

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE IDEALS OF SOVEREIGNTY,
WHOLENESS AND BECOMING WHAT ONE IS
IN NIETZSCHE'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

by

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To My Past, Present And Future Family

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ABSTRACT

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE IDEALS OF SOVEREIGNTY, WHOLENESS AND BECOMING WHAT ONE IS IN NIETZSCHE'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

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My dissertation deals with three important ideals that Nietzsche recommends: the ideals of Sovereignty, of Wholeness, and of Becoming What One Is. I locate the main texts where Nietzsche addresses each of these topics and I offer a consistent and coherent interpretation of them.

On my reading, the ideal of Becoming What One Is involves a process whereby we become mature and give expression to our own uniqueness. This process requires an active self-reflection on our part and a dynamic practice of relinquishing and regaining our capacity to be the cause of our own behavior (the capacity for autonomous self-control). Besides emphasizing the ideal's connection to authenticity and our capacity to

be autonomous, my interpretation provides a more detailed description of the mechanisms whereby one attains this ideal than that offered by other commentators.

In the case of the ideal of Sovereignty, I argue that for Nietzsche becoming sovereign entails accepting and even embracing one's susceptibility to moral guilt. For Nietzsche, having a sovereign conscience means understanding oneself as a morally responsible agent. This self-understanding confers on us a freedom that other creatures do not have, but at the cost of becoming subject to blame and guilt for our wrongdoings. In this respect, my account is at odds with the propensity in the secondary literature to characterize Nietzsche as a staunch opponent of the moral notion of guilt.

Finally, my interpretation of Wholeness runs against the grain of the prevalent readings that characterize this as an ideal of psychic unity aimed at restructuring the various parts of the agent's mind into a harmonious whole. I argue, on the contrary, that wholeness fundamentally concerns social – not psychic – integration: the person becomes whole by placing himself within the circle of genuine culture in which he works together with others in the perfection of nature and freedom. In this way, the person finds redemption from the meaninglessness of existence by ensuring that his energies survive into the future within a suprapersonal community in which life and creativity are perpetually renewed and guaranteed.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation deals with three different ideals that Nietzsche advocates throughout his writings. Since they belong to Nietzsche's ethics and his practical philosophy, these ideals fall within the broadly construed field of action theory and moral psychology. In the second chapter I offer a reading of the injunction to become what or who one is; in the third chapter I investigate the relation between the ideal of the sovereign individual and the moral phenomenon of guilt; and, finally, in the fourth chapter I elucidate the somewhat enigmatic notion of wholeness that Nietzsche entreats us to realize. All these chapters have been conceived as separate essays that explore particular problems that arise in and out of Nietzsche's works. As such, the essays are, for the most part, highly focused and specific. Instead of guiding my approach by a contemporary understanding of the issues proper to a philosophy of action and moral psychology, in my investigation I pursue topics that Nietzsche himself lays out and that are taken directly from his texts. This means that I will not focus on questions such as whether Nietzsche held a compatibilist or an incompatibilist position with regard to human agency; or whether he was in favor of moral realism or on the contrary embraced an anti-realist outlook; or whether his ethical views are those of a virtue ethicist or a consequentialist or a perfectionist, etc. Instead of pursuing these and similar questions,

my goal is to understand the problems that Nietzsche himself explored in the way that he explored them.

To be sure, while I favor an approach that focuses on Nietzsche's own questions and concerns within the broadly construed field of action theory and moral psychology, I do not mean to suggest that pursuing this type of investigation is of no consequence to contemporary questions and concerns within this area of study. Quite the contrary, I believe that Nietzsche has interesting things to contribute to current discussions on moral psychology. However, I think we will be able to appreciate what those contributions are not by demanding that Nietzsche take up our own concerns, but by engaging his philosophy on its own terms and by trying to clarify his position on the very issues that he himself set out to resolve. My hope is that by pursuing these localized topics I will be able to construct, or perhaps reconstruct, a picture of Nietzsche's thoughts on this subject. In what follows I intend to give a brief characterization of my overall approach and the way I think it contrasts with other approaches to Nietzsche's philosophy.

As anyone who is familiar with Nietzsche's work knows, he was not a systematic thinker and he rarely pursued arguments in a focused and sustained manner. Moreover, his style of writing was dauntingly heterogeneous: his books frequently exhibit no apparent thematic structure; in many cases, they lack linear narrative; they adopt a variety of voices and techniques; they comprise all sorts of literary genres, ranging from the scholarly treatise and the philological essay to the epical poem, the autobiographical

narrative, or the polemical pamphlet; they constantly revel on all manner of rhetorical strategies, hyperboles, parodies, ironies, metaphors, and the like.

