compete with the power of nobles, with their fearless affirmation of suffering. But the ascetic means used to acquire power announces its inability to affirm suffering, for it is continually looking for a means to moderate suffering through the production of a sense of one's own moral goodness.

When we think of the ascetic techniques that facilitate vanity, we are often struck with common examples such as fasting and abstinence. But Nietzsche notes there are numerous ascetic techniques, dividing them into two categories, the innocent and the guilty. Most often, scholars have been drawn to the guilty means, techniques for the quick release of the excesses or "orgies" of feeling, the sudden release of emotion that acts as an anesthetization of suffering.[36] But among the innocent means Nietzsche lists techniques that allow for even the most subtle satisfactions of vanity, of a false sense of affirmation in the face of suffering. One such technique is that of the "small pleasure." Nietzsche describes it as "the pleasure of *giving pleasure* (as doing good, giving gifts, bringing relief, helping, encouraging, comforting, praising, honoring); the ascetic priest thereby prescribes, when he prescribes 'love they neighbor,' the arousal of the strongest, most life-affirming impulse, albeit in the most cautious dose – the *will to power*."[37] Here we see how subtle asceticism can be, that even the desire to love another, seemingly intending to only do them good, is motivated by a sense of our own power. This satisfaction of power is seemingly harmless, especially considering the good it does another. But Nietzsche is stressing the

[36] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§19.
[37] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 3§18.

context in which we are seeking the feeling of power, for the search for little tastes of power in harmless situations can be ascetic to the extent that they take us away from the challenge of true self-affirmation.

Nietzsche notes that one example of ascetic small pleasures is compassion. First, Nietzsche elaborates how compassion operates as a moral seduction that leads us away from the challenge of affirming suffering: "should you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts; and the latter is perhaps the mother of the former – *the religion of snug coziness*."[38] Deeming suffering to be evil, Nietzsche argues that we retreat into compassion to save ourselves from suffering, but that is not the only reason. That we turn to compassion as the subtlest expression of our own power, our ability to help, comfort, advise, is seen in how it operates without concern for its own blindness to the suffering of others and how it seeks to undermine their own relationship to suffering. When it comes to the blindness of compassion, Nietzsche writes that "it is the essence of the feeling of compassion that it *strips* the suffering of what is truly personal: our 'benefactors' diminish our worth and our will more than our enemies do."[39] Here Nietzsche notes that compassion intervenes in a situation it does not understand and is not party to, that it is often little more than "intellectual frivolity," and that it "offends" the sufferer through its inability to distinguish its desire from its ability to help. The desire to compassionately open oneself up to another often loses sight of the fact that it knows "nothing of the whole inner sequence and interconnection that spells misfortune for *me* or for *you*!" The erasure of the one on whom compassion

[38] Nietzsche, *Science*, §338. Nietzsche continues: "Yes, there is a secret seduction even in all these things which arouse compassion and cry out for help, for our own way is so hard and demanding and so far from love and gratitude of others that we are by no means reluctant to escape from it, from it and our own most conscience – and take refuge in the conscience of the other and in the lovely temple of the 'religion of compassion."

[39] Nietzsche, *Science*, §338.

is bestowed reveals a telling gap between the apparent ethical motivation of compassion and the vanity of exercising one's power and capacity to help another without adequate understanding.

While compassion offends because it cannot understand what is personal about suffering, it is also dangerous in that it spreads its own ignoble understanding of suffering. Just as benefactors of compassion perceive suffering as evil, a defect of existence, so they attempt to spread this ignoble understanding of suffering to others, robbing them of the possibility of a noble affirmation of life: "they want to *help* and have no thought that there is a personal necessity of misfortune**;** that terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders are as necessary for me and you as their opposites; indeed, to express myself mystically, that the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell."[40]

Thus, in light of their different views on suffering, *ressentiment*, and compassion, we see that the distance between Nietzsche and Connolly is great: Nietzsche affirms suffering while Connolly consistently needs to moderate it, Nietzsche affirms *ressentiment* while personally keeping a noble distance from it while Connolly condemns it as "evil," and Nietzsche teases out the ascetic vanity that motivates compassion and threatens to rob both us and those we bestow our gifts on of a noble relation to self-affirmation while Connolly seems to return to ascetic practices that risk fostering vanity, a form of self-affirmation masquerading as noble that drives us further away from ourselves.

[40] Nietzsche, *Science*, §338.

2.0 The Problem of Vanity: Nietzsche's Rhetoric

Having seen substantial differences between Nietzsche and Connolly regarding suffering, *ressentiment*, and compassion, I now shift to the rhetorical question of what it is about Nietzsche's philosophy that draws Connolly in and leads him to desire nobility. I begin with Daniel Conway's argument that Nietzsche's philosophy actively uses the figure and language of nobility to appeal to the vanity of his readers, to hook them and pull them into his philosophy. I then push this insight further, demonstrating that Nietzsche appeals to the vanity of his readers because he takes vanity to be a defining characteristic of democracy. Over the course of his philosophy, starting in *Human* and taking large strides forward in *Beyond* and *Antichrist*, Nietzsche is searching for an understanding of the noble psychology lost to democracy's social pathology of vanity. Nietzsche locates the roots of both beyond democracy to what it inherited from Christianity. In this section, I gloss Conway's account of the formal qualities of Nietzsche's rhetoric and briefly trace the development of Nietzsche's thinking about the relationship between nobility and vanity to set up the next two sections, where we turn to Nietzsche's final word on both in *Antichrist*.

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Daniel Conway has noted that Nietzsche regularly appeals to the vanity of his readers. This appeal occurs through what he calls Nietzsche's "plural presumptive mode of address," which "engages [Nietzsche's] best readers as if they were (near) equals, partners in an exclusive 'we.'"[41] That is, Nietzsche uses the first-person plural to seduce his readers, for they continually hear themselves addressed by him

[41] Daniel W. Conway, "Resurgent Nobility and the Problem of False Consciousness," in *Nietzsche and the Antichrist*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 187.

as if they are part of a chosen elite, superior to the common person, together with Nietzsche in pursuit of a higher calling. Conway notes the aim of drawing readers in through flattery is to juxtapose them with more detailed accounts of great individuals. These juxtapositions set up comparisons that expose the deficiencies of readers, the way they fall short of nobility. This is supposed to alert readers to their vanity, for they hear themselves addressed as nobility, delight in it, actively want to pursue and demonstrate it, only to then be increasingly confronted with what it means, what it would require of them, of how they "have not yet earned the privilege to be addressed as such." This opens an opportunity for self-confrontation, as Nietzsche "addresses himself to a 'we' that is meant to come into existence and take shape as a consequence of being addressed…as such."

Conway's account of Nietzsche's rhetorical appeals to vanity is truly insightful, but there is more to say regarding why Nietzsche sought to appeal to vanity. Nietzsche rhetorically appeals to vanity because he takes it to be a defining characteristic of democracy. In *Human*, where, as Ruth Abbey has noted, Nietzsche comes the closest to offering a traditional account of political theory, he characterizes the rising tide of democratic sentiment in his time by stating that: "we place more value on the satisfaction of vanity than any other form of wellbeing."[42] This observation does not lead Nietzsche to search for political means of overthrowing democratic sentiment or intervening in politics. On the contrary, Nietzsche declares that there is no possible political action to take, that democracy will have to overcome itself, for the common appeal to the masses "is no longer alterable…it would be pointless to raise so much as a finger against it:…Since this has happened one has to accommodate oneself to the new conditions as one

[42] Nietzsche, *Human*, §457. Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Human, All Too Human,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 129.

accommodates oneself when an earthquake has displaced the former boundaries and contours of the ground and altered the value of one's property.[43]

Nietzsche devotes most of his energy to criticizing what is wrong with democracy: how vanity has manifested itself in the growing recalcitrance of the masses to political authority, the squandering of human resources through war and poverty, the bias and hyperbole of public discourse, the covetousness of so-called "justice," the mediocrity of education, the greed of industry, and the deceitfulness of politicians who capitalize on these vices while breeding a whole host of their own.[44] But Nietzsche is not simply venting. Interspersed throughout his remarks is a constant interest in noting the loss and growing unintelligibility of nobility. Though he presents little more than allusions and intimations regarding nobility and its distinct understandings of commanding, obedience, sacrifice, and justice, it is clear he mourns its loss, desires its return, and is actively in pursuit of trying to recover an understanding of its psychological disposition toward life. After *Human,* Nietzsche never composes anything like a typical political tract again, and his remarks about democracy become increasingly acerbic.[45] But his interest in rediscovering the psychology of nobility remains constant and leads him past democracy to focus squarely on Christianity, for he comes to see, as he writes in *Beyond*, that "the *democratic* movement is the heir to Christianity."[46]

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[43] Nietzsche, *Human*, §438.

[44] On recalcitrance see §§440, 441, 480; on the squandering of human resources see §§442, 479, 481; on bias and hyperbole see §§447, 448, 451, 452; on the covetousness of justice, see §452; on vanity, see §457; on education, see §467; on industry, see §478; for the corruption of politicians, see §§445, 449, 453, 458, 469, 470. Nietzsche, *Human*, §457.

[45] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §§22, 44, 202-204; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 1§§4, 5,2§12, 3§8; Nietzsche, *Antichrist* §§17, 51.

[46] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §202.

While Nietzsche's interest in the psychology of nobility grows and his rhetorical appeal to the vanity of his audience remains constant, his interest in the topic of vanity gradually wanes after *Human* until it reappears at the end of his philosophy in *Antichrist*. While no robust account of it is given, vanity is invoked at crucial moments in Nietzsche's argument as the psychological mechanism responsible for the successful rise of Christianity, the subsequent rise of democracy, and the loss of the psychology of redemption from *ressentiment.* Those with knowledge of Nietzsche's past reflections of vanity can see that his former ideas about it are present and operating in *Antichrist*, for the text rehearses vanity's relation to asceticism, its competition with nobility, its substitute satisfaction for self-affirmation. It is in *Antichrist* that Nietzsche finally names vanity as an equal contributor, alongside *ressentiment*, to the rise of slave morality and the loss of nobility. It is this account that I now wish to reconstruct, for it is here that we see what vanity costs us in the most nuanced account of the psychology of nobility Nietzsche ever penned.

2.1 The Problem of Vanity: A Genealogy of Priestly Lies

Antichrist has long been neglected by scholars. Initially, because of its excessive hyperbole, vicious criticism, less focused argumentation, and late composition, the question of Nietzsche's mental sanity hung over the text. Today, this view is on the decline as most scholars agree with Aaron Ridley that, "*Antichrist* should be read...as the work of someone who finds Christianity genuinely maddening, not as the work of someone who is already mad."[47] Evidence of this growing consensus can be seen in Daniel Conway's recent edited volume devoted to *Antichrist*, which brings together several prominent scholars to reassess this heretofore marginal text. In his introduction, Conway observes that *Antichrist* "remains something of an outlier, an enigma, perhaps, even to Nietzsche's most sympathetic readers."[48] Conway reasons this is because it is not clear what unique insights the book possesses. This leads Conway to conclude that, while *Antichrist* is a work worth studying, it falls short of the grandiose claims made within it and will likely continue to be considered a minor work in Nietzsche's philosophy.

While I agree that *Antichrist* will never compare with some of Nietzsche's other works, and while I readily acknowledge that its argumentation is sometimes frustratingly frenetic, attentiveness to it is rewarded. On the surface, *Antichrist* can seem like one long tirade against Christianity. But beneath the surface Nietzsche is using and reworking ideas old and new to push himself even closer to a satisfying account of a psychology free from *ressentiment*. One way into such a reading is to start by attending to

[47] Aaron Ridley, "Introduction," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ix.
[48] Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Antichrist*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 4.

Nietzsche's appeal to the vanity of his readers, for it clues us in to the battle Nietzsche is staging between priestly instincts and the instinct of redemption.

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Antichrist opens with a direct address to its readers. Nietzsche writes, "This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are even alive yet."[49] He then lists the necessary requirements to understand what he is about to say. He claims that "you" must be "honest to the point of hardness," able to live on mountain tops, indifferent to how exposure to truth may lead to your undoing, and most of all that you need courage. This use of the second person combined with Nietzsche's address to an ambiguous audience who may not be alive yet, not to mention his own comment about being born "posthumously," initially leaves readers wondering whether they are being addressed. Do they have the strength and courage to hear what Nietzsche is about to say, or are they eavesdropping on an address that is not intended for them?

Such a question is left to linger in the mind of the reader as Nietzsche then immediately switches to his more familiar plural presumptive mode of address: "Let us look at ourselves in the face. We are Hyperboreans…We have discovered happiness, we know the way, we have found the way out of the labyrinth of whole millennia."[50] Discussions of power, breeding, higher types of humanity, and the importance of instincts follow this address.[51] Each discussion stresses how rare and valuable great individuals are, how many obstacles they must overcome, how much they have been dependent on

[49] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, Preface.
[50] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §1.
[51] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§2-6.

chance. But Nietzsche wants this to change, he wishes to find a more intentional way of pursuing individual greatness, and this requires overcoming what resists it.

Pulling in his readers with descriptions of greatness, Nietzsche then turns his attention to "our" shared enemy. Nietzsche writes: "We must say *whom* we are opposed to – theologians and everything with theologian blood in its veins." Nietzsche will go on to call this enemy the "theologian instinct," a drive that attaches itself to ascetic practices, seeks self-preservation in such a way that it "does not allow any scrap of reality to be honored or even expressed," turns judgments on their head, and turns a blind eye to itself to avoid facing its own mendacity.[52] Nietzsche is clear that this instinct follows in the "legacy of the priests" but in a particular way, for it is the "art of *falling for your own forgeries*."[53] With this, Nietzsche introduces one of the major themes of *Antichrist*, the battle between truth and lies.[54] Nietzsche wishes to outline not only the lies priests and theologians have told but that the fact that they fall for them means we are in danger of losing the truth they once willfully distorted.[55] Foremost among such truths are those pertaining to nobility, for the priestly instincts at work in the history of Judaism and that fully bloomed in Christianity have always been opposed to the figure of the noble, they have always "waged a *war to the death* against this *higher type*."[56]

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[52] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§8-9.
[53] Nietzsche, *Antichrist* §12.
[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), §§33, 35, 40, 43, 44, 50, 55.
[55] Nietzsche's emphasis on truth in *Antichrist* is a bit strange, especially when he aligns it with science later in *Antichrist*. One might think that Nietzsche has returned to the more positivistic views he articulated in such works as *Human*, *Daybreak*, and *Science*. But, as I will show, the kinds of "truths" he is interested in recovering clearly demonstrate his consistent belief that history should be used onto the greater end of life. For more on such a view, see Nietzsche, "Truth and Lying"; Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §4; Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 2§12.
[56] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §5.