This highly idiosyncratic aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy no doubt contributed to the relatively poor reception of his work within the Anglo-American world. Unlike other German writers such as Kant, Hegel or Husserl, Nietzsche was for the most part ignored, caricatured, decried and generally dismissed by analytic philosophers as a thinker of no philosophical consequence and worthy of no serious attention (a prime example in this respect is Russell). Since the 1960s this trend steadily began to reverse itself, with the result that nowadays there is a flurry of secondary literature on Nietzsche. Yet, one need only glance at this literature to discover that, while there may be a general consensus as to the importance of Nietzsche's work, there is a widespread disagreement about where this importance lies and how exactly to understand the significance of his various contributions (whatever they may be) to philosophical inquiry. Nietzsche has been subject to the most diverse and incompatible interpretations; and, again, his peculiar way of tackling philosophical issues is partly to blame for this. Still, it is also the case that many commentators take Nietzsche's unconventional style as an excuse to engage in what can only be classified as confused and obscured thinking and interpretation. Many of the so called postmodern appropriations of his work exhibit this quality. The result of this tendency to forego the scholarly virtues of clarity and rigorous argumentation is that, for the most part, the secondary literature on Nietzsche has been somewhat dreadful and cannot be recommended.

More or less starting in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, there have been a series of attempts at rescuing Nietzsche from the clutches of this kind of interpretation. People like Richard Schacht, Maudemarie Clark, Brian Leiter, John Richardson, Peter Poellner, among others, have sought to organize Nietzsche's thought under traditional categories and to render his work directly relevant to current analytic philosophy.¹ Though these interpretations differ in various ways, they all share the assumption that Nietzsche is trying to answer what are rather conventional philosophical questions. According to these interpreters, then, despite his multifarious styles, Nietzsche had more or less coherent and philosophically motivated views about a series of key issues in philosophy. All we need to do is apply the tools and resources available in contemporary philosophical discourse to understand the content and, therefore, the importance of Nietzsche's work.

I share the general aspiration of presenting Nietzsche's insights in a clear, rigorous, perhaps "analytical" manner. And I certainly wish to locate my efforts within the efforts of those who want to make Nietzsche's work relevant to current philosophy. But I do not want to saddle Nietzsche with the demand or the expectation that his philosophy be continuous with our own way of understanding the issues. Adopting such demands and expectations does a disservice to Nietzsche and ends up misconstruing his work in important ways. It does so not simply because this strategy tends to deflate the polemical aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy and to de-emphasize the ways in which he is discontinuous with current academic discourses, but, more importantly, because this strategy conflates goals that, in my judgment, should be kept apart. Making Nietzsche

¹ See Schacht (1983), Clark (1990), Poellner (1995), Richardson (1996), Leiter (2002).

palatable to contemporary philosophy and vindicating the analytic approach in academic discourse may be lofty goals, but they should not be confused with the aim of getting Nietzsche right. In this respect, my own approach offers an important advantage over others. By starting with Nietzsche's own way of framing the problems I can more easily avoid the temptation to conflate these aims.

Along these lines, I am also able to resist an assumption that is very prevalent in the secondary literature, but which in my view is not all that warranted. This consists in thinking that Nietzsche must have coherent views on metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Put differently, the idea is that his various reflections and conclusions within one of these areas of study must be connected and carry implications for his thinking about the others. His thoughts must support and sustain each other across fields. Now, I do not wish to deny that such connections could indeed exist. But I do not think it is a good strategy to assume that they must. Since Nietzsche confronts us with a way of thinking that is operating at different levels, in different contexts, at different times, out of different motivations, and so on, one should not expect a high level of coherence across diverse fields and subject matters. This means that one should be ready to accept the existence of contradictory views within the Nietzschean corpus as a whole. It does not mean that one should be ready to accept such contradictions within specialized and highly localized problems such as the ones I intend to explore. So one can still demand consistency in the treatment of particular issues without thereby worrying about whether such treatment resonates or is in harmony with things Nietzsche says elsewhere about different issues.

A final advantage of my approach is that it is also able to steer clear of another pernicious tendency. Perhaps as a result of the impetus to find coherence in Nietzsche's views on different matters, many interpreters tend to try to organize Nietzsche's writing around one overarching principle or worldview. John Richardson, for instance, thinks that Nietzsche's work is structured by a particular ontology, an interpretation of the essence of things as will to power. He then reads various aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy in the light of that ontology. Agents, for example, turn out to be not single entities but the result of a complex bundle of drives or forces that struggle for power.² Brian Leiter also proceeds this way: he identifies a particular naturalist strand in Nietzsche and then tries to shed light on other issues like how one becomes what one is, or Nietzsche's immoralism, by reading them as aspects of such naturalism.³ Interestingly, interpreters who do not necessarily share the aspiration to make Nietzsche's view systematic in the way these other philosophers want to, nonetheless end up adopting a similar strategy. Thus, Alexander Nehamas, for example, focuses on the metaphor of the world as a text in need of interpretation and then proceeds to deal with various aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy by using this metaphor as a key to unlocking their true significance. Nietzsche's immoralism turns out to consist in the injunction to liberate oneself from the yoke of a system of morals that demands unqualified obedience, and to construct instead one's own moral code out of the combination of various features and qualities into a controlled and coherent whole (constructing an interpretation of morality much in the same way one

² See, Richardson (1996).

³ See, Leiter (2002).

constructs an interpretation of the world).⁴ Unlike these readers, I do not want to assume that there is one key to unlocking Nietzsche's thought on different issues. Instead, I take each topic on its own terms and try to unlock whatever significance it may contain using as many keys as I can find or muster and without worrying about whether those keys should fit all locks.

Let me now briefly say something about the issue of the continuity in Nietzsche's thinking. Since Lou Andreas Salomé first introduced the idea in her 1894 book on Nietzsche,⁵ it has become fashionable to speak of three periods in Nietzsche's writing: an early period spanning from the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* to the last Untimely Meditation, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*; a middle period starting with *Human All Too Human* and culminating in *The Gay Science*; and a late or mature period covering all his work from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* onwards up to his mental collapse in January of 1889. This tripartite arrangement is often used by readers of Nietzsche who wish to defend a developmental account of his philosophy, according to which Nietzsche's views on different philosophical matters changed significantly from one period to the next. A prime example is Maudemarie Clark's book *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*.⁶ Clark argues that Nietzsche's views on truth underwent radical revisions and transformations during the course of his life. In the beginning, Nietzsche was under the spell of the Kantian idea that genuine truth belongs to the realm of things as they are in themselves, which – being inaccessible to us – meant that we only had contact with a world that is

⁴ See Nehamas (1985).

⁵ See, Salomé (1894).

⁶ See Clark (1990)

merely apparent or illusory (i.e. false). Under the influence of the scientific paradigm, he then began to question this basic Kantian picture during his middle period; a critical examination that he carried over to his mature period with ever increasing momentum and which culminates, during the last two productive years of his life, in the realization that the repudiation of the Kantian doctrine restores our confidence in truth and dispels all prior skepticism. Thus, according to Clark, the last works of Nietzsche “exhibit a uniform and unambiguous respect for facts, the senses, and science” (Clark, 1990: 105).

I am not interested in arguing here against Clark’s conclusions. I think the jury is still out on what Nietzsche’s views on truth were, and on whether he changed them and how exactly he did so. Many commentators have tried to show that there is more continuity on Nietzsche’s ideas about truth than Clark would have us believe.⁷ More important for me is to point out that there is something fundamentally suspect in adopting this tripartite approach as some sort of exegetical principle. One gets the impression that readers who are bent on emphasizing discontinuities in Nietzsche’s thinking are motivated by a desire to rid Nietzsche’s work of positions that they themselves judge incoherent or deeply problematic. They focus on the discontinuity to show that in the end – or in the beginning, or in the middle, depending which Nietzsche you favor – Nietzsche comes through and joins the ranks of what rationally, good minded people ought to think.

To be sure, this is just a suspicion and, to that extent, a bit of hand waiving. But it seems to me that it makes good sense to preempt such suspicions. Moreover, the need to do so is even more advisable and urgent given what we know about Nietzsche’s own

⁷ See, for example, Anderson (1996), Klein (1997), and, more recently, Green (2002).

position with regards to his philosophical trajectory and the relationship he had toward his own work. Nietzsche constantly revised and enlarged his texts throughout the course of his life and, as Wayne Klein has observed, he did so in a way that raises difficulties for those who want to understand the relationship that Nietzsche's books have to each other and to Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole.⁸ For instance, in his mature period Nietzsche composed a series of prefaces to his earlier writings like *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Human All Too Human* and *Daybreak*. He also added a fifth part, a preface and a concluding set of poems to *The Gay Science*, a book that originally had only four parts and no preface. Such additions raise questions about how to understand the connection between the new and the old material in Nietzsche's works. The puzzle is accentuated further when one considers Nietzsche's pronouncements regarding his books in letters and in his own published work. In *Ecce Homo*, for example, he claims that the fourth untimely meditation, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, is a vision of his future while the third meditation, *Schopenhauer as Educator* contains his innermost history, his becoming. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he claims that the text is meant to supplement and clarify the one that preceded it, namely, *Beyond Good and Evil* without specifying why this is so and how exactly it is supposed to do so. In letters to friends he claims that *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science* can serve as introductions and commentaries to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He also claims that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the vestibule to his philosophy and that the books that follow it are meant to be expansions and explanations of the ideas contained there. Yet the rest of the books of his mature period pay little heed overall to what seem to be the seminal concepts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, namely, the Will to Power, the Eternal Return and the Overman.