Nietzsche illustrates such lies by retelling the story of the political decline of the ancient state of Israel and the historical rise of the Jewish priest. In this account, Nietzsche stresses that the priests used "decadent" means, lies about a supernatural realm and the causal connection between it and our own, to gain power, but that they themselves were not "decadent."[57] Nietzsche argues that when Israel was powerful, its God was like any other in that it was a means used for the Israelites to celebrate their own power. But, once the political power of Israel began to wane and political hopes were disappointed, the priests saw an opportunity to seize power by deliberately manipulating the conception of God. They introduced the concept of sin, the notion that people's suffering was the result of their disobedience to God and that to prosper they must align themselves with the religious law. As the spokesmen of God and effectual writers of the religious law, the priests thereby cemented their power with this new conception of metaphysical causality through lies and deceit.[58]

Nietzsche claims that just as the Jewish priests of old saw in the political decline of Israel an opportunity to come to power through lies, so Paul saw an opportunity to claim power by imbuing the life of Jesus with supernatural significance. Rather than invoking God's punishment, Paul discarded the truth of Jesus's teaching and transformed a man into the Son of God. With this transformation, Paul lied, turning Jesus's death into a sacrifice to redeem the eternal souls of humanity. For Nietzsche, Paul's emphasis on the redemption of the soul is crucial, for this is where Paul introduced an innovative lie that would lead to the destruction of nobility. While the soul itself was simply a lie about a metaphysical entity, it communicated to the masses that "everyone is on the same level as everyone else, that...the

[57] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §24.
[58] The following account can be found in Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§25-26.

'salvation' of *each* individual lays claim to an eternal significance, that the small-minded and the half-mad can think well of themselves."[59] That is, Paul's teaching of the redemption of the human soul appealed to the vanity of the masses. Regardless of their position in society, everyone was now able to believe that in the eyes of God they are all equally valuable, all worthy of love, of being redeemed.

The assertion of equality hidden in the lie of an immortal soul had two familiar effects. On the one hand, equality allowed for the release of resentment against anything that thought of itself as higher, for with the "poisonous doctrine 'equal rights for everyone'" Christianity "used *ressentiment*...against everything on earth that is noble" and by granting immortality to all engaged in the "most vicious attempt to assassinate *noble* humanity."[60] On the other hand, the lie of the immortal soul brought with it ascetic practices capable of satisfying vanity. Nietzsche writes that Christianity appeals to people "who cannot posit *themselves* as a goal" and who hold "a morality of self-abnegation in the greatest honor,"[61] for

> In Christianity, the instincts of the subjugated and oppressed come to the fore; the lowest classes are the ones who look to it for salvation. Casuistry of sin, self-critique, and inquisitions of conscience are sources of *employment*, cures for boredom...The body is an object of hatred, hygiene is rejected as sensuousness...There is a distinctively Christian sense of cruelty towards yourself and others...It is Christian to harbor a deadly hatred of the masters of the earth, the 'nobles,' – while maintaining a hidden, secret edge of competition (– they can have the 'body,' we *only* want the 'soul').[62]

Here we see the ascetic practices Paul's doctrine of the soul introduced and the inner torsion it posits between a false, metaphysical self and the real material self, elevating the former over the latter through practices of self-denial, self-critique, and inquisitions of conscience. This bifurcation of the self leads to

[59] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §43.
[60] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §43.
[61] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §54
[62] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §21.

a familiar relationship between asceticism and vanity as a means of competing with nobility. Nietzsche argues that this vanity was crucial for the rise of Christianity, that, in fact, "Christianity owes its *victory* to *this* miserable flattery of personal vanity."[63] It is here that Nietzsche has traced "our" enemy back to its roots in Christianity. For it is the lie of the soul, how it has flattered vanity, that has made Christianity successful and has had profound political consequences. Having identified "our" enemy and the lie that has been forgotten, Nietzsche now sets himself the task of revealing the noble understanding of redemption from *ressentiment* it has obscured.

[63] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§43, 42.

2.2 The Problem of Vanity: *The Antichrist's* Psychology of Redemption

In *Antichrist*, Nietzsche lists examples of the cultural forms of greatness we have lost to the satisfaction of vanity.[64] But the loss that interests him the most is psychological: "What I *do* care about is the psychological type of the redeemer."[65] While it is true that the notions of "redeemer" and redemption" cut in different directions in his philosophy, in this context Nietzsche uses the language of redemption to talk about a "superiority over every feeling of *ressentiment*."[66] What follows in Nietzsche's account of redemption is the most detailed example of self-affirmation he ever penned, curiously using the figure of Jesus to illustrate it.

To disclose the psychology of redemption we have lost to vanity, Nietzsche first returns to the lies of Paul. Nietzsche writes that Paul "had no use whatsoever for the life of the redeemer" or for Jesus's teaching and not only distorted the truth but set a precedent the Church was to follow, codifying such lies in Scripture.[67] Despite the falseness of the New Testament, Nietzsche claims that we can still discern traces of the truth in the Gospel accounts, and he provides his own revisionist reading by peeling back the lies of priestly instincts to return to what the satisfaction of vanity has led us to forget.

Nietzsche starts his search for "truth" by addressing his readers with a question. When it comes to the psychology of a typical redeemer, "Can we even conceive of this type anymore?"[68] This question sets up Nietzsche's investigation by drawing the reader in with him. Together we are going to search for the

[64] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§58-62.
[65] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §29.
[66] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §40. See Nietzsche's critique of redemption as an attempt to escape self-affirmation in *The Case of Wagner*.
[67] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §38, 42.
[68] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §29.

psychological truth about Jesus. But phrasing this in terms of a question also communicates the challenge of comprehending something that may already be lost. The challenge is reflected in Nietzsche's own account of Jesus, which at first appears deeply ambivalent, torn between criticism and admiration.

To decipher the truth about Jesus, Nietzsche retells the story of who he was on two registers, attending to the particularities of the man from Nazareth, on the one hand, to parse the typical traits of a psychology of redemption, on the other.[69] When it comes to the particularities of who Jesus was, Nietzsche characterizes him as an "idiot." This characterization is not simply an insult, but the name Nietzsche gives for two defining characteristics of Jesus. The first is that Jesus suffered from a medical condition that produced profound pain from physical contact with the external world. That is, Jesus suffered from a condition "where the *sense of touch* is pathologically oversensitive and recoils from all contact" because it has a "capacity for suffering that does not want to be touched at all because it feels every contact too acutely."[70] And this physiological or "instinctual" condition leads to a second quality Nietzsche wishes to emphasize, for because of Jesus's inability to interact with the external world, he was largely ignorant of it: "He does not know anything about *culture*...he does not need to struggle against it...The same is true of the *state*, about the whole civic order and society, about *work*, about war – he never had any reason to negate 'the world,' the ecclesiastical concept of the 'world' never occurred to him."[71]

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[69] For other interpretations of Nietzsche's account of Jesus, see Lawrence Hatab, "A Revived God in the *Antichrist*?," in Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Antichrist*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 7-20; Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche and Christianity*, (Washington D.C.: Henry Regnery Company, 1961 [1938]), 16-35; Anthony K. Jensen, "Nietzsche's Quest for the Historical Jesus," in Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Antichrist*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 117-139.
[70] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §§29, 30.
[71] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §32.

The characterization of Jesus as an "idiot" serves two functions. On the one hand, Nietzsche's characterization of Jesus as an idiot means that his condition cannot be generalized. Even if Jesus demonstrates the typical traits of the psychology of redemption, the particularity of its expression, of what we will see as the practical result of Jesus's self-affirmation, is tied to his "idiotic" instincts, instincts that few of us are likely to share. In this way, Nietzsche frees himself from having to follow through with the specific form of "redemption" Jesus adopts but can still use the formal qualities Jesus displays to discern something akin to a model of psychological redemption.

On the other hand, Jesus's physiological condition and mental state serve to further isolate what Nietzsche is most interested in – Jesus's psychology. That Jesus was ignorant of his external world means that we are free from having to wonder about the possible political ambitions he may have harbored, for Nietzsche's account makes him ignorant of this aspect of reality altogether. Moreover, his physiological condition, his inability to interact with the external world, means that Jesus's life and teaching are almost solely focused on his own inner, psychological reality, for that was the only world he had any knowledge of or influence over. Nietzsche argues that this becomes obvious once we see that Jesus's language, his references to such things as "God" and "the kingdom of heaven," do not denote a supernatural realm but are instances of Jesus's symbolism, his attempt to find a language capable of communicating his own inner, psychological states of being.[72]

Having isolated the particularities of Jesus, Nietzsche wishes to identify the "typical" psychology of redemption and does so by contrasting Jesus's response to suffering with the ascetic response of

[72] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §§32-34.

Christianity. Nietzsche claims that Jesus and Christianity shared a hatred of reality, a hatred of the suffering we experience being forced to confront our limitations, our losses, our disappointments, our afflictions. Christianity responds to this suffering with lies about the results of ascetic practices. We adopt ascetic practices not because they allow us to affirm suffering but because they are morally coded as "good," because they grant us a subtle feeling of power as one part of ourselves lords over another. But both this sense of power and the compensatory lies of morality come at the cost of noble forms of affirmation, of affirming oneself regardless of what is deemed morally good and affirming the suffering of life without recourse to mendacity.

Pace Christian asceticism, Nietzsche finds in Jesus a different psychological response to suffering. Jesus's own physical suffering is acute and idiosyncratic. He cannot escape it, and this makes his situation prone to *ressentiment*. Nietzsche even admits that Jesus possess the same "hatred of reality" Christianity possesses. But in response to suffering Jesus rids himself of asceticism and compensatory religious lies, for he

> no longer needed formulas, rites for interacting with God – or even prayer. He had settled his accounts with the whole Jewish doctrine of atonement and reconciliation; he knew how the *practice* of life is the only thing that can make you feel 'divine,' 'blessed,' 'evangelic,' like a 'child of God' at all times: 'Atonement and 'praying for forgiveness' are *not* the way to God: *only the evangelical practice* leads to God, in fact it *is* 'God.'"[73]

When Nietzsche writes that Jesus's practices are God, he is saying two things at once. Polemically, he is saying that when Jesus invoked "God" and other religious terms all he was talking about were the psychological effects of his practices. The religious significance Christianity attributes to Jesus and his teachings is a lie. Jesus was not interested in a world beyond this one, he was barely interested in the world

[73] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §33.

around him. Rather, Jesus was interested in discovering psychological redemption in this life, for he knew "how we must *live* to feel as if we are 'in heaven,' to feel 'eternal,' given that we do not feel *remotely* as if we are 'in heaven' when we behave in any other way: this, and this alone, is the psychological reality of redemption' – A new way of life, *not* a new faith..."[74]

This distinction between living and believing illuminates the second thing Nietzsche is saying, for what Jesus discovered was a deification of practice. This is not to suggest that practice should once again become imbued with religious significance but that practices themselves, with all their mundane, tedious attributes, should be elevated to the same level of significance as God. Jesus's life, once we adopt the radically immanent vision Nietzsche attributes to him, reveals that everything he did he did as an end onto itself. There was no thought of supernatural compensation, no dispensation of moral "goodness." Just the psychological benefits of the practices themselves. And Nietzsche pushes this point as far as it will go, insisting that even Jesus's willingness to be crucified can be understood in terms of its own inherent value: "Jesus could not have wanted anything more from his death...than publicly to give his doctrine its strongest test, to *prove* it."[75]

What distinguishes Jesus's practice from asceticism is not only the refusal of spiritual compensation but the faith it expresses in the form of self-affirmation. Nietzsche emphasizes Jesus's practice of nonresistance more than any other. While the motivation of nonresistance often concerns one's ethical or moral responsibility, Nietzsche claims that these are not what motivated Jesus. Instead, Jesus's practice of nonresistance was grounded in self-affirmation, in the search for his own personal happiness.

[74] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §33.
[75] Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §40.

Nietzsche writes that Jesus adopted practices of nonresistance because of its direct relation to his instincts, for his idiosyncratic hatred of reality could "only experiences bliss…when it stops resisting everyone and everything,"[76] that only this would lead to "inner feelings of pleasure and self-affirmation" that are themselves "pure 'proofs of strength.'"[77] This is an incredible claim. Jesus, afflicted with intense suffering from contact with the external world, chooses to offer no resistance even as his practices and teachings lead to misunderstandings and persecutions that confront him with even more suffering. He does this because the psychological freedom found in self-affirmation empowers Jesus to continue to affirm suffering, knowing that as long as he is one with himself, with his instincts, as long as he continues to practice nonresistance, to exercise the psychological choice to be indifferent toward suffering, he has redeemed himself from the dangers of *ressentiment*.

Jesus's self-affirmation is what Nietzsche fears we no longer understand. His account of priestly lies tells the story of the rise of vanity to distance us from what is incredible and yet human, all-too-human about Jesus's exemplification of redemption, of self-affirmation. Considering what self-affirmation can entail, it is little wonder that the promises of vanity, even despite the asceticism it may entail, have been so effective. With his depiction of Jesus, of how he illustrates the typical traits of redemption, of the "aristocratism of the mind," Nietzsche brings his readers face to face with what self-affirmation looks like, he reveals the audience he wishes to address, and he nudges his actual readers from wondering about what nobility looks like toward the question of whether they are themselves noble.

[76] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §30.
[77] Nietzsche, *Antichrist,* §32.

3.0 Conclusion

In *Beyond*, amid his most concentrated reflections on nobility, Nietzsche writes: "Among artists and scholars these days, you will find plenty of people whose works reveal them to be driven by a deep desire *for* nobility. But this very need for nobility is fundamentally different from the needs *of* the noble soul itself, and almost serves as an eloquent and dangerous testimony to the absence of such needs."[78] Having seen the substantive differences between Nietzsche and Connolly, and both the nature and force of Nietzsche's rhetorical appeals to vanity, it is uncanny how Nietzsche could be said to "anticipate" Connolly's reading of him. Connolly is attracted to Nietzsche's figure of the noble, to its ability to affirm becoming and suffering, and he is eager to assume its ethos. But instead of pursuing nobility through an existential reading of Nietzsche that would lead to self-confrontation, Connolly sidesteps the more challenging aspects of nobility, only partially affirming suffering by dividing it into two distinct kinds, one morally approved of and the other denounced as "evil." This division in suffering leads to the need to posit a torsion in the self, produced through innocent though still ascetic "arts of the self." The culmination of these things is that self-affirmation, which is central in Nietzsche's understanding and what grounds the noble's ability to affirm suffering, falls out of Connolly's account altogether.

Regarding the substantive differences between him and Nietzsche, Connolly often responds that he is not interested in pleasing the "academic police." By this, Connolly means he is not interested in whether his interpretation of Nietzsche is something Nietzsche himself would approve, for Connolly chooses to see Nietzsche's philosophy as a fertile ground for plagiarism. Connolly's reason for doing so

[78] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §287.

is that he is interested in addressing the political challenges of pluralism in our contemporary democracies. That is, he is interested in what he can *do* with Nietzsche's philosophy. But such an approach to Nietzsche's philosophy not only bypassing an opportunity for self-confrontation but seems to recapitulate the general contours of the argument Nietzsche's philosophy seeks to confront.

Ultimately, Nietzsche's criticism of the democratic appropriation of nobility is that it slips into vanity to avoid the challenge of self-affirmation, and it is curious, given the centrality of self-affirmation in Nietzsche's understanding of nobility, that it entirely falls out of Connolly's account. The reason self-affirmation is absent in Connolly's thinking is that he assumes self-affirmation is not a problem because it is lacking but because there is far too much of it. Within his problematic, where the suffering of contingency leads people to morally denounce others as evil to affirm the essential qualities of their identity, self-affirmation is equated with evil.

Nietzsche reads self-affirmation differently. For him, self-affirmation is the noble process of affirming suffering and oneself. The two go together, for only an adequate relationship to oneself can produce the strength to endure suffering. Thus, while Connolly thinks of the self-affirmation of one's identity as the cause of moral and physical violence against others, Nietzsche argues that the *ressentiment* that produces such violence is due to a lack of self-affirmation. The politics of *ressentiment* may often take the explicit form of absolute affirmations of identity, strong moral claims, and the invocation of strength, but Nietzsche wants us to perceive that despite appearance the true psychological motivations of such actions and proclamations is a lack of self-affirmation rather than an instance of it.