⁸ See Klein (1997), chapter 1.

All this indicates that Nietzsche himself thought of his philosophy as continuous in some, to be sure, not easily accessible sense and, at the very least, put quite a bit of burden on the discontinuity thesis and make the suspicion I spoke of earlier more pressing and salient. In order to avoid this type of suspicion, then, I adopt a principle of charity that I will call the continuity principle. It consists in working under the assumption that there is a strong continuity in Nietzsche's thinking about whatever issue I intend to examine, until the text itself proves me wrong. In other words – to take an example –, if Nietzsche talks about becoming who one is in his early writings and he characterizes it as the process of becoming a unique individual, one that is different from the mass of people, I will assume that should the phrase “becoming who one is” appear again in later writings, it will signify something very close to this prior meaning, unless the text resists this interpretation. This is not to deny or contest the idea that Nietzsche's mind could change in the course of his life nor is it to suppose that he must use the same language when speaking about these issues. It is simply to assume that if such changes occur they will in all likelihood consist in a building upon earlier concepts and not in an outright rejection or reformulation of them; it is to assume that changes tend to be refinements and not repudiations of previously held ideas.

I have said that in these essays I take Nietzsche on his own terms. Let me now say a bit more about how I think this works. I will take chapter two on How One Becomes What One Is as an example of the approach I implement throughout this dissertation. In the essay I take up the issue of how to understand Nietzsche's repeated injunction to

become who or what one is. I trace back the places in Nietzsche's corpus where he is most vocal about this issue and attempt to give a coherent and comprehensive interpretation of those passages in a way that allows us to understand what the injunction means and what sort of thing it would entail to follow it; what type of process is involved in bringing it about that a person becomes who he is. In pursuing this line of inquiry I am driven to recruit concepts such as the notion of a person as a multiplicity that are found within the Nietzschean corpus, albeit in an incipient and imprecise form, in the service of constructing a plausible interpretation of the texts. My use of such concepts is rather liberal in the sense that I give myself quite a bit of leeway in my understanding of what they involve and the way they may function within Nietzsche's views. I take this strategy to be warranted in the light of Nietzsche's thin and unsystematic treatment of such concepts. Moreover, while I take some latitude here, the employment of these concepts is not arbitrary since the way in which they are understood and get recruited is to a large extent dictated by the exigencies that arise in the course of solving the problem under consideration and the clues that the text itself provides.

When Nietzsche does not offer enough, by way of conceptual background, to shed light on the passages I examine, I am forced to enlist the aid of other sources. In my essay this happens, for instance, when I make use of David Velleman's theory in order to fill in the assumptions that are required to make sense of Nietzsche's pronouncements on the manner in which a person can be said to contribute to the process whereby he becomes what he is. In particular, I make use of Velleman's characterization of autonomous agency as a form of self-understanding to explain Nietzsche's view that, though

autonomy is necessary for becoming what one is, too much self-understanding is detrimental to this process. I realize that in doing this my account walks a thin line between attributing certain positions to Nietzsche in an unwarranted way and discovering in Nietzsche the incipient form of certain views that are articulated and defended in contemporary discourse. In response to this worry all I can say is that the impulse to adopt this kind of maneuver is pragmatic in nature: I use it to fill in the gaps in Nietzsche's account in a way that makes sense of what he is saying. To that extent it is governed by guidelines found within the text itself. Nietzsche *does* talk of understanding oneself and misunderstanding oneself when he is referring to the process of becoming who one is, and Velleman's theory simply provides the occasion for spelling out what that may involve. This does not necessarily mean that Nietzsche thought of the issue in those terms or anticipated these ideas, but neither does it mean that he is just arbitrarily being aligned to a position that is completely foreign to his way of thinking.

Similarly, I find this strategy fruitful because it allows me to start the dialogue with contemporary debates. By using Velleman's theory as a foil for interpreting the text I not only shed light on what Nietzsche is saying, I also provide a space from which Nietzsche can speak to our concerns, an aim that I explicitly set out to pursue in this dissertation. In Nietzsche one finds interesting ideas that are certainly worth exploring from the point of view of contemporary theorizing, such as the notion that we have overestimated the value of autonomy, that though a good thing, autonomous self-control may also, under certain circumstances, be bad for us; or the idea that the unity of the self or the person should be thought of along the lines of the type of unity a community may

enjoy and not the type of unity that an isolated entity (an object) is thought to have; and so on.

Finally, let me say that although these essays were conceived as self-contained projects that can be read independently of each other, they are nonetheless complementary and in my estimation shed, when read in conjunction, an important light on Nietzsche's overall philosophical views. I hope that the novel results generated by the piecemeal approach I adopt here will not only lead us to reassess more traditional readings, but will also put us in the right path to tackle more ambitious projects like those of solving apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole or understanding his stance on broader issues of epistemology and metaphysics. It is, of course, the reader's prerogative to judge whether my hopes are warranted on this score.