If Nietzsche is right that *ressentiment* emerges from a lack of self-affirmation, then Connolly's prescription of an inner torsion not only risks perpetuating a sense of vanity through asceticism; it also

threatens to precipitate rather than prevent acts of *ressentiment* in those who lack the resources or sufficient "strength" to endure the suffering of contingency. On some level, Connolly acknowledges this, knowing that "techniques of the self" sow disturbance in one's identity and that there is always a risk that they will push some people into resentment. This is why he consistently calls for moderation. But this is where things become confusing. Because Connolly equates self-affirmation with evil, he is caught having to make his techniques more and more gradual and moderate to find a way around the odd position of trying to prescribe an inner tension in the self to those who are not even able to affirm themselves in the first place.

This opens the question of how to respond to *ressentiment*. Ostensibly, Connolly turns to ethical practices that introduce an embodied awareness of mutual contestability between individuals and groups of different identities. But if Nietzsche is correct that this ethical invitation harbors moralistic attitudes toward suffering and *ressentiment*, then Connolly's attempt to intervene in the politics of resentment fails to understand the nature of the suffering that fuels it. More than that, morally condemning resentment only adds fuel to the fire. From Connolly's perspective the call to recognize plurality and the inherent value of modesty seems intuitive and reasonable. But as a way of intervening in the *ressentiment* of others, unless they are already predisposed to the snug coziness of asceticism, this unacknowledged moralizing adds insult to injury among those who need to find their way to self-affirmation.

It is Connolly's inability to affirm *ressentiment* that leads him to moralize against it, to denounce it as evil, and to miss what form of self-affirmation exists among the resentful. Nietzsche's affirmation of *ressentiment*, on the contrary, sees the role it plays in the lives of the "weak." Here we see that Nietzsche's

affirmation of *ressentiment*, the fact that he does not need to moralize against it, allows him to better understand how such a psychology works, what is driving it. We have already seen in the previous chapter how Nietzsche appeals to rather than condemns the *ressentiment* in his readers. And there is no question that Nietzsche has been influential to political movements fueled by *ressentiment*. This leads us to the question of how Nietzsche tries to confront *ressentiment*, how he believes this is possible, what it must be confronted with, how this differs from Connolly's ethical tactics. It is to that task that I turn in the next chapter, asking how Nietzsche's philosophy might confront interpretations of it from figures among the Far Right.

Chapter 4

Nietzsche and the Alt-Right: Confronting Our Resentment of Creation

In the previous chapter, I discussed the democratic reading of Nietzsche and suggested that one further implication of vanity is that it extends itself in a form of compassion that is blind to the suffering of the resentful, offending them and provoking rather than preventing further *ressentiment*. In this chapter, I turn to a far-right interpretation of Nietzsche to illustrate how Nietzsche appeals to the resentment of his readers. Indeed, Nietzsche hooks such readers through an indulgence of *ressentiment* rather than its ethical prohibition. He does this through the critical tone and posturing of his rhetoric, the use of vocabularies of power, violence, and elitism that seek to bolster experiences of loss and exclusion from the universal claims of morality. While appealing to the *ressentiment* of his audience is a dangerous strategy, Nietzsche indulges his readers to first hook them and then direct their ire toward cultural forms of decadence that he gradually reveals are at work in themselves.

This chapter develops as follows. In the first section, I sketch the rhetorical resonance between Nietzsche's philosophy and its far-right interpreters. I aim to explore a resonance often ignored by democratic defenders of Nietzsche, while also raising a familiar puzzle about how to make sense of Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment* and his seeming rhetorical indulgence in similar if not identical affects. In the next two sections (1.1-1.2), I further scan the relation between Nietzsche and a specific, contemporary figure among the Far Right in the work of Jack Donovan. In the familiar contours of Donovan's apocalyptic critique of our contemporary "empire of nothing," I draw out the psychology of loss that underwrites it and that finds a sense of resonance with Nietzsche's articulation of untimeliness.

Then, I turn to Donovan's interest in the challenge of overcoming *ressentiment* and his turn to Nietzsche's understanding of aesthetic creation as a means of overcoming it. It is here that I locate the tension in Donovan's interpretation of Nietzsche as he comes to embody the type of the decadent artist, combining Nietzsche's thinking about art and creation with masculine notions of mastery and domination in ways that force him to avoid an existential confrontation with *ressentiment* just as he claims to be doing so.

In the second half of the chapter (2.0-2.2), I begin to unpack the differences that exist between Nietzsche and Donovan concerning creation and its use in the "overcoming" of *ressentiment*. I begin by tracking the evolution of Nietzsche's understanding of Dionysus to reveal that in contrast to Donovan Nietzsche holds an understanding of creation intimately tied together with destruction and fate. However, while his account of Dionysus illuminates the differences that exist between Nietzsche and Donovan concerning creation, it presents its own problems, as Nietzsche ends his account of Dionysus with a psychological puzzle regarding how to distinguish between *ressentiment* and destruction. To gain further insight into this distinction and better understand Nietzsche's account of creation as a means of overcoming *ressentiment*, I then track Nietzsche's own personal transformation. Tracing the evolution of Nietzsche's relationship with Wagner and how its vicissitudes find parallels in his thinking about Dionysus provides an example of the means Nietzsche uses to overcome *ressentiment*, revealing that the negative and critical aspects of his rhetoric emerge from and never cease to exist in relation to Nietzsche's self-critique of his own decadence.

1.0 Nietzsche and the Far Right: A Resonance of Rhetoric

In this section, I identify the resonance between the critical dimension of Nietzsche's rhetoric and that of intellectual figures on the Far Right.[214] While Nietzsche's liberal and democratic interpreters often wish to defend him against such interpretations, they conspicuously avoid the existence of this rhetorical resonance. This is curious given the importance Nietzsche places on the rhetorical dimension of language and his own recognition of the need to communicate with his readers on an experiential register. Identifying how Nietzsche's rhetoric communicates an experience of being untimely with universal moral claims and how this connects with figures among the Far Right, I suggest that it is in this relation that we can begin to further explore the familiar and confounding question of how Nietzsche's philosophy can so powerfully put forth a substantive critique of *ressentiment* while simultaneously seemingly to indulge the very psychological and affective tendencies it criticizes.

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Nothing has haunted Nietzsche's philosophy more than its use by far-right intellectuals and political movements. From the distribution of *Zarathustra* to soldiers in the trenches during the first world war, the photographs of Hitler by the bust of Nietzsche, the appropriation of Nietzsche's ideas in Nazi propaganda, and his subsequent influence on a range of thinkers from Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger,

[214] In this chapter, the definition of "Far Right" is admittedly vague. The reason for this is that, as Cas Mudde has argued, the nomenclature commonly used by scholars to refer to right-wing political groups remains varied, biased, and imprecise (Cas Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family, *West European Politics*, 19(2), (1996), 226). While some scholars, such as Daniel Rueda, have noted a growing tendency to distinguish between right-wing political ideologies that advance revolutionary as opposed to reformist aims (Daniel Rueda, "Alain de Benoist, Ethnopluralism and the Cultural Turn in Racism, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 55(3), (2021), 215; Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), I have followed Mark Sedgwick's attempt "to avoid questions of definition and classification by focusing on thinkers widely read in all these circles, in the US and Europe" (Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xiv). The only additional qualification I add, is that I am obviously only interested in such figures who draw upon Nietzsche in their work, which happens to be most of them.

and Julius Evola during and after the World Wars to the founding members of the *Nouvelle droite* in the 1960s and the contemporary Alt-Right and its fellow travelers – we cannot escape the fact that Nietzsche has regularly been used as a source of authority and inspiration by those on the Far Right.[215] Beyond these the political associations, numerous far-right figures have drawn upon Nietzsche's ideas of cultural decline and decadence, the naturalness of social hierarchy and the humanitarian distortion of egalitarianism, the aestheticization of masculine virtues of strength and power, and an enigmatic desire for a lost past that cannot be fully retrieved.

For as long as there have been such readings of Nietzsche, there have also been liberal and democratic defenses of his philosophy. Karl Jaspers, Georges Bataille, and Walter Kaufmann wrote the first wave of defenses, attempting to distance Nietzsche from the political stain of Nazism by transforming him into a more spiritual thinker attuned to the constant processes of change and becoming.[216] Such defenses frequently ignore the unseemly aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy to argue that what lies at its center is a more spiritual or existential philosophy. These defenses are eager to point to the substantive discrepancies between Nietzsche's explicit views on nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the means of political change and those interpretations of the Right that would co-opt his thinking toward these ends. Indeed, the back

[215] For more on Nietzsche's appropriation by the Nazis, see Max Whyte, "The Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich: Alfred Baumler's 'Heroic Realism,'" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43(2), (2008): 171-194. For scholarly denials of Nietzsche's Nazism, see Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For Nietzsche's influence on far-right thinkers, see Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[216] Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Stuart Kendall, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015); Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz, (Tucson: The University of Arizona, 1966); Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

and forth of this debate over Nietzsche continues to this day.[217] These defenses, old and new, always take a similar tact, identifying the "bad" interpretations by those on the Right and replacing them with a more accurate account of the substantive claims of Nietzsche's philosophy.

However, defenders of Nietzsche object to substantive misinterpretations while ignoring the rhetorical resonance between him and his far-right interpreters. Nietzsche's unconventional style of writing – his use of insults in the place of arguments, his (seemingly) *ad hominem* attacks, his reductive accounts of his enemies, his brazen racism, misogyny, and elitism – all these critical dimensions of Nietzsche's rhetoric are regularly adopted and redeployed by those on the Right. While Nietzsche's defenders ignore this resonance and often refuse to adopt it themselves, fearing an indulgence of *ressentiment* will lead to political violence and antidemocratic politics, the resonance between Nietzsche and his interpreters raises a familiar question about how Nietzsche can both condemn and seemingly indulge in the language and psychological disposition of *ressentiment*.

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[217] The most recent iteration of this debate occurred in 2017 after the far right rally at the University of Virginia and played itself out in the popular press. For more on this see: Erik Baker, "Why the Alt-Right Loves Nietzsche," *Jacobin*, https://jacobin.com/2019/01/neitzsche-heidegger-ronald-beiner-far-right; Ronald Beiner, *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Joseph Brean, "In the rising far-right, philosopher are seeing a return of the 'bad' Nietzsche," *National Post*, September 21, 2018, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/in-the-rising-far-right-philosophers-are-seeing-a-return-of-the-bad-nietzsche; Hugo Drochon, "Saving Nietzsche from the Nazis," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 6, 2020, https://www-the-tls-co-uk.proxy.library.cornell.edu/articles/walter-kaufmann-stanley-corngold-review-hugo-drochon/; Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (eds.), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Sean Illing, "The alt-right is drunk on bad readings of Nietzsche. The Nazis were too," *Vox*, December 30, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2017/8/17/16140846/alt-right-nietzsche-richard-spencer-nazism; Raymond Lopez, "Answering the Alt-Right," *National Affairs,* Fall 2017, https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/answering-the-alt-right; Barbara Molas, "Exposing the Philosophy Behind Neo-Nazism," *CARR*, November 29, 2021, https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2021/12/01/exposing-the-philosophy-behind-neo-nazism/; Sue Prideaux, "Far right, misogynist, humorless? Why Nietzsche is misunderstood," October 6, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/06/exploding-nietzsche-myths-need-dynamiting.

While defenders of Nietzsche wedded to his substantive critique of *ressentiment* distance themselves from his critical rhetoric, it leads them to the awkward position of ignoring what Nietzsche held to be the most important quality of language.[218] As James I. Porter has argued, Nietzsche knew that rhetoric "scandalizes thought and language because it brings them back to our senses, confronts us with all their historical and contextual contingency, and renders thought both materially present…and…*materially* intelligible…which is emphatically not the same as the abstract and ideal intelligibility that thought's expression would present by itself."[219] That is, Nietzsche knew that rhetoric communicates to us not through conscious ideas but on a visceral register, speaking to the very instinctual, biological, biographical, and cultural material that we embody.[220] This is both because we overemphasize the role of the conscious mind and because we fail to see that language can only be used as a means of connection when two people find a shared experience."[221] When Nietzsche uses words, he is not interested in treating them as a scholar would, exploring the various meanings they possess, but is interested in the rhetorical

[218] For more on the danger of rhetorically tapping into the energies of *ressentiment* for the purposes of politics see, William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), chapter two.

[219] James I. Porter, "Nietzsche, Rhetoric, Philology," in *Philology and Its Histories*, ed. Sean Gurd, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 169; Simon Lambek, "Nietzsche's Rhetoric: Dissonance and Reception, *Epoché*," 25(1), (2020): 57-80. I should clarify that while I am exclusively focused on the critical dimensions of Nietzsche's rhetoric in this chapter, it is not the only rhetorical mode in which Nietzsche writes. As Nehamas has rightly observed, many styles exist in Nietzsche's philosophy, and it cannot be reduced to its seemingly resentful polemics. Indeed, much of Nietzsche philosophy is almost entirely devoid of the critical or negative tone that becomes prominent in his post-*Zarathustra* works, the colder, "icier" tone of his scientific neutral in what has long been thought of as his "middle" or transition period, from *Human* through *Zarathustra*, being the most obvious. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

[220] "An instinct becomes weaker if it rationalizes itself: because the very *act* of rationalization represents weakness" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 255.

[221] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268.

communication of language, of how one experience seeks to communicate itself through the rhetorical manipulation of language.

The experience Nietzsche wishes to communicate is one of being untimely. Nietzsche's untimeliness pertains to how his predilection for another, older, noble morality no longer has a place in the modern world. Whether it takes the form of Christianity, democracy, or cultural barbarism, the pervasiveness of a morality that refuses to affirm the darker side of life, that needs compensatory beliefs and values that seek to create a form of life that seeks comfort and security, has taken over Nietzsche's modern world. Thinking about this in terms of the experiences communicated through language, Nietzsche writes that, "People who are more alike and ordinary have always been at an advantage; while people who are more exceptional, refined, rare, and difficult to understand will easily remain alone, prone to accidents in their isolation and rarely propagating. Immense countervailing forces will have to be called upon to cross this natural, all-too-natural *progressus in simile*, people becoming increasingly similar, ordinary, average, herd-like, – increasingly *base*."[222] Nietzsche then extend this idea, arguing that because of the disadvantage of the exceptional, because their experience is unable to communicate itself to those around it, the referents of language become increasingly wedded to common experiences such that those with a different experience find themselves forsaken, unable to communicate.

This experience of not being able to communicate, of having one's experience erased from language, and for the commonness that is entirely foreign to one's own self-understanding to become morally coded, is at least part of what Nietzsche communicates through his critical rhetoric. And one only needs

[222] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, §268.

to attend to those interested in Nietzsche among the Far Right to see that this is what resonates with them, this experience of being untimely. It is this connection across a shared experience that I wish to further explore, to see where Nietzsche's rhetorical appeal takes those on the Right, where they are willing to follow its implications and where they turn away from the opportunity of self-confrontation an existential reading of Nietzsche's philosophy would offer. To do this, I turn to the work of Jack Donovan, a contemporary figure of the Far Right who not only replicates the substantive and formal aspects of Nietzsche's critical philosophy but also attempts to follow Nietzsche toward the "overcoming" of *ressentiment*. It is between Donovan's interpretation and Nietzsche's philosophy that I wish to tease out an answer to the question of how Nietzsche can seemingly practice and condemn *ressentiment*.