Chapter 2

On Becoming What One Is

I want to explore an idea that appears constantly throughout various stages of Nietzsche's philosophical development. This concerns his famous exhortation to the reader to "become what (or who) he is." The idea appears in different formulations in Nietzsche's work and can be traced back to as early as the third untimely meditation, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, where he writes: "The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself'" (UM III, 1). Later, in *The Gay Science*, it becomes synthesized into the aphorism: "What does your conscience say? – You should become who you are" (GS, 270). This formulation is echoed again in one of Zarathustra's speeches where we find the following pronouncement: "*That* is what I am through and through: reeling, reeling in, raising up, raising, a raiser, cultivator, and disciplinarian, who once counseled himself, not for nothing: Become who you are!" (Z, IV, 1).

All these variations of the phrase are articulated as either commands or counsels, but Nietzsche also expresses this thought in other guises. For instance, in a different passage of the aforementioned *Gay Science*, the idea is articulated in the form of a desire: "we, however, want to *become who we are* – human beings who are new, unique,

incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!” (GS, 335). And in Nietzsche’s last book, *Ecce Homo* (his philosophical autobiography) he reintroduces the thought in the subtitle, this time expressed in the form of the descriptive statement “How One Becomes What One Is.”

I call attention to these different formulations simply because this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought has been seized on by commentators of his work as a gateway for understanding his views on the self and on human agency in general, and many times different conclusions are drawn from different formulations of the statement.⁹ One reason why this seems a very apt place to look for Nietzsche’s views on the self is that the injunction “become who you are” remits us to a self that one is supposed to become. To that extent, this thought seems to present us with a possible vantage point from which to answer the question of just what sort of thing Nietzsche imagines a self to be.

I think this strategy is misguided. If there are lessons to be drawn regarding Nietzsche’s views on the category of selfhood from examining his “doctrine” of becoming who or what one is, those lessons are indirect and presuppose, rather than furnish, such views. Though I hope to be able to say something about Nietzsche’s conception of the self, in this essay I want to concentrate primarily on the more humble task of trying to interpret his remarks on becoming who one is. Who or what is the Who

⁹ Thus, for instance, people like Alexander Nehamas or Richard Schacht, who defend a kind of “constructivist” notion of selfhood according to which the self is something created and not something found or discovered, tend to emphasize the imperative form; whereas others like Brian Leiter focus on the more descriptive formulations in order to defend an “essentialist” view of the self as having immutable, determining characteristics that fundamentally make it what it is. See Nehamas (1983); Schacht (1992); Leiter (2001).

that one is supposed to become, according to Nietzsche, and how does one become it?
This is the question I will try to answer here.

Let me begin as most commentators do and that is by noting that an interpretation of becoming who one is faces at least one serious constraint: it must accommodate Nietzsche's pronouncements against the notion of the self as a metaphysical substance. This criticism of what Nietzsche more broadly calls the "soul hypothesis" forms part and parcel of his attack on traditional metaphysics and his efforts against the dominance of Judeo-Christian values (which Nietzsche considers to be detrimental for life). It is remarkable that for the most part Nietzsche's arguments against the self as a metaphysically abiding entity take place within the context of his criticism of the notion of a free will understood as a *causa sui* (cause of itself).¹⁰ I will not rehearse those arguments here. Suffice it to say that despite his rejection of this belief in a kind of soul atomism, Nietzsche does not consider it necessary to get rid of the postulate of "the soul" itself. On the contrary, as he suggests, "the path lies open for new versions and sophistications of the soul hypothesis – and concepts like the 'mortal soul' and the 'soul as subject-multiplicity' and the 'soul as a society constructed out of drives and affects' want henceforth to have civil rights in the realm of science."¹¹

¹⁰ See, for example, BGE 21 and in general the whole section entitled "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

¹¹ BGE 12. In *Human All Too Human* Nietzsche had also pointed towards this type of understanding of the subject as a multiplicity of souls when, remarking on the difference between the metaphysician and the student of history, he asserts that, unlike the former, the latter is happy "to harbor in himself not 'an immortal soul,' but *many mortal souls*" (HAH II, "Assorted Opinions and Maxims" 17).

Unfortunately, Nietzsche was not a systematic thinker and, besides being gestured at in this way, the hypothesis of the soul or the self as a multiplicity of sorts receives no sustained attention in his published works. We fare no better when we look at Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks, for though there we find somewhat more elaborate explanations of this idea, the passages are scant and their exposition remains at best partial.