But two notes before I begin this task. First, an introduction. Jack Donovan is an autodidact and former fellow traveler of the Alt-Right. A self-described man of many trades, Donovan's work began with his own personal struggle between homosexuality and gay culture. Refusing the idea that one must reject traditional conceptions of masculinity to be "gay," Donovan began his literal love affair with masculinity, what he refers to in his 2007 book of the same name as "androphilia." An underground classic, Donovan's influence spread throughout the Far Right, principally among the alt-right and within the "manosphere," where his reflections on masculinity grew into *The Way of Men* (2011), a work that seeks to retrieve a conception of masculinity grounded in a notion of tribalism. In 2016, Donovan continued his project as the alt-right theorist of masculinity with *Becoming a Barbarian*, a work aimed at a critique of the feminization of contemporary culture and its construction of the "empire of nothing," which aims to render tribal relationship between men impossible. Then, in 2018, Donovan

made his most explicit and concentrated turn to Nietzsche to tackle his growing awareness of his own *ressentiment* and the reactive tendencies widely circulating within the Far Right.

Second, I feel some account of why I have chosen Donovan is called for. I have three reasons. First, as Mark Sedgwick has suggested, while Donovan's use of gender as the primary lens of his work is unique among members of the contemporary Far Right, it is also something of a culmination of contemporary far-right thinking. By basing his critiques and analysis on gender, Donovan not only identifies the disproportionate appeal of the Far Right to men but the masculine psychology that defines it. Indeed, even going back to works like Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* and Robert Bly's *Iron John*, a sense of needing to retrieve or preserve an endangered sense of masculinity, of the need to struggle against and overcome the whole world, is a common and oftentimes defining feature of thinkers and ideologies among the Far Right.

Second, I have chosen Donovan because of his level of engagement with Nietzsche. Engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy among figure of the Far Right rarely conforms to conventional scholarly practices of citation and textual analysis. Indeed, it is common in the works of many of these figures to make passing remarks that invoke the authority of Nietzsche without any further explanation. Donovan is one of the few whose engagement with Nietzsche is possible to reconstruct.

Third, and most importantly, Donovan is one of the few figures within the Far Right who not only trades in the critical dimensions of Nietzsche's philosophy but is struggling to come to terms with the problem of *ressentiment* and acknowledges such a psychology at work within himself. This is undoubtedly due to the attentiveness of his engagement and makes him particularly important for my own purposes, for trying to tease out how Nietzsche's critical rhetoric functions by tracking where his

philosophy and interpretations of the Right part ways is made more difficult and precise in a thinker who is attuned to Nietzsche's concerns about the dangers of *ressentiment*.

1.1 Nietzsche and the Far Right: Hearing Suffering behind *Ressentiment*

In this section, I sketch the general resonance between Donovan and the larger tradition of the Far Right as I provide his account of the contemporary challenges facing men who wish to identify with a traditional conception of masculinity. To be clear, I am not interested in the veracity or persuasiveness of Donovan's arguments, nor do I excuse the misogynistic elements in his rhetoric and ideas. However, generously listening to his arguments makes it possible to discern the psychological predicament he and his growing audience of men take themselves to be in. Understanding this can clue us in to the appeal of Nietzsche, of why the contours, both formal and substantive, of Donovan's arguments resemble Nietzsche's, and why Donovan draws on Nietzsche in his conceptualization of masculinity and his desire to exchange *ressentiment* for artistic and cultural creation.

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Donovan echoes many familiar arguments from others among the Far Right. At the center of his critique, echoing what Sedgwick describes as the apocalypticism of the Far Right going back to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, is Donovan's rejection of the cultural "empire of nothing."[223] Donovan defines the empire of nothing as "an international collection of self-interested and self-perpetuating systems with overlapping interests" where "all these systems are trying to survive in Darwinian fashion."[224] Among these self-interested systems he notes the cultural production of Hollywood, antidiscrimination policies in the workplace, and government interdiction of any and all groups or tribes professing exclusionary identities. Among multiple forces, Donovan believes that the

[223] Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xxiii. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 1926).
[224] Jack Donovan, *Becoming a Barbarian*, (Milwaukie, Dissonant Hum, 2016), 29.

profit motive reigns supreme, and it masks itself in moral universalism, where the moral appeal to respect all serves to cut us off from "natural" understandings of human relationships, where intimacy is grounded in a local, exclusively shared cultural identity.

Donovan locates the greatest casualty of the empire of nothing in the cultural and moral shift from the masculine virtues of strength, courage, mastery, and honor to feminine virtues of empathy, inclusiveness, nurturing, and peacemaking. While Donovan believes that both sets of values have their place in all societies, the hegemonic shift away from masculine virtues, which posit hierarchy and a clear friend/enemy distinction between different social groups, are replaced with what he calls "pathological altruism."[225] For Donovan, the problem with the hegemonic rise of an abstract, feminist conception of society is that we become subject to "moral universalism," the idea that everyone should be treated the same, as members of the same ingroup. Donovan disdains moral universalism and blames feminism for its hegemonic rise. While he acknowledges that altruism has a place in every society, Donovan argues that when it extends beyond a clearly delineated "perimeter" that distinguishes between those who are inside and those who are outside of a given social group it become "pathological."[226] Citing scientific research about the limited capacity all humans to truly know, keep track of, and care for other people, Donovan insists that moral universalism extends our moral responsibility beyond human capacities to imagined communities we neither know nor can rely on.[227]

[225] Donovan, *Barbarian*, 34-41. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[226] Donovan, *Barbarian*, 67-68.
[227] Jack Donovan, *The Way of Men*, (Milwaukie: Dissonant Hum, 2012), 16.

For Donovan, the worst consequence of the "pathological altruism" of our "effeminate" culture is that it has destroyed masculinity by rendering tribal relationships between men impossible. Donovan cites changes in the workforce after the industrial revolution, the cultural advances of feminism, the declining numbers of male students in higher education, and the devaluation of work traditionally done by men as elements of change that have actively undermined the possibility of masculinity today. Donovan claims men's heads are filled with effeminate values that put them in a position where they have started to deny their own interests and have become convinced that they must put the concerns of everyone before their own. While Donovan neither blames individual women for the changes in our contemporary culture nor thinks that feminism has done anything other than extend an instinct for survival, his general antipathy is palpable:

> Women, individually, are not to blame for everything that has transpired over the past few hundred years. Individual women can certainly not be blamed for the Industrial Revolution. They can't be blamed for the train, planes, and automobiles that make globalism possible. They can't be blamed for Marxism, or the birth control pill, or the Internet or the shopping mall. Women, as a group, can probably be blamed for abominations like reality television, and for a lot of bad music and art, and for making mainstream magazines almost unreadably gossipy and stupid. But individual women, a few figureheads aside, can't fairly be blamed for a whole lot. Women are just acting according to their natures and skewing things in their interests, as they've always wanted to, and as men have prevented them from doing for most of human history.[228]

For many of us, Donovan can be hard to listen to. But if we can suspend the logical offense of his broad generalizations and the moral offense of his misogynistic remarks, we can begin to listen to what lies behind his arguments and begin to discern the insight he possesses regarding a psychology suffering from a sense of cultural loss and disorientation trying to come to terms with not only a new world but one that is actively hostile to it values and perception of masculine norms.

[228] Donovan, *Way of Men*, 122-123.

For Donovan, the loss of masculinity is tied to a double standard inherent within identity politics. In the last chapter, we saw William E. Connolly's articulation of the inescapable relation between identity and difference, where identities are what they are in opposition to other identities. Given the logic of identity, there is always a danger that differences will harden into political fault lines and become the front of not only political but also violent contestation. The prescription in such a situation is to bestow recognition and respect on differences to valorize each identity in its particularity while also weakening any exclusionary or absolutist claims they may make that would violate the inherent value of all identities. Donovan sees mutually extended recognition and respect as well as the call to weaken all exclusionary claims as instances of moral universalism. As such they are devoid of the intimate, local relationships of community and connection he feels to be essentially "human." Yet the absence of such relations is compensated for in the formation of minority identities. That is, Donovan believes that the rejection of an exclusionary logic bars what he takes to be the essential component of identity, namely, intimate relationships grounded in a local, lived experience rather than abstract moral ideas. But there is also a compensation for this loss of identity in the form of morally valorized minority identities that reintroduce an exclusionary logic, for it is because of their exclusive differences that they are recognized and respected.

However, while the call to weaken exclusionary claims to identity is generally applied to all identities within a society, Donovan notes that the compensation of a valorized minority identity is not granted to all. The reason for this is that the logic of identity not only exists between different identities but is underwritten by a moral reaction to histories of abuse and trauma directed at people on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ableness, and economic class. The desire to curb these forms of suffering morally

motivates identity politics. But it has the effect of positing a further distinction between identities in terms of a binary between the oppressor and the oppressed. In theory, this does not lead to the disparagement of individuals within "oppressor" identities, but it does morally condemn aspects of those identities. For Donovan, a traditional conception of masculinity is such a former "oppressor" identity and is socially and morally proscribed. This puts men who identify with such aspects of masculinity in a situation where they are not only asked to make social and political sacrifices, to weaken their exclusionary claims to identity but to abandon them altogether. Characterizing this situation in terms of Donovan's preferred lens of gender, he writes, "Only men are expected to see the world in gender-neutral terms...Women have not abandoned their sexual identities; they have expanded them. Whereas men are told that they can no longer do the things they used to do, and are asked to repudiate their heritage as males, women are told to embrace their past, to keep doing everything they've always done – and do more![229]

The exclusion of traditional conceptions of masculinity within identity politics is where Donovan not only locates a double standard but where he sees the very masculine traits of aggression, exclusion, coercion, and self-interest that are barred for men adopted by minority identities and used against men: "For all their talk, I doubt that people truly want fairness, equality or "peace." Strategies said to put peace and equality within our grasp invariably end up moving the axe of violent coercion from the hands of one group into the hands of another. This – not 'equality' – has been the achievement of feminism"[230]

[229] Donovan, *No Man's Land*, (Open Source, 2011), 11-12, 16, https://www.jack-donovan.com/sowilo/2018/08/08/no-mans-land/.
[230] Donovan, *No Man's Land*, 37-38.

In such a situation, Donovan argues that men experience the hypocrisy of identity politics in that the very attributes that society condemns in them are used against them. In this, they see that the supposedly "dangerous" and "asocial" qualities of masculinity that moral universalism is eager to condemn is redeployed onto the ends of constructing and maintaining its own conception of society.[231]

But men are not only stripped of their masculinity by "feminists" to find themselves on the receiving end of a moral logic that excludes them, for Donovan further argues that just as men are told to renounce their masculinity they are thrown back on the very masculine notions of self-reliance, autonomy, and independence they are told to relinquish. Donovan characterizes this in terms of the "hypocrisy of feminists telling men to 'man up'" when this "invokes the same ancient masculine archetypes that all those who have tried to 'reimagine masculinity' have been trying to put to bed. They are ham-handedly trying to tap into the power of the very same 'male culture' that they want to break down"[232] Donovan sees men being pushed back on their own resources most clearly in the refusal of their attempts to adopt identity politics. This is most clearly seen in the attempt by the Men's Rights Movement to adopt identity politics discourse to draw attention to structural forms of domination that target men, issues such as divorce law, child custody, and workman's compensation. Donovan notes that their attempt to

[231] In this, Donovan is observing the other side of the ever-present danger of resentment along the fault lines of identity and difference. William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory*, 21(3), (1993): 390-410. Cf. Richard V. Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why it Matters, and What to do About It,* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2022), "Blaming the Victim."

[232] Donovan, *No Man's Land*, 19.

play the game of identity politics fails because MRA's put themselves in the position of proclaiming themselves victims when society sees them mediated through an identity of the oppressor.[233]

If this was not enough, Donovan argues that men find themselves at yet a further disadvantage when it comes to communicating their vulnerability. Donovan observes that men are socialized to avoid discourses of vulnerability and encouraged to take up forms of communication that demonstrate strength, often taking the form of anger, aggression, and confrontation:

> If you look at vulnerability from the perspective of group hierarchy, it becomes obvious why men don't want to expose their vulnerabilities publicly, and why men distance themselves from men who are obviously vulnerable...A man who is "vulnerable" is a weak link. He's shown that he is going to break under pressure, or that he is prone to manipulation. Tactically, this is a problem for the group, and as a result he is going to lose status within the group. Men who appear to be unflappable, however, make the group look watertight. It makes perfect sense for men to want to ally themselves with strong men who can pull their weight, and who don't dishonor the group. From a primal perspective, dishonor is danger. It should be obvious why a group of men competing with other groups of men for survival would want to appear to be strong, courageous, and competent. / All this primal posturing may seem absurd, say, in an office or walking around the mall, but status still matters.[234]

While Donovan acknowledges that today's reality no longer reflects the survival situation of some primitive state of nature, and while men are increasingly encouraged to be vulnerable, such prescriptions are often blind to the unique psychological challenges men face in the adoption of such forms of communication. To make matters worse, the one avenue they are traditionally afforded to communicate their feelings from a position of strength, one of anger and hostility, is barred from them as socially and morally unacceptable.

Given the social and moral asymmetries men face, it is no wonder they are angry. This does not justify the cruel things they say and do or validate their conception of masculinity. The purpose of listening to

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[233] Donovan, *No Man's Land*, 8. Donovan, *Way of Men*, "Start the World." For more on his see, Cassie Jaye, *The Red Pill*, (New York: Gravitas Pictures, 2016); Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, (New York, *Bold Type Books*, 2017); Richard Reeves, *Of Boys and Men*, (Washington: *Brookings Institute Press*, 2022).
[234] Donovan, "No Man's Land," 31-32.

Donovan is not to agree with him or pity men. The picture Donovan paints is one of men trapped within a morally condemned identity, where their only resource for making sense of their situation seems to be a return to the very thing that is socially and politically anathema. This situation leads to outbursts of anger and aggression and a retreat into tribalism.

That the anger of men often falls upon deaf ears is understandable given that it is perceived as senseless, immoral violence. But it is also ironic, given that in the very "feminism" Donovan critiques there has long been an awareness of the need to listen to the content of the form of one's discourse. In the now canonical essay, "The Uses of Anger," Audre Lorde addressed fellow feminists, altering them to the need to attend to the expressions of anger within their ranks by women of color. Through a powerful series of reflections, Lorde wished to communicate the content of the form of anger, of how it possesses a desire to be heard, how it always says more than what is literally said, how it conveys concern for a relationship that needs to be transformed. Drawing a distinction between anger and hate, where one is generative and the other destructive, Lorde invited her audience to adopt a more nuanced understanding of expressions of frustration and animosity. That is, she wanted her audience to realize the consequence of hearing violent speech as either anger or hatred, that just as we need to attend to the intention in the speaker so, too, do we need to discern the intention of the listener. Lorde wanted us to realize that an overly rash labeling of something as hate silently communicates to the other that you are not a part of this group, that I am unwilling to listen to you. That is, to use Donovan's language, it draws a tribal line in the sand.[235]

[235] Audrey Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 25(½), (1997): 278-285.

1.2 Nietzsche and the Far Right: Donovan's Response to *Ressentiment*

In this section, I trace Donovan's turn to Nietzsche. Donovan draws upon Nietzsche to articulate a traditional conception of masculinity and a theory of artistic creation capable of escaping the dangers of *ressentiment*. In both instances, Donovan takes something from Nietzsche and adds his own twist. To articulate a vision of masculinity, Donovan turns to Nietzsche's figure of the noble warrior but adds the concept of the tribe. Rejecting Nietzsche's penchant for radical forms of individualism, Donovan places Nietzsche's reflections on nobility in a tribal context and makes the social relationship of mutual competition and a shared struggle to survive a central component of masculinity. Likewise, to articulate an understanding of creation, Donovan turns to Nietzsche's theorization of the relationship between Apollo and Dionysus and combines it with his own reading of the Norse god Odin to present a conception of creation with an overtly masculine desire for mastery and control while escaping the danger of *ressentiment*. In both instances, we begin to see how Donovan puts on display the type of the decadent artist, a figure drawn to Nietzsche's articulation of creation but unwilling to fully surrender its *ressentiment*.

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Donovan is not unaware that men among the Alt-Right struggle with *ressentiment*. Donovan writes in his book, *A More Complete Beast*, that it "is dedicated to reactionary men and presents my solutions to chronic problems I noticed while traveling in various reactionary circles over the years."[236] For Donovan, the victim mentality of contemporary morality leads men toward *ressentiment* all too easily,

[236] Donovan, *Beast*, 4.

and he recognizes that even his own critique of the empire of nothing can be misread as a reason to resent society. To avoid the trap of resentment, Donovan turns to Nietzsche to urge men to turn their energies to self-criticism and the task of creating a counterculture. Donovan urges his audience to "recognize [*ressentiment*], avoid it, or overcome it through honest self-analysis and by seeking the constructive criticism of peers." Donovan argues that men must discipline themselves, becoming clear about their goals and their need to pursue the virtues of masculinity, sacrificing the parts of themselves and their egos that stand in the way. Because this vision of self-criticism is determined in relation to traditional virtues of masculinity, self-criticism is a process of bringing oneself into alignment with the tribe:

> A man who has earned his place in a group of men knows who he is. A man who knows who his 'we' is doesn't have to wonder 'who he is.' He doesn't have to find himself because he knows where he belongs. His personal identity is located within and relates to his social identity. His idea of himself is not a daydream or a whim; it is repeatedly verified and peer reviewed. His ego is balanced by his superego.[237]

Donovan believes that subsuming individuals under a group is necessary to tie them to a real, living, breathing community, that this will provide a sense of identity, purpose, and meaning, and that it will free them from the isolation and meaningless of their situation in relation to moral universalism.

The first thing to be done is to create and foster the kinds of masculine, tribal relations the double standard of identity politics and the pathological altruism of moral universalism has made impossible. Donovan calls men like himself who have been forsaken by the empire of nothing to extricate themselves to the greatest extent possible from society, to throw off moral universalism, and to form tribes based on traditional conceptions of masculinity.[238] Donovan simply believes that, given the essential relationship

[237] Donovan, *Barbarian*, 13.

[238] In this, Donovan resembles the famous articulation of *apoliteia* by Julius Evola, the idea that one must remove oneself, specifically internally, from the politics of one's time and its influence over one's own being, waiting or "riding the tiger" for

between masculinity and tribalism, there is no alternative. And, here, Donovan turns to Nietzsche to help flesh out the noble warrior or "barbarian" that men should emulate:

> The barbarian spirit is...in Nietzsche's own words maintained at the center of all the noblest, aristocratic-chivalric peoples, who base their value judgements on, "a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health that includes all of the things needed to maintain it, war, adventure, hunting, dancing, jousting and everything else that contains strong, free, happy action." Barbarians are alive in the world and say "yes!" to life. Barbarians live like beasts, without self-hatred or the need to apologize for living life at the expense of life, as all creatures do in some way or other.[239]

From this gloss on Nietzsche, Donovan goes on to elaborate masculinity as an aspirational ideal, defined by the tactical virtues of strength, courage, mastery, and honor. The last of these, honor, is the result of the other three but is tied to the social recognition men give one another through a constant mutual contest that results in a clear hierarchy. The others – strength, mastery, and courage – are at once tied to militant survival skills that contribute to the tribe. Yet, while Donovan often articulates these in relation to his imagined state of nature, he realizes that they may take alternative forms in contemporary society. Drawing on William James's idea that men need a moral substitute of war, for example, Donovan believes that these essential traits of masculinity have not ceased to be important but have simply changed in form and need to be exercised to give expression to the kinds of aggressive masculine drives society denies expression.[240]

While Donovan's account of noble warriors promotes the kind of competitive and militant relationships that men need to foster a sense of masculinity, he also knows that physical strength is not sufficient, that there must also be a demonstration of psychological strength, channeling psychic energy

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things to change in time. Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: Survival Manuel for the Aristocrats of the Soul,* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 2003), 172-175.

[239] Donovan, *Barbarian*, 68.

[240] For Donovan's discussion of the four tactical virtues, see Donovan, *Way of Men*, 21-55; for his discussion of William James and moral substitutes for war, see Donovan, *The Way of Men*, 75-76.

toward the creation of a new counter culture. Donovan argues that creation "is the countermeasure to blaming and complaining, resentment and resignation."[241] To articulate an account of creation, Donovan turns to Nietzsche's distinction between Apollo and Dionysus as two of the primal forms of aesthetic creation. Donovan glosses Apollo and Dionysus in terms of the imposition of a conscious form on a wild and natural chaos: "The Apollonian reacts to Dionysian disorder by dreaming his own world into existence, by giving it shape and putting it in order," and, again, "through the solar reaction to darkness and chaos the creature of man becomes a creator and seeds the Dionysian earth with his Apollonian dreams."[242] For Donovan, this opposition gives him an opportunity to transpose masculine ideas about mastery and domination into an understanding of creation where Dionysus is reduced to the raw material that needs to be sculpted, shaped, and seeded by the conscious power of Apollo. The use of gendered language here is not incidental, but something of a tell, for it feminizes and reduces Dionysus to something that needs to be dominated.

Donovan extends his Nietzschean inspired account of Apollo and Dionysus to a more general notion of creation he suggests can be traced throughout the development of western civilization. In this history, Donovan is particularly drawn to the Norse god Odin, who embodies both forces. In the story of Odin's willingness to sacrifice his own eye to acquire wisdom, Donovan locates a model for the need of self-sacrifice for the masculine development of the self and the tribe. Donovan characterizes this notion of self-sacrifice as the turning of the ego against itself, in accord with the alignment of personal desires and the superegoic imperatives of the tribe to create something new, reshaping our wild Dionysian nature

[241] Donovan, *Beast*, 92.
[242] Donovan, *Beast,* 96, 94.

according to our own Apollonian vision: "aspects of the ego which must be destroyed or contained in training are self-imposed scripts, limitations, and habits which may impede the progress of your self-development. This is a pruning of the ego – a sacrifice of old growth to stimulate new growth."[243] This leads us to a process seeking self-mastery, the ability to impose one's will and realize one's vision, for "you must be willing to sacrifice *portions* of your present self-concept to a future, higher version of the self, created by your ego."[244]

Donovan's invocation of Nietzsche to think about creation as a means of overcoming *ressentiment* predictably brings with it masculine concerns with mastery and domination. Donovan recognizes that his account is not entirely in line with Nietzsche's views, but he is not concerned with a historical understanding of Nietzsche, insisting that he is just a man whose ideas can be refashioned to new ends. While Donovan's interpretation of Nietzsche as a thinker of power and mastery is not uncommon, his introduction of foreign elements, such as his interpretation of Odin, raise questions about where his thinking deviates from Nietzsche's and why. In what follows, I turn to Nietzsche's account of Dionysus to begin to track these differences and raise the question of what more existential and confrontational reading Donovan must surrender to put forth his own masculine conception of creation.

[243] Donovan, "All Training is Sacrifice," 2.
[244] Donovan, "All Training is Sacrifice," 3.

2.0 Freedom from, Lucidity about *Ressentiment*: The Sparagmos of Dionysus

In this section, I turn to Nietzsche's evolving account of Dionysus from the artistic context of Attic tragedy to the psychological problem on display in Zarathustra. Contrary to Donovan's understanding of Apollo as an egoic force of mastery, control, and creation that shapes the wild nature of Dionysus, Nietzsche understands Apollo as an aesthetic means of representing and protecting oneself from the dangers of an honest confrontation with the existential suffering of life Dionysus represents. The implication here is that Donovan's affirmation and revision of Nietzsche's early account of Attic tragedy leads him to overemphasize the sense of mastery in Apollo while ignoring that the god's aesthetic contribution is an attempt to aesthetically shield oneself from the suffering of life Dionysus represents. Following his thinking about Dionysus further reveals that Nietzsche eventually became aware of how his early aesthetic reflections were attempts to shield himself from suffering. In response to this insight, Nietzsche revises his understanding of Dionysus at the end of his philosophy, transforming him into the psychological challenge of submitting to fate, where this refers to processes of suffering outside of our control that must first undo us before they can release the creative power of our unconscious drives.[245]

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While Donovan thinks of Apollo as a conscious force of creation and Dionysus as raw material to be shaped, Nietzsche conceives of both as different aesthetic modes of representation. In *Birth*, Nietzsche describes Apollo as the god of all imagistic art and likens his creations to dreams. Apollo's images are like

[245] My account of Nietzsche's evolving understanding of Dionysus is greatly indebted to Detwiler's account, see Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Chapter 7 "Dionysus," 144-168.

dreams, not because they are produced unconsciously but, just as upon waking we can tell the difference between dreams and reality, because they are artificial and call attention to their own semblance of reality. Apollonian arts do not try to capture life in its totality but to break it down into its constituent elements, giving each their separate, individual forms of representation. The aim of these Apollonian representations is to give rise to contemplation. In contrast, Dionysus is the god all non-imagistic art, principally music. Such arts do not represent the individual aspects of existence but are "purer" forms of representation that aim at reflecting life in its essence. Nietzsche likens the effects of such representations to the state of intoxication, in that intoxication releases destructive drives ordinarily socially suppressed and gives rise to elated forms of being where we feel ourselves part of a greater totality of existence.[246]

While Donovan's claim that Apollo shapes Dionysus is partially correct, what he omits is that this occurs not to master Dionysus but to pacify the terrifying force Dionysus not only represents but threatens to release. Nietzsche argues that Apollo and Dionysus usually exist in a relation of brotherly rivalry. But a "brotherly bond" occurred in the context of Attic tragedy. Here Apollonian elements of representation (the actors, dialogue, and plot) combined with those of Dionysus (the music, chorus, and staging) to create a complex representation of the suffering of Dionysus. The contribution of Apollonian aesthetic mediums is crucial because, unlike Dionysiac aesthetics, their means of representation announce their semblance. These modes of representation check the dangerous elements of Dionysian aesthetics, keeping the audience from descending into a destructive frenzy and leading them to a state of

[246] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), §1.

contemplation. In Attic tragedy, Nietzsche sees the aesthetic representation of Dionysus as a moment of bringing the audience face to face with Dionysus and the forces of life he represented:

> A public of spectators as we know it was something unknown to the Greeks; in their theaters is was possible...for everyone quite literally to *overlook* the entire cultural world around him, and to imagine...that he was a member of the chorus...as a self-mirroring of Dionysiac man...The chorus of satyrs is first and foremost a vision of the Dionysiac mass, just as the world of the stage is in turn a vision of this chorus of satyrs; the strength of this vision is great enough to render the spectator's gaze insensitive and unresponsive to the impression of 'reality' and to the cultured people occupying the rows of seats around him. The form of the Greek theater is reminiscent of a lonely mountain valley; the architecture of the stage seems like a radiant cloud formation seen from on high by the Bacchae as they roam excitedly through the mountains, like the magnificent frame in which the image of Dionysus is revealed to them.[247]

Here, at the start of Nietzsche's philosophy, he is already thinking about the means of confronting people with the ineluctable suffering of existence. But at this stage in his philosophy, this moment of confrontation is tied to a distinction between the real and apparent world and the belief that life can be justified through art. That is, Nietzsche believes what happened in Attic tragedy was an aesthetic moment of suspension from ordinary life that allows the audience to see through the world of appearance to the drama of a real metaphysical world where there was a constant process of unending struggle between creation and destruction. The artistic representation of this metaphysical reality justified life not because it brought any comfort but because it led the audience into a contemplative understanding of reality that brought them into a harmonious relation with the dissonance of life.

Nietzsche claims that the metaphysical reality Attic tragedy represented was a series of variations on a single theme, namely, the sufferings of Dionysus. This contemplation of the suffering of Dionysus was meant to bring the audience face to face with fate, confronting them with the epiphenomenal nature of their existence while bringing them into a contemplative unity with life. The truth of this reality is seen

[247] Nietzsche, *Birth*, 42.

in what Nietzsche denotes as the suffering of Dionysus. While this is represented in every aspect of Attic tragedy, Nietzsche's attention to the contemplative consequences of seeing it represented in the figure of the tragic hero would come to have great significance:

> this hero is the suffering Dionysus of the Mysteries, the god who experiences the sufferings of individuation in his own person, of whom wonderful myths recount that he was torn to pieces by the Titans when he was a boy and is now venerated in this condition as Zagreus; at the same time, it is indicated that his being torn into pieces, the genuinely Dionysiac *suffering*, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, so that we are to regard the state of individuation as the source and primal cause of all suffering, as something inherently to be rejected.[248]

In this passage, Nietzsche alludes to a central myth of Dionysus, the story of his death and resurrection. According to myth, Zeus slept with a human woman, and she gave birth to a child, Zagreus, who was half human, half god. When Zeus's wife, Hera, learned of Zeus's infidelity and its consequences, she grew angry and plotted her revenge. To kill Zagreus, she enlisted the help of the Titans, an older generation of gods who possessed incredible powers. Using a mirror to entice the child away from the protection of Zeus, the Titans captured Zagreus and killed him by ripping him limb from limb and attempting to consume him. Amid the fray, Zagreus's sister, Athena, rescued his heart and brought it to Zeus. After killing the Titans, Zeus sewed up the heart of Zagreus into his thigh and, in time, gave birth to Dionysus, a full-fledged god and the future inheritor of Zeus's throne.[249]

As scholars have noted, this story has long been taken to symbolize the continuance of life through even the greatest tragedies, and the ritual of sparagmos is meant to remember this fact, that even in the cruelest destruction of living things, life continues.[250] In the story, Dionysus is torn limb from limb and

[248] Nietzsche, *Birth*, 52.
[249] David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 22-23; Dwayne A. Meisner, *Orphic Tradition and the Birth of the Gods*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 237.
[250] Richard Seaford, *Dionysus*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 111-119.

nearly destroyed, yet through this process of destruction he not only survives but is transformed into a god. Thus, what is destruction and death from the perspective of the individual is from another perspective a larger process of becoming that gives birth to a new, greater form of life. The practice of sparagmos is thus a way to enact this process and to remember that amid great catastrophe, in one form or another, life will always continue, often in a greater form than what was destroyed.

Here we already see that, in contrast to Donovan, Nietzsche's account of Dionysus does not relegate the god to a wild nature that can be shaped by our conscious visions but is rather the representation of terrifying forces of life that are entirely outside of our control. To contemplate Dionysus is to recognize the futility of mastery and control and present the challenge not of shaping ourselves or our tribe but living with some understanding of our need to submit to fate.