Nonetheless two passages warrant mentioning. In the first Nietzsche states the following:

No subject "atoms." The sphere of a subject constantly growing or decreasing, the center of the system constantly shifting; in cases where it cannot organize the appropriate mass, it breaks into two parts. On the other hand, it can transform a weaker subject into its functionary without destroying it, and to a certain degree form a unity with it. No "substance," rather something that in itself strives after greater strength, and that wants to "preserve" itself only indirectly (it wants to *surpass* itself—) (WP, 488).

In the other passage Nietzsche writes:

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of "cells" in which common dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command? (WP 490)

One important thing to highlight about these passages is the employment of the political metaphor to talk about selfhood. The notion of the self as a multiplicity is supposed to capture the thought that, whatever reality a self has, it is to be understood along the lines of a social structure whose unity, as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, is that of "regents at the head of a communality" (WP, 492). We also learn here that this communality or government does not simply want to preserve its structure; instead its fundamental orientation is to surpass itself, that is, to incorporate more complex structures, to grow, to appropriate, to dominate, and other such concepts that Nietzsche employs whenever he speaks of the basic drive of man towards self-overcoming.

To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that these passages solve any philosophical issues with respect to the hypothesis of the self as a multiplicity. If anything they seem to raise all sorts of puzzles. In what sense can one speak of a regent or a series of regents here? Who is that regent? Does it have any particular set of characteristics? How does it interact with its subjects and what is the nature of such interaction? Does the regent remain always the same? Or is there a constant shifting of rulers in the way the previously quoted passage suggests there is a constant shifting of centers? These are just some of the interpretative problems that confront any reader of Nietzsche on this subject.

The fact that it is very hard (if not impossible) to answer these questions, in the light of the unsystematic treatment Nietzsche gives to these issues, may send some interpreters down a spiral of despair. I, however, find it rather liberating. The space is open for us to make use of this very suggestive image of multiple selves however we see fit. I thus welcome the interpretative “elbow room” that Nietzsche has left us and I shall attempt to benefit from it later in this paper. Let me now turn back to the issue of becoming who one is.

Starting from these and other premises, Alexander Nehamas transforms the issue of how one becomes what one is into the problem of how, given Nietzsche’s rejection of the self as a metaphysical unity, it is possible to still speak of a unity of the self at all. Accordingly, Nehamas ends up suggesting that to become what one is entails becoming a unity through an act of self-creation consisting of “the total organization of everything

that one thinks, wants and does” (Nehamas, 1983: 403). On the other side of the spectrum we find someone like Brian Leiter who takes Nietzsche’s criticism of the free will hypothesis as part of a larger project of defending a “naturalist” conception of the self according to which there are essential natural facts about a person that determine in a non-trivial manner what a person becomes. Under this interpretation becoming who one is consists simply in the process whereby a person becomes what, according to his essential attributes, he was always “destined” (causally determined) to become (Leiter, 2001: 283-287).

Though I find both interpretations suggestive, I think neither of them captures the real spirit of what it means to become who one is. I believe that in order to approach this problem we need to first ask ourselves what is the “Who” that Nietzsche is urging his readers to become. In the passage from *Schopenhauer as Educator* that I quoted at the beginning of this essay we get the first glimpse of an answer. The “Who” one is supposed to become is one that stands in direct opposition to the person that one currently represents as an acting, thinking and desiring member of the mass. Thus the injunction to become who one is turns out to be an injunction to become that kind of self that sets one apart from the mass of people. In this connection, it is worthwhile to recall the passage from *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche describes the desire to become who we are as the desire to become “human beings who are *new, unique, incomparable*, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!” (GS, 335; emphasis added). Thus, contrary to what Nehamas would have us believe, becoming who one is consists not so much in becoming a unity as it does in becoming unique. But uniqueness is not to be understood

in the commonplace sense of that term according to which each person is a unique individual. Instead, the type of uniqueness at stake here seems to be one that a person exhibits when he becomes a great human being, or when he achieves something extraordinary; when he stands out from the crowd. It is uniqueness in the sense in which Nietzsche thought Napoleon or Goethe were unique.

This raises some interesting issues having to do with Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism that I cannot pursue in this essay, but which are, nonetheless, worth mentioning here in passing. Indeed, in the light of Nietzsche's paradigmatic cases, one may wonder whether he thought this kind of uniqueness was really available to all human beings or whether he envisioned it as being the purview of a privileged few. After all, evidently not everyone will become a Napoleon or a Nietzsche; most of us will not make world historical changes in any field of life. The vast majority of us are condemned to remain forever members of what Nietzsche calls (not always pejoratively) the herd. At other times, however, Nietzsche speaks in a manner that betrays a much more egalitarian conception of becoming who one is. Thus, for instance, in *Schopenhauer as Educator* he insists that "each one of us bears a productive uniqueness within himself as the core of his being" (UM III, 3). And in the unpublished notebooks he claims that "the 'higher nature' of the great man lies in being different, in incommunicability, in distance of rank, not in an effect of any kind – even if he made the whole world tremble" (WP, 876). Such passages make it sound as if the uniqueness or greatness that is achieved in the process of becoming who one is does not consist in the realization of great tasks or revolutionary changes in the world. Instead this type of uniqueness is something that manifests itself,