But this is not where Nietzsche's thinking about Dionysus ends, for in time Nietzsche would become dissatisfied with his claims about Attic tragedy and his aesthetic understanding of Dionysus and begin to explore the implications of his early thinking in the context of human psychology. In the years that followed the publication of *Birth*, Nietzsche's life and thinking radically transformed as he not only broke with his profession and began to live a solitary, itinerant lifestyle, but also threw into question every philosophical influence and assumption he previously held. In the early stages of this process, Nietzsche rejected his earlier views such as the distinction between the real and apparent world and the idea that art could justify life. During this time, the figure of Dionysus almost completely disappeared from his philosophy. When the Greek god remerges to a more prominent if enigmatic position in Nietzsche's post-*Zarathustra* writings, Dionysus is no longer an aesthetic representation of life placed before us on a stage. Instead, Dionysus names the psychological disposition that was once seen on the

stage and now presents a problem and a challenge to those rare individuals who dare to wrestle with the challenge of affirming fate. That is, Nietzsche is no longer interested in contemplating the tragic hero through aesthetic representation. Now the challenge is to be the tragic hero, to experience rather than represent the sparagmos of Dionysus: "Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – *that* is what I call Dionysian, ...*Not* to escape fear and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous effect by violent discharge...but instead...for *you yourself to be* the eternal joy in becoming – the joy that includes even the eternal *joy in negating*..."[251]

While the reemergence of Dionysus signals an affirmation of life that now must be lived and embodied rather than contemplated, the shift from aesthetics to psychology leads not only to a daunting challenge but to a problem of how we should understand ourselves as a tragic hero who has personally experienced the sufferings of Dionysus. The challenge of assuming the position of the tragic hero, of submitting to one's own sparagmos, not only entails the willingness to submit to fate and undergo destructive processes of our own self that create it anew but how to distinguish between this generative form of destruction and the pathology of *ressentiment*. Again, the problem of saying "yes" and "no" reemerges, and it must find a different expression than that of the priest we encountered in the previous chapter. But Nietzsche does not clearly identify how we are to understand this distinction. Instead, he chooses to present it as a psychological problem and leave it with his readers. Nietzsche best captures this puzzle when, while speaking about those like Zarathustra, he writes:

[251] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109.

The psychological problem apparent in the Zarathustra type is how someone who…says no and *does* no to everything everyone has said yes to so far…can nevertheless be the opposite of a no-saying spirit; how a spirit who carries everything that is most difficult about fate, a destiny of a task, can nonetheless be the lightest, spinning out into the beyond…how someone with the hardest, the most terrible insight into reality, who has thought 'the most abysmal thought,' can nonetheless see it *not* as an objection to existence, not even to its eternal return – but instead find one more reason in it for *himself to be* the eternal yes to all things, 'the incredible, boundless yes-saying, amen-saying' …*But this is the concept of Dionysus once more.*[252]

[252] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Thus Spoke," §6.

2.1 Freedom from, Lucidity about *Ressentiment*: Affirming Fate

Nietzsche leaves the psychological puzzle of Dionysus unresolved. While there are reasons for this, foremost being that it is not an intellectual puzzle to solve but an experience to navigate, it leaves us wondering what such an embrace of sparagmos would look like. One may be tempted to turn to *Zarathustra*. But, as we saw in chapter one, both possible endings of that work are enigmatic and leave us with more questions than answers. Indeed, Nietzsche regularly falls silent before the experience of affirmation and its relation to destruction. His emphasis on the importance of experiencing and feeling one's way into affirmation is not only the result of the limitations of intellectualization but also the result of his own experience. Looking for an example that gives us some insight beyond the enigma is hard to find in Nietzsche's philosophy. That is why it is necessary to look at Nietzsche himself. Tracing Nietzsche's autobiographical reflections on the most transformational period of his life, where his revision of Dionysus paralleled his personal break with Wagner, the man who profoundly influenced his early ideas, gives us the best example of the assumption of a Dionysian fate and the challenge of wrestling with the relationship between affirmation and destruction. This brings us to Nietzsche's relationship with Richard Wagner, the famous twentieth century composer who was also Nietzsche's greatest friend and mentor. Nietzsche's initial understanding of Dionysus is profoundly influenced by Wagner, and the end of their friendship precipitates not only his alternative understanding of Dionysus but a lived experience that must first bring Nietzsche through the process of his own sparagmos. It is in this process that Nietzsche must defend himself against the temptation of *ressentiment* and where he learns how to distinguish it from destruction.

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When trying to understand the psychological problem of Dionysus, one of the few places to turn is to Nietzsche's account of his own life. Nietzsche writes in *Ecce*, that the task of Dionysus "is mine as well" and that his own start as a philosopher had "an extremely strange beginning. I had *discovered* the only historical simile and facsimile of my own innermost experience, – and this led me to understand the amazing phenomenon of the Dionysian, the first person to have ever done so."[253]

The resonance between the experience of Dionysus and Nietzsche can be seen in the similarities they share. For both, the experience of sparagmos, of their own undoing and transformation, is precipitated by a fascination and misrecognition of their own image. Just as Dionysus was led by his reflection in a literal mirror, so Nietzsche retroactively acknowledges a similar experience of projecting his own image onto Wagner.

> what I heard in Wagner's music when I was young had absolutely nothing to do with Wagner…when I described Dionysian music, I described what *I* had heard – that I instinctively had to translate and transfigure everything into the new spirit I was carrying inside of me. The proof of this is as strong as any proof *could be*: my essay "Wagner in Bayreuth': at every psychologically decisive spot I am only talking about myself…Even psychologically, all the decisive features of my own nature are projected onto Wagner…absolute certainty about what I *am* projects itself onto some arbitrary piece of reality.[254]

Taking Nietzsche's comment seriously, it is striking to reread his early essay, "Wagner in Bayreuth," as if he wrote it about himself. There we find Nietzsche describing Wagner in almost the exact way he would come to describe himself in his later philosophy. In Wagner, Nietzsche saw an artist speaking to untimely men, about to precipitate a great event, a return to a fatalistic and eternal understanding of life; a man

[253] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 133, 108.

[254] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Birth," §4. Nietzsche makes a similar comment again about both Wagner and Schopenhauer. See Nietzsche, *Birth,* "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," §§3, 6.

destined to wander in an age of modernity, trying to appropriate and retrieve an understanding of nobility; one who knew that the problem of suffering needed to be faced head on.[255]

At the center of Nietzsche's account of Wagner is a story of constant struggle within himself and the challenge of navigating his relationship to friends and enemies. Nietzsche writes that Wagner's evolution was guided by a single "ruling idea" and over the course of "Wagner in Bayreuth" he traces what he will later call, in reference to his own development, "the governing, organizing 'idea.'"[256] Nietzsche's reflections on Wagner's "ruling idea" foreshadow what Nietzsche will later coin with the phrase "how to become who you are." Nietzsche refers to this phrase a few times in his philosophy, but its most conspicuous use is as the subtitle of his autobiography, *Ecce*. In his various invocations of the idea, he suggests that becoming who we are is about fostering a relationship to ourselves, separated from our moral attachments to others and our resentment toward fate. Nietzsche further insists that to become who you are is not something we have any conscious vision of: "you do not have the slightest idea of *what* you are." Nor can we actively pursue it, for, as Nietzsche recalls about his own experience of becoming who he is, "I have no memory of ever having made an effort." That is, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about each of us, a haecceity. This not some inner, essential self that we can actively search for. One could argue that it is the expression of unconscious drives, which it is, but this leaves us with a similar lack of clarity. The fact is that what we are grows in us like a kind of fate, one that emerges in its own time. While

[255] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Wagner in Bayreuth," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007),
[256] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Clever," §9.

we cannot comprehend it in advance or actively foster it, there is a temptation to be led away from it by indulging *ressentiment*.

In *Ecce*, Nietzsche writes of his experience of *ressentiment*, of his struggle to understand and "overcome" it. Nietzsche writes that to overcome *ressentiment* one must experience it in states of weakness and strength, that both present their own challenges and require different responses: "Freedom from *ressentiment*, lucidity about *ressentiment* – who knows how much I ultimately have to thank my long sickness for these as well! The problem is not exactly a simply one: you need to have experienced it out of strength and out of weakness...The sick person has only one great remedy for this – I call it *Russian fatalism*."[257] Nietzsche describes such fatalism as "not reacting anymore" and provides the example of the Russian soldier who simply lies down in the snow, no longer marching, fighting, trying, resisting, but throwing themselves into a state where they are ready to accept whatever is to befall them. This is a radical form of "yes" saying that can appear passive, but for Nietzsche it is important to realize that in such a weakened state it is the only means to bring you back to yourself, to a place of renewed strength.

Such a fatalistic "yes" can be seen in Nietzsche's break with Wagner, which precipitates his own personal sparagmos. So much of Nietzsche's account of Dionysus in the context of *Birth* is indebted to his allegiance to Wagner, to the idea that art could justify suffering, that we can come to terms with life and gain a greater self-understanding through art. But in his thinking there was a fine line between the redemption of Wagner's art and the anesthetization of suffering through art, one Nietzsche ultimately could not sustain. This led to his break with Wagner, something he describes with ambivalence. On the

[257] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Wise" §6.

one hand, Nietzsche writes of the beginning of this phase that it was like the youth who throws off the "fetters of reverence" to one's elders, experiencing a "great liberation" that "comes suddenly for those who are...fettered, like the shock of an earthquake: the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away – it itself does not know what is happening..."[258] But, on the other hand, whatever excitement or sense of newfound freedom emerged from such a liberation is met with the countervailing force of a new isolation: "Solitude encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening, that terrible goddess and [wild mother of the passions]."[259]

In solitude, Nietzsche was forced to come to terms with the loss of Wagner, the only true friend he ever had. Nietzsche writes just before this break that the "composure needed to be *able* to speak of an inner solitude over long intervening years first came to me."[260] But once the break was accomplished solitude ceased being liberatory and threw Nietzsche into great suffering. He writes of his work at that time that a "subtler eye and empathy will nonetheless not fail to see what perhaps constitutes the charm of this writing – that here a sufferer and self-denier speaks as though he were *not* a sufferer and self-denier."[261] Nietzsche's suffering was tied to feelings of isolation and loneliness he desperately tried to fight off: "What I again and again needed most for my cure and self-restoration...was the belief that I was *not*...isolated...Thus, when I needed to, I once also invented for myself the 'free spirits'...as compensation for the friends I lacked."[262] That this compensation was needed to replace Nietzsche's relationship with

[258] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), First Preface, §3.
[259] Nietzsche, *Human*, First Preface, §3.
[260] Nietzsche, *Human*, Second Preface §1.
[261] Nietzsche, *Human*, Second Preface, §5.
[262] Nietzsche, *Human*, First Preface, §§1-2. Cf. the epilogue to *Human*.

Wagner is clear from the fact that as late as his composition of *Ecce* Nietzsche still cherished his days with Wagner, while the days afterward Nietzsche describes himself as being "condemned to mistrust more profoundly, despise more profoundly, to be more profoundly *alone* than ever before. Because I had had nobody except Richard Wagner..."[263]

The surrender of his relationship with Wagner was first a need to embrace solitude, for Nietzsche to come to himself. Nietzsche writes that he needed solitude, for "When I am among the many I live as the many do, and I do not think as I really think."[264] And Nietzsche more specifically writes of traveling in the circles around Wagner that, "In Bayreuth, one is honest only as a mass; as an individual one lies, lies to oneself... one relinquishes the right to one's own tongue and choice, to one's taste, even to one's courage... there is no solitude, nothing perfect can bear to have witnesses."[265] Moreover, Nietzsche argues that solitude, of one kind or another, is always necessary to return to oneself, for "he who proceeds on his own path in this fashion encounters no one,"[266] where the reason for this is that "No one who possesses true friends knows what solitude is."[267]

The danger of friends lies in the claims of morality. Nietzsche writes that one of the principal ways any morality maintains its hold on us is through the threat of being forsaken should we break with its decrees and meet with the disapproval of those around us: "Even the strongest person still *fears* a cold

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[263]"I would not give up my Tribschen days for anything, days of trust, of cheerfulness, of sublime chance, of *profound* moments...I do not know what other people's experience of Wagner has been: no clouds ever darkened our skies...my first contact with Wagner was also the first time in my life I was really able to breathe freely." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 277; Nietzsche, *Human*, Second Preface; Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Clever," §5.
[264] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, eds. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §491.
[265] Nietzsche, *Contra*, 267; Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §484.
[266] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, Preface §2.
[267] Nietzsche*, Meditations*, 139.

look or a sneer on the face of those among whom and for whom he has been brought up. What is he afraid of? Growing solitary!" [268] To break with morality always has social repercussions, and the fear of this, of losing friends, of being isolated and alone, keeps us within the bounds of good moral action, keeps us from ourselves, while in "solitude all this [moral restraint] falls away. He who is evil is at his most evil in solitude: which is where he is also at his best and thus to the eye of him who sees everywhere only a spectacle also at his most beautiful."[269]

Thus, the first step for Nietzsche was a fatalistic acceptance of his solitude, his need to live amid his own "evil." While Nietzsche is clear that the form his solitude took, the tasks he pursued, are not general prescriptions, he models a form of coming to ourselves beyond the reach of morality that is necessary to escape the feeling of being socially and moral forsaken. This is crucial because feelings of being forsaken present themselves as our loss of others when they are a failure to recognize that such feelings of loss serve to hide how we are already constantly forsaking ourselves. Nietzsche captures this insight best in the conversation he stages between Zarathustra and solitude, where the latter says to the former: "Oh, Zarathustra I know everything, and that you were *more forsaken* among the many, you solitary one, than ever with me! Being forsaken is one thing, solitude is another: *that* – you have now learned!"[270] What follows this comment is a series of refrains in which solitude reminds Zarathustra of moments in his life where he misunderstands his feelings of being forsaken, failing to see that his need for the other masks a greater need, for it is easier to find moral acceptance among others than it is to confront the truth of

[268] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay* Science, ed. Bernard Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §50; Cf. Nietzsche, *Meditations*, 139.
[269] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §499.
[270] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146-147.

oneself in solitude. All this comes to a head when solitude says to Zarathustra that "among human beings you will always be wild and foreign" and that the failure to recognize this will lead to feelings of forsakenness that previously "drove you away from yourself."

It is in this exchange between Zarathustra and solitude that Nietzsche gives us some sense, however mediated through his own art, of his experience of needing to say yes to his fate, to recognize his position of weakness, his susceptibility to influences that led him from himself, and to say "yes" to his own mysterious path even when that meant saying goodbye to the greatest friend and mentor he had ever had.

2.2 Freedom from, Lucidity about *Ressentiment*: Waging War

In this section, I turn to Nietzsche's account of war as a means of further resisting *ressentiment*. While Nietzsche emphasizes the necessity of aggression in expressions of strength, aspects of his account of war cut against the rhetorical force of his critical philosophy. Though his polemics often disparage individuals by name, Nietzsche insists there is neither anything personal nor any ill will in his criticisms. Questioning the validity of such claims in the context of Nietzsche's critique of Wagner, I conclude that what appears to be a personal attack is Nietzsche's war against a pervasive cultural decadence. Wagner is neither the cause nor the embodiment of this cultural decadence but its most profound expression. Using Wagner's name as a metonym for such decadence provides an example of the rhetorical effect of Nietzsche's polemics, of how they appear to be personal attacks that invite resentful readers into the vicarious pleasure of Nietzsche's viciousness. However, closer attention to Nietzsche's critique of cultural decadence reveals that he includes himself in his critique and, by extension, his readers.

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Once the temptation of *ressentiment* is elucidated and "overcome" from a state of weakness through the pursuit and affirmation of fate and the construction of a solitary relation to oneself, it must also be avoided from a subsequent position of strength. In such a state, Nietzsche argues that *ressentiment* is avoided through war, but what war means is far from straightforward. Nietzsche writes that, in contrast to the affirmation of fate in weakness, "War is another matter. I am warlike by nature. I have an instinct for attack"[271] and that an "*aggressive* pathos is an essential component of strength." As Nietzsche

[271] Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Wise," §7.

continues to describe war his account begins to cut against the apparent intent of his own vociferous critiques. Nietzsche defines war according to four criteria, stating that he only wages it against victors, that he only puts himself at risk, that he never attacks people, and that he never possesses any ill will. While the first two criteria appear straightforward, the latter two seem to directly contradict the content and form of Nietzsche's polemics, as Nietzsche regularly attacks people by name and his condescension, disparagement, and ridicule leave little room to believe that he is offering anything like constructive criticism.

However, understanding Nietzsche's claims about war depends on perceiving his metonymic use of proper names to refer to forms of cultural decadence. While there are reasons to question whether his criteria for war reflect his writerly practices, Nietzsche insists he meets this standard. He writes that, "I never attack people – I treat people as if they are high-intensity magnifying glasses that can illuminate a general, though insidious and barely noticeable, predicament...this is how I attacked Wagner or...the half-couth instincts of our 'culture' that mistakes subtly for maturity and richness for greatness."[272] Nietzsche is insistent on his metonymic use of "Wagner," for this is not the only time he makes his use of "Wagner" explicit. In a second postscript to *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche states "nobody understands a single thing I say...Things are bad everywhere. Decline is universal. The disease runs deep. If Wagner is the name for the *downfall of music*...he is not the cause.[273]

The rhetorical effect of Nietzsche's metonymic slide from proper name to cultural decadence is that it at once invites resentful interpretations and lays the ground for their later confrontation. When

[272] Nietzsche, *Ecce,* "Clever," §7.
[273] Nietzsche, *Case*, 258-9.

Nietzsche claims no one understands him, we see in his clarification the reason why. To use a proper name as a metonym for cultural decadence and not explain this invites confusion. Combine this with an aggressive, abusive, and condescending tone, and it is easy to not only assume the presence of *ressentiment* on the part of Nietzsche but to connect with – or be repelled from – its discharge. Regardless of whether Nietzsche's use of metonymy is an intentional rhetorical strategy, the rhetorical effect is the same: whatever the true target of Nietzsche's attacks, they *appear* and *feel* like personal attacks against those he names.

The tension between the substance and form of Nietzsche's critiques invites and indulges readers prone to *ressentiment*, but it also leads them toward a cultural understanding of decadence that implicates them as well. In the case of his polemic against "Wagner," Nietzsche makes this self-critique explicit in relation to himself.[274] Writing of his initial experience of solitude after his break with Wagner, Nietzsche describes it as if going to war with himself: "Henceforth alone and sorely mistrustful of myself, I...took sides *against* myself and *for* everything painful and difficult precisely for *me* – thus I again found my way to the courageous pessimism that is the antithesis of all romantic mendacity, and...the way to 'myself,' to *my* task."[275] Nietzsche's turn against himself in solitude led to the adoption of the very things he had criticized and rejected as anathema, namely, science and truth, and he used them to

[274] Nietzsche's use of proper names for cultural forms of decadence can be extended beyond the example I explore here with his polemical attacks against "Wagner." Indeed, there is no lack of such names – Schopenhauer, Rée, Strauss, Kant, Rousseau, Pascal, etcetera. While the example of Christianity is more complicate, for it is not the name of a single individual, it operates in a similar way, taking aim and viciously attacking an enemy that, in the end, turns out to be a part of us, Nietzsche's readers, all along in the form of various "shadows."

[275] Nietzsche, *Human*, Second Preface, §4. "I needed a particular form of self-discipline for a life task like this: to takes sides against everything sick in myself, including Wagner" Nietzsche, *Case* 233.

suspend and question all of his prior ideas and convictions.[276] One of the things he was forced to confront is that the very decadence he criticized in Wagner existed within him as well: "I am just as much a child of my age as Wagner, which is to say a *decadent*," that "I was even one of the most corrupted Wagnerians...I took Wagner seriously," where the only difference between them is "just that I have understood this, I have resisted it."[277]

To discern not only the decadence Wagner exemplified but that existed within himself, Nietzsche needed to discern the distinction between two forms of suffering. With Wagner, Nietzsche found someone with an experience of profound suffering, a "musician who...is a master at finding the tones from the realm of suffering, dejected, tormented souls and at giving speech even to mute misery. Nobody equals him at the colors of late autumn...he knows a tone for those secret, uncanny midnights of the soul...Wagner is someone who has suffered deeply...I admire Wagner wherever he has set *himself* to music."[278] While Nietzsche never ceased to appreciate Wagner's ability to express profound suffering through music, he previously failed to distinguish between the rare moments Wagner expressed his own suffering and when he was speaking to an altogether different form of suffering in his appeals to the masses:

> I explained Wagner's music to myself as the expression of a Dionysian might of the soul...You see what I misjudged, you also see what I *gave* to Wagner – myself...Every art, every philosophy can be considered a cure and aid in the service of growing or declining life: it always presupposes suffering and sufferers. But there are two types of sufferers: first, those who suffer from a *superabundance* of life – they want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life – then, those who suffer from an *impoverishment* of life and demand quiet, stillness, calm seas *or else* intoxication, paroxysm, stupor from art and philosophy. Revenge against life itself – the most voluptuous type of intoxication for people who are impoverished in this way! ...Wagner...responds to the dual need of the latter type – they negate life, they slander it, and this makes them my antipodes. – He who is richest in fullness of life, the

[276] For Nietzsche's early critiques of science and truth, see Nietzsche, *Birth*, §§14-18; Nietzsche, "The Uses and Abuses of History," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[277] Nietzsche, *Case*, 236; Nietzsche, *Contra*, 233. Cf. Nietzsche, *Ecce*, "Wise," §2.
[278] Nietzsche, *Contra*, 265-6.

> Dionysian god and man, can allow himself not only the sight of what is terrible and questionable but also the terrible deed and every luxury of destruction, decomposition, negation; in his case, what is evil, nonsensical, and ugly seems allowable, as it seems allowable in nature, because of an overflow in procreating, fertilizing forces capable of turning any desert into bountiful farmland.[279]

After discerning the distinction between suffering from abundance and impoverishment, Nietzsche was to set himself against the latter, seeing it not only at work in Wagner, but within himself.

To turn away from the suffering of impoverishment and begin to embrace the suffering of abundance, Nietzsche had to go to war with his own desire to use art to mediate suffering. To do this, he returned to the source of his temptation, to the cultural expression of decadence in Wagner's art. As a response to suffering from impoverishment, Wagner's art adopted the tactics that Nietzsche would later define as the guilty means of asceticism.[280] That is, Wagner both combined music and drama and subordinated them to an overarching goal to produce "effects," intense responses or "orgies of feeling" to his art: "if it was Wagner's theory that 'the drama is the end; the music is always merely its means – his *practice* was always... 'the attitude is the end; the drama, and music, too, is always merely *its* means...the Wagnerian drama a mere occasion for many dramatic attitudes! Besides all other instincts, he had the *commanding* instinct of a great actor in absolutely everything."[281] Nietzsche labels Wagner a great actor to describe him as someone who knows how to lie to affect his audience, someone seeking power and influence by using the semblance of art to give his audience a means of soothing their suffering: "Wagner represents a great corruption of music. He realized how to use it to stimulate tired nerves – in doing so he has made music sick. He has great inventive talent – in the art of getting the most exhausted people

[279] Nietzsche, *Contra*, 271-272.
[280] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §19.
[281] Nietzsche, *Contra*, 267.

back on their feet and calling the half-dead back to life."[282] Ultimately, Wagner was to use art to shield his audience from a confrontation with abundance by giving life a meaning, that of redemption, and Nietzsche saw that the "need for *redemption*...is the most honest expression of decadence, it affirms decadence in the most convinced, most painful way, in sublime symbols and practices. The Christian wants to *escape* from himself. *Le moi est toujours haïssable*."[283]

Nietzsche's war against Wagner is simultaneously a war with the decadence within himself, as the use of art to shield oneself from the suffering of abundance describes both Wagner's art and Nietzsche's own arguments in *Birth*. Nietzsche's own attempt to bring Apollo and Dionysus together in a brotherly bond was the attempt to turn one's relationship with Dionysus into something that one could experience and contemplate from a distance. Contemplating Dionysus, viewing tragic heroes as a means to come to terms with life through art, these are means of decadence that testify that life is too much to embrace, that we are too impoverished to become the tragic hero ourselves, to submit to sparagmos, not the literal ritual of being physiologically torn apart but the paradoxical process Nietzsche describes as self-affirmation, the submission to fate and its destructive forces, to profound experiences of suffering, that refashion and create us anew, that leads to us becoming who we are. Nietzsche knew this process intimately, and it is to it, rather than himself, that he owes his greatest creation of all:

> I have often asked myself whether I am not more deeply indebted to the hardest years of my life than to all the rest. What my innermost nature tells me is that everything necessary, seen from above and in the sense of a *great* economy, is also useful in itself – it should not just be tolerated, it should be *loved*...*Amor fati*: that is my innermost nature – And as far as my long infirmity is concerned, isn't it the case that I am unspeakably more indebted to it than I am to my health? I owe a higher health to it, a health that becomes stronger from everything that does not kill it off! *I owe my philosophy to it as well*...[284]

[282] Nietzsche, *Case*, 240.
[283] Nietzsche, *Case*, 262. Cf. Nietzsche, *Case* 247-8, 251, 257; Nietzsche, *Contra*, 269.
[284] Nietzsche, *Contra*, 280.

4.0 Conclusion: The Sparagmos of Tribal Masculinity

In this chapter, I began with the rhetorical resonance between Nietzsche and the Far Right and asked what should be made of it. What I have tried to show is that Nietzsche's critical rhetoric appeals to those who wish to reject moral universalism, just as it has rejected them. Such individuals wish to avoid a retreat into moral goodness and instead pursue self-affirmation. However, in their pursuit of self-affirmation they fail to see that they can easily swing from one extreme of decadence to another, escaping the "weakness" of universal morality for a notion of control and mastery that equally refuses to confront the ineluctability of suffering.

In Donovan, we see a figure among the contemporary Far Right who is not only seeking self-affirmation but is doing battle with *ressentiment*. This leads him to Nietzsche's emphasis on future-oriented tasks of creation. But in his attempt to adopt such creation, Donovan brings with him notions of control and mastery that must deny not only the reality of our own human limitations but the very unconscious forces within us that we can only release by submitting to the powers of fate beyond our control. Against Nietzsche's understanding of the importance of accepting our personal sparagmos, Donovan cuts himself off from the creative potential of forces beyond his control by reasserting a need for egoic mastery as the means of creation, for he insists that "It is your ego, god-like, that is initiating and driving the process of self-transformation and becoming."[285] In true Wagnerian fashion, Donovan turns to the Nordic god, Odin to illustrate this, repurposing religious figures and myths to fit into his conscious vision of masculinity and avoid the more confrontational dimension of Nietzsche's

[285] Donovan, "All Training is Sacrifice," 3.

philosophy. Rather than seeing how his critical project exposes his own relation to decadence, his attempt to reject rather than affirm the implication of existential suffering, Donovan doubles down on the notions of mastery, control, and egoic creation that continue to be rooted in *ressentiment*. Donovan wishes to cease being reactive, but his vision of a tribal future refuses to acknowledge its own reactivity. This is ironic, given that his conception of masculinity as a tragic ideal is supposed to express an indefatigable desire to embrace suffering.

Nietzsche's articulation of Dionysus as a psychological problem presents Donovan with perhaps the greatest test of his masculinity, and reveals how embracing suffering leads to transformative modes of creation that transcend our own conscious visions. In comparison to this, we begin to see the limitations of Donovan's egoistic vision. Unlike Nietzsche, Donovan does not interface with the larger world, he does not present a challenge to contemporary culture, he retreats into a tribalism, allowing himself a safe space to create his own world while removing the real internal and external challenges that would not only be necessary for transformation but that on Donovan's own terms would present a real challenge to masculinity. In the end, Donovan returns to traditional conceptions of masculinity as if the challenges of the present do not demand a response and further evolution of the concept. There is undeniably a power in tribalism and egoistic forms of creation, but they are limited and hide a sense of resentment against the very need to grow, change, develop, and overcome that Donovan claims is so central to his own thinking.

If Donovan understood the central importance of the suffering of Dionysus, of the myth of sparagmos, of the relationship between creativity and fate, he would no longer be able to offer up his unrefined accounts of traditional masculinity. Instead, he would be forced to interface with the cultural

world he reductively identifies as “feminism,” and his advocacy of male tribalism would be seen as a retreat into a citadel of friends, a retreat entirely natural, understandable, and not without its short-term benefits, but one that avoids an even greater challenge. It would force Donovan to realize that what he resents is not moral universalism but the process of creation that he himself acknowledges as the means of overcoming *ressentiment*, a process that would expose him to forms of suffering that far outstrip the relative safety of his tribe and would truly lead him to the role of the tragic hero he idealizes in his conception of masculinity.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that *Zarathustra* stands at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy as a work that illustrates the challenge morally confronting ourselves. As such, it is a work Nietzsche wanted people to read existentially rather than intellectually. Exploring the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and three different influential interpretations of it, I have noted that Nietzsche's rhetoric "hooks" three different types of readers through appeals to knowledge, nobility, and creativity. These rhetorical appeals indulge the slavish drives of each respective type of reader and encourage initial interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy that co-opt it to the normative ends of slave morality. While many readings of Nietzsche go no further, here I have asked the further question of what the relationship is between each of these specific interpretations and Nietzsche's philosophy. Doing so, I have illuminated what each takes from the text, what each leaves behind, and how a further reading of what is forsaken reveals a refusal to confront slavishly moral motivations behind each interpretation. To confront the workings of slave morality within these narratives allows us to see the operation of fear, vanity, and ressentiment as moral means of reacting to rather than affirming life. And, to the extent that we share an attachment to these interpretations, to see these same moral responses to life in ourselves.

In the introduction, I claimed that my selection of interpretations is not arbitrary nor is it a sly attempt to level a critique of others. In truth, each interpretation I have offered, along with their respective confrontations is one that I am intimately familiar with. In choosing to write about the interpretations of Foucault, Connolly, and Donovan I have presented masks of myself. In each of them there is a type of person caught in slave morality, a type that I have participated in, that I continual to struggle against, a type that exists beyond these individual accounts and can be found in many of us, if

we are willing to engage in self-confrontation. Each of these interpretations that represent such a type along with their investments in the moral rejection of suffering have been things I have needed to work through as well. Indeed, my relationship to Nietzsche's philosophy necessarily needed to pass through the historical mediation of these interpretations and the moral temptations they give voice to. Here I cannot and will not recount everything that my encounter with Nietzsche has brought to light in my own life. That would require the writing of another book, one that called out for a pen rather than the other way around.[286] Instead, to round out this project, I wish to bring myself to the fore and make good on my previous claim that I stand behind this project.