as it were, internally. It consists in the achievement of a kind of maturity or independence that is instantiated in one's ability to "live according to one's own laws and standards" (UM III, 1). In this respect, becoming who one is means becoming autonomous in the social or political sense of that term, even if such autonomy never translates itself externally into great accomplishments of the kind that make the world tremble.¹² I shall have occasion to reemphasize this connection between the notion of becoming who one is and achieving maturity or independence later. For now, let me turn to the issue of *how* one is supposed to become the person one is.

In asking this question I take myself to be inquiring after the mechanism that Nietzsche thinks operates when a person becomes who he is. More to the point, I am interested in understanding whether and how the person contributes to the process that leads him to become who he is. Indeed, as we have seen, many of Nietzsche's statements on this topic are articulated as commands or counsels. As such, they seem to suggest that to become who one is requires an active involvement on the person's part, so that failing in this task must be construed as a failure in the exercise of some sort of agential capacity and not just as the outcome of some pre-established natural path.¹³ If people were just

¹² The sense of autonomy at stake here parallels in an interesting way Kant's discussion of the need to emerge from one's self-imposed immaturity in his essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" See, Kant (1996). In that work, Kant exhorts his readers to become mature by learning to use their own understanding, a course of action that in his view amounts to extricating oneself from the minority status that is characteristic of the unthinking masses. See Kant (1996). Below I introduce the notion of autonomy in what I will call its strictly practical sense, that is, the sense it has when we are referring to the human capacity to be practical contributors to our own behavior. In order to disambiguate between the two notions, in this essay I will restrict myself from now on to the use of the word autonomy only when speaking of our practical capacity. I will use terms like independence, sovereignty, maturity, and the like, to refer to the political or social sense of autonomy that I think is at work in Nietzsche's understanding of becoming who one is.

¹³ Even though the way I put the point here sets it in a collision course with the essentialist readings I mentioned earlier, I do not mean to suggest that the mere rendering of the notion of "becoming who one is"

arenas for causal events to which they could not contribute, it would make little sense to exhort them to engage their motives in one direction or another. To counsel them is to acknowledge that they can motivate themselves to do things and, thus, to admit that they are capable of participating actively in their actions. It seems that becoming who one is depends on the exercise of autonomous agency, that is, it involves that capacity a person has to be the cause of his own behavior.¹⁴

Once again, it is important to remark that there is no place in Nietzsche's work where one can find a sustained discussion of what such a capacity entails or how it works. In the places where Nietzsche criticizes the notion of free will understood as a *causa sui* he usually also emphasizes his rejection of what he takes to be the opposite of this concept, namely, the concept of an "un-free will." In place of this dichotomy Nietzsche proposes a different sort of bipolarity: "in real life," he writes, "it is only a matter of *strong* and *weak* wills" (BGE, 21). Of course, nothing Nietzsche says about what it means to have a strong or a weak will really serves to directly clarify what he thought about, what I am here calling, our capacity to be autonomous in the strictly practical sense. Nonetheless, if what I said above is plausible, it seems he very much presupposed the existence of such a capacity, although he never took the trouble to articulate in an explicit manner what it could involve. I suspect that, in examining Nietzsche's description of the employment of this capacity in the process of becoming

in the form of practical injunctions necessitates such collision. Having said that though, I do think that even if in the end they may be able to accommodate it, at the very least, Nietzsche's use of the injunctive voice puts his pronouncements in strong tension with the general tenor of the essentialist readings.

¹⁴ I am taking my cues from David Velleman here. See David Velleman (2000)

who one is, we will be able to find resources to interpret how such a capacity functions in a way that makes sense of what Nietzsche is saying.

Nietzsche's implicit assumption of the existence of a capacity for autonomous agency serves another purpose in my view. Many commentators like to remark that there is a kind of paradox at the center of the notion of a person who is encouraged to become who he is.¹⁵ For it seems that this notion requires that the self that one is to become already be what one is *before* one has become *it*. In other words, it seems that we are required to think of a self that somehow produces his own existence or, alternatively, that exists already before it comes into existence. It is the paradox of our having to be already that which we are trying to become. I think what we have said thus far provides the tools for dispelling this worry. Indeed, in my view, this is a worry that arises only if one is trying to hold on to a view of the self as a unity, that is, as a single entity that stands for each individual in all the different aspects of his life and in all different contexts. Since Nietzsche rejects this view in favor of a notion of the self as a multiplicity, this sort of preoccupation with the possibility of a self-positing self should be of no concern to him. If at every present moment all sorts of selves are operating or idling within myself, as it were, then it is not so paradoxical that at another stage of my life another self can come into being or be activated as a result of the operation and interaction of those prior selves that I am. Indeed, it seems that the self of becoming who one is requires the existence of at least another self one already is, namely, that self one is in virtue of one's capacity to be the cause of one's own behavior: an autonomous self, in the strictly technical, practical sense of that term.