[286] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, in *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §133.

1.0 My Reflection

I started writing this dissertation in a political context of polarization. With the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, the seemingly ubiquitous rise of far-right political parties around the world, the intensifying partisanship of media outlets, and the increasing replacement of political debate with the repetitive shouting matches of entrenched positions – it seemed as though the world was falling apart, or at least splitting in two. While many of those around me responded to these political events with expressions of mourning and fear, I remember being drawn to the growing conversations about "post-truth." Perhaps best exemplified in Kellyanne Conway's announcement of "alternative facts," post-truth became the object of a new discourse expressing a concern over the loss of reason, of any shared commitment to facts, to the existence of a common world. With the loss of these fundamental aspects of our political world, it was feared that debate had become impossible, that the very means to communicate across the political aisle were gone, and that we were in danger of descending into violence.

My preoccupation with the discourse of post-truth was tied to my being long under the influence of Nietzsche's assertion that rational argumentation is the retroactive justification of instinctual drives and in Freud's discovery of the unconscious and its indirect means of communication. Given these things, the absence of truth, facts, and a common world, while regrettable, struck me as the supports of a limited spectrum of communication, one that was not particularly good at getting at underlying psychological realities and their influence on politics.[287]

[287] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §6.

Beginning a dissertation at such a time with such convictions and knowing the daunting challenges of trying to find a way to bring the working of the unconscious to light in a politically efficacious way, I was drawn to heterodox psychoanalysts such as Sandor Ferenczi and Wilhelm Reich and theorists such as Herbert Marcuse and Frantz Fanon with a revolutionary bent located at the intersections of Marxism and psychoanalysis. What I was after was a political vision grounded in the political mobilization of unconscious psychological forces. In hindsight, I was more drawn to the energy and imaginativeness of these texts than their ideas, and my overeagerness showed. I wanted to use Ferenczi to think about expanding a clinical relation of mutual analysis to all of society, to foster a different means of communication that took the psychological reality of its participants seriously; I was tempted by Reich's idea that character was itself a psychological defense that needed to be broken down; I was mesmerized by Marcuse's historicization of Freud and the seeming promise of pushing psychoanalytic insights in an emancipatory direction; and I respected Fanon's recognition of the psychological complexity of violence, of its explosive, revolutionary, and dialectical nature as well as the pathological consequences it left in its wake, and his desire to will the former even in light of the latter. In all this, I was not sure what I was after. Some vague notion of a paradigm shift, a revolution, an explosive change, something wild and crazy, exciting and different, dangerous and potentially transformational.

Thankfully, this wild project never really got off the ground. I quickly encountered problems that I could find no way around. I was trying to theorize a mutual dialogue across unconscious registers with an erroneous conception of transference, I could find no way to resolve the familiar problem of drawing an analogy between the psychoanalytic clinic and society, I had to deal with the rising tide of post-critique that leveled damning criticisms of the elitism and ineffectual nature of critique, and I was

trapped between the optimism of the Marxist tradition with its belief in revolution, transformation, and emancipation and the pessimism of psychoanalysis's largely conservative conclusions about the structures of human psychology.

These challenges, a perceived dearth of solutions, and my disinterest in abandoning the energy, enthusiasm, and materiality of these thinkers for the increasing abstraction of the contemporary radical left, led me to suspend this initial vision of my project, taking a step back to rethink things and look for other resources for my ambition for a politics of the unconscious. Belatedly convinced that I needed to relinquish romantic notions of revolution and that any return to an unnuanced account of ideology critique simply slipped into an indefensible form of paternalism, I set off in search of a different form of critique, a purely formal mode of rhetorical intervention into political discourse that would short-circuit the biases that underwrote polarization not through an elitist, substantive critique of them but through an inducement of self-reflection by somehow cluing others into the workings of their own unconscious. In search of this, I turned to the single most troublesome thinker I had ever encountered, Friedrich Nietzsche. Having read him off and on for years, always surprised, disturbed, confused, and delighted, there was no other thinker I had ever encountered who could get me to pause and question myself in ways that oftentimes felt profound and radical merely by means of suggestive assertions. I wanted to understand how Nietzsche's philosophy worked, how it could have such an effect on me, whether I might be able to extract the rhetorical dimension of his philosophy and construct a model of critique from it.

While my interest in Nietzsche quickly grew, leading me to abandon my earlier thinking about the intersection of Marxism and psychoanalysis and the seeming insoluble problems I had encountered

there, my study of Nietzsche led to new problems. Though, this time, I was unaware of it. With the seeming failure of my initial project, the seemingly unending obstacles to reinvigorate some kind of revolutionary politics, and personal issues of my own, my turn to Nietzsche was not only motivated by a search for a rhetorical mode of critique. If you had asked me about this at the time, I would have denied there was any ulterior motive. But the truth was that, though I did not fully understand it at the time, I was also drawn to the critical force of Nietzsche's work for the vicarious pleasure it offered to my frustration. Nietzsche's acerbic criticism, ridicule, condescension, dismissiveness, hyperbole – the fact that we scholars are allowed to take it seriously! – in all this Nietzsche offered what I was looking for in others and trying to intellectualize. A release. Reading Nietzsche can be so many things, sometimes all at once. But there is an unmistakable pleasure in the cruelty he offers and puts on display, in his vicious and adroit wielding of his hammer. While I confessed to be searching for a rhetorical model of critique in Nietzsche's work that could interrupt deep-seated, unconscious moral biases, there was also a part of me that wished to indulge in the sheer force of Nietzsche's philosophy. Not wanting to own this, not even being entirely aware of it, placed me in yet another impossible position. For I was trying to extract a rhetorical model of self-critique from Nietzsche's philosophy on the basis of past experiences, refusing to acknowledge the obvious point that I would first need to place myself back into such a relation to Nietzsche's philosophy to be able to write of such experiences at all, and all the while wanting to use the power and authority of Nietzsche to wield the very form of critique I was unwilling to embrace in my own life.

Things changed as I continued to read Nietzsche. The very experience that I had had before, that I was trying to write about, moments of intense and bewildering self-confrontation, where, as Deleuze

once put it, Nietzsche comes up behind you, scrambles your understanding of him and reveals to you the monster of our own interpretation, returned. The first occurred one night while reading *Human, All Too Human* for the first time. I came across §81. There Nietzsche writes about the false ideas of one another held by the sufferer and the perpetrator of harm. Nietzsche claims that the idea of pain is not the same as the suffering of it, that when a person is injured, they judge the actions of the perpetrator in terms of their own suffering, whereas the perpetrator judges the harm they cause in terms of their own idea of pain. Neither understands the other. Then Nietzsche takes things a step further. He chooses to illustrate this misunderstanding with examples that are hard to judge as anything other than atrocious, in particular, Xerxes's execution of another man's son. Nietzsche claims that this offense, from the perspective of the perpetrator, is equivalent to killing an insect, insisting that the "inherited sense of being a higher type of creature with higher claims already makes such a man fairly cold and leaves his conscience at rest: we all...lose all feeling of injustice when the difference between ourselves and other creatures is very great, and will kill a gnat...without the slightest distress of conscience." To say that the sufferer misunderstands the perpetrator is one thing, but to suggest that this misunderstanding is so radical that it would be more accurate to see the murder of another's son as akin to killing a fly trips a moral switch. Or at least it did for me.

The problem with my reaction is that it was the very thing Nietzsche is discussing in §81. In effect, Nietzsche is asking whether we can have no other reaction to the murder of a son other than moral outrage. That our inability to see it any other way leads us to a fundamental misunderstanding of what is happening. Even to attribute an inhumane callousness to Xerxes, to claim that this is immoral, leads us away from an understanding of what is happening. We replace psychic reality with our moral defense

against it. Realizing this, without losing sight of the degree of suffering Nietzsche is discussing on the part of the sufferer, leads us to move not past but beyond the shock of Nietzsche's immoral suggestion long enough to begin to question when suffering gets in the way of our own understanding. Nietzsche does not say what the offended party should do, whether they should accept fate or enact revenge. He simply states that they allow suffering to deceive them about the truths of both parties respective psychological realities.

Nietzsche's assertion was a hard thing swallow on its own terms, but it also led me to begin realizing how and why I had been hooked by Nietzsche's philosophy. The critical force and energy of Nietzsche's philosophy was indulging my desire for a style of critique I had consciously abandoned but still deeply desired. While I did not associate these critiques with a moral condemnation of their objects, I began to realize that whatever the harm of the various manifestations of slave morality Nietzsche took aim at, the suffering they caused was not the motivation driving his critiques. But my indulgence in Nietzsche was very much invested in responding to my own frustration, my own suffering. Once I began wrestling with this idea, I began to se that I was not simply unwilling to acknowledge my response to the failures of my earlier project but that that project was itself grounded in a moral reaction to suffering.

1.1 My Self-Confrontation

I started writing this dissertation in a political context of polarization. While those around me expressed sentiments of fear and mourning as they found themselves living in a time when reason and facts no longer carried weight, where there no longer seemed to be a shared world or point of reference, where two different perspectives stood in a polarized, irreconcilable position to one another, I oddly felt there was something all too familiar about the situation.

For nearly two decades I have lived somewhere between two worlds. The first is the world I was born into. It is a religious world, Protestant, conservative, insular, legalistic, rural, ethnically homogenous. Intellectual drives are directed to lay theology and required to submit to the unknowability of God's will, all the while subordinated to a robust sense of community where families and marriages are strong, love and encouragement is in steady supply, and purpose, meaning, and identity are taken as given. Drawn to overthink from an early age and both blessed and cursed with an intense ambition that all too easily channels self-loathing into ascetic discipline, the intellectual frustration of such a world and its artificial limits coded in the language of an eternal "because I say so" chafed against my own instinctual drives. Moreover, the exclusionary effects required to create such a sense of community did not easily sit with the Gospel notion of love that was preached every Sunday.

Through a series of chance events, humble beginnings at a community college quickly led to entry into another world. Amherst College, the University of Chicago, Cornell University. I found myself walking the halls of prestigious institutions of higher learning. Though criticized by professors and friends alike for continuing to lack real diversity, these institutions introduced me to more diversity than I had ever known before. They also granted a new-found freedom for intellectual pursuits, an ethos of

experimentation, outlets for ambition, an encouragement of accomplishment, and a refreshing embrace of along with a painful honesty about the perplexities of existence. While I met the greater diversity of this world and its expanded sense of freedom with excitement and a sense of promise, in time it proved to operate according to a similar moral logic – not in its specific content but in its form – as the world I had left. It seems that no matter how much the borderlines of identity and morality are extended, they all come to an end somewhere, with the exclusion of someone. And in time, particularly with the secular loss of community, meaning, and identity that is often the other side of the coin of such freedom, I found myself unable to return to the world I had left behind and unable to relinquish it. Neither world fit with the other. Both spoke different languages, had different criteria of justification, and I was torn between them.

My response to this situation, long barred from consciousness and even then from affective uptake, was the reanimation of the moral urge for redemption. A religious idea, translated in the Christian tradition as the second coming of Christ that ushers in the redemption of the saints and a reunification with God, redemption is a moral response to the suffering of the world. It gives meaning to suffering, turning it into a test to be endured. It deadens or compensates for the pain, making suffering into something temporary to be abolished for all time in the hereafter, a means onto an end. And it is a promise of reunion, reunion with God, with all those who have been lost. But redemption also stands in judgment of life, deeming it to be evil in some sense, in need of correction.

This moral urge for redemption, for to speak of it as an "idea" fails to understand its unconscious force, took a familiar means of escaping suffering and sought a new form for it. This, undeniably, is why I was so taken with the Marxist tradition as it extends into the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, as the

desire for revolution and social transformation taps into the same moral logic of redemption, or at least can. This also explains my investment in psychoanalysis, my search for a "cure" through an understanding of unconscious psychological structures. In hindsight, looking back on these fixations, seeing in them not an intellectual pursuit but a moral one, leaves me feeling ridiculous, embarrassed. But understanding how and why I was led there reveals something else about the tenacity of our moral defenses against life, that they metonymically slide from one form to the next and that conscious, intellectual objections to them can lead them to change form but do not necessarily alter the underlying galvanizing force of our desired political and moral visions.

Things changed with Nietzsche. Not at first, mind you. At first, Nietzsche indulged my moral desire, just like other discourses. The critical dimension of his philosophy, the force of his critiques, the fact that they were grounded in rhetoric, speculation, and assertions rather than the traditional contours of a rational, logical, linear argument, gave my moral drive a new freedom and a vicarious pleasure in Nietzsche's penchant for destroying things with a hammer. Furthermore, to be flattered as noble, to be included in an exclusive group defined by their daring to accomplish extraordinary feats, the fact that in their profundity they become incomprehensible to the world around them, that they suffer from the limitations and mediocrity of the world around them as something beneath them – all these rhetorical strategies initially lead to an indulgence of my own moralism, not to its questioning.

But once this freedom of indulgence has its hooks in you, then the moment of confrontation comes like the uncanny flash of lightning Nietzsche describes, something that illuminates who we are in an instant, seemingly coming from nowhere, and revealing that what we took ourselves to be and to be doing is something else entirely. In my own experience, *Human* §81 led me to radically question my

reactions to suffering, and this led me away from the desire to formulate a model of critique out of Nietzsche's philosophy. For if Nietzsche hooked my moral desire to escape from suffering, he also hooked something else as well. By indulging my moral ambitions drives and then pulling the rug out from under them, he sent me in search of not only a better understanding of his philosophy but of myself. This occurs because Nietzsche is always indulging his reader, first feeding their moral ambitions and then turning them against themselves, precipitating their own overcoming. This occurs because Nietzsche's personal address confronts its readers in terms of their own personal investment in morality while it remaining committed to the expression of the reader's own idiosyncratic personality. This is why the experience of self-criticality is so jarring, for it reveals us to ourselves both in terms of our entanglement in morality and in terms of our desire to affirm ourselves. Beginning to understand this then led me down the path of each of the chapters above, discovering the centrality of self-confrontation in *Zarathustra* and how Nietzsche teases out the workings of fear, vanity, and *ressentiment* and their investment in a moral rejection of life to bring me to an honest confrontation with my own fate.

I wish to be clear, the point of telling this aspect of my own experience reading Nietzsche is not to reduce the work of my dissertation to my own personal problem of being torn between two worlds, though I do not wish to hide this fact, either. The point of telling the story is to illustrate that Nietzsche's rhetoric, his ideas, and his invitation to read his philosophy existentially are what intervened and interrupted my moral desire where other reasoned arguments and logical objections merely diverted it. That is, Nietzsche's philosophy targets our personal investments and attachments and the compromises we have made to morality, and it throws them into question on the basis not of some external standard but in terms of our own relation to ourselves insofar as it is reflected in our relation to life, the degree to

which we affirm or reject it. Such self-confrontation is not an ethos. It is a reorienting pathos, a moment. It is not magic. It does not lead to an instantaneous transformation. But it throws our moral rejections of life in our face in ways we cannot forget because it derives its power and force from its demonstrated investment in our own selves. Behind or beneath the moral distortions of our desires lie our actual desires, the things we fail to pursue in the face of suffering. The embrace of slave morality leads to forms of moral compromise that, at best, can only mitigate or compensate us for our relinquishment of our very selves, and, ironically, lead to even greater forms of suffering as we forsaken ourselves. Reading Nietzsche's philosophy existentially brings all this to light, if we are willing to read it that way.

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