¹⁵ See Nehamas, 1983: 393; Breazeale, 1998: 14.

So what is the process by which one becomes who one is? One place where Nietzsche gives us some clues for answering this question is the fourth untimely meditation, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. In that work, Nietzsche describes a moment in which Wagner, driving back to Bayreuth with some of his friends, fell into a pensive state. He then tells us,

he [Wagner] was silent and he seemed to be gazing into himself with a look not to be described in words ... We know that at times of exceptional danger, or in general at any decisive turning point in their lives, men compress together all they have experienced in an infinitely accelerated inner panorama, and behold distant events as sharply as they do the most recent ones ... What Wagner beheld within him on that day, however – *how he became what he is and what he will be* – we who are closest to him can to a certain extent also see (UM IV, 1; emphasis added).

This passage is significant because it provides a first indication of the type of process Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of becoming who one is. Indeed, this type of process is here captured in terms of the image of gazing. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explicitly associates the type of gazing described here with Zarathustra's distinctive gazing (EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 4). What is important about this type of contemplation is that it does not correspond to a mere passive activity. Here Nietzsche is describing a process of introspection that consists in compressing, accelerating, sharpening, one's own life, and which results in one becoming what one is. In order to elucidate further what is involved in this type of introspective process I will now turn to an analysis of *Ecce Homo*.

To my knowledge, no commentator has really engaged in a close analysis of the answer to the question of how one becomes what one is that is found in the work that bears that very question in its subtitle, namely, *Ecce Homo*.¹⁶ I find this somewhat surprising. If there is any place where one can hope to find some kind of sustained discussion of how one becomes who one is, this should be it. Let us see what we can find in this philosophical autobiography.

I think that one good place to start approaching the text is from the epigraph with which Nietzsche opens the book. Epigraphs usually function as a sort of microcosm that prefigures and sets the stage for the story that is to follow. They do this not merely by suggesting the underlying theme of the narrative, but also by organizing and preparing the space in which and from which the story will develop. The epigraph introduces the dominant images of the text, those symbols that establish the general tone and the dynamics of the work. It is, I think, therefore worthwhile in this case to attempt to highlight some of the most salient images that are operating in the epigraph to *Ecce Homo* as a first approximation to the book, as a strategy for approaching and tackling its meaning, its aim and function. The text reads as follows:

On this perfect day when everything is ripening and not only the grape turns brown, the eye of the sun just fell upon my life: I looked back, I looked forward, and never saw so many and such good things at once. It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today; I had the *right* to bury it; whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal. The *Revaluation of All Values*, the *Dionysus Dithyrambs*, and, for recreation, the *Twilight of the Idols*, – all presents of this year, indeed of its last quarter! *How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?* – and so I tell my life to myself (EH, ‘Epigraph’).

¹⁶ One exception is Leiter, but he engages more in a kind of cursory sweep of the arguments found in *Ecce Homo* than in a sustained and careful consideration of them. I shall have occasion to point out later my disagreement with Leiter’s interpretation of those arguments. See Leiter (2001).

The first thing to notice is that the epigraph opens with an image of maturity. We are amidst a process that has been brought to perfection, something has ripened; it is now fully grown and developed. This something, of course, is Nietzsche himself: he has become the one he is. Nietzsche is going to tell us in this book how he came to maturity, how his life was brought to some sort of completion. This is significant because it links this text to our prior discussion on the nature of the “Who” that one is suppose to become. But the epigraph also points us in another direction. It remits us to the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* in which the image of maturity, of a ripening process, is used to refer to the notion of achieving independence or sovereignty. The essay begins with what Nietzsche characterizes as the authentic enigma with respect to man, namely, that in the case of man nature has set itself the paradoxical task of breeding an animal with the *right* to make promises (GM II, 1). Nietzsche then explains that this task amounts to the creation of a being that is capable of acting as guarantor of itself, a being who can to a certain extent ordain the course of its life and of its future, in a word, a being that is capable of *responsibility*. The important point here is that Nietzsche describes the attainment of this capacity as a late fruit that is the product of a long historical process.

As he puts it:

If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit ... then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself ... in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises* – and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of *what* has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion (GM II, 2).

Thus, we have here a characterization of the achievement of some sort of agential capacity, a capacity to act in an independent manner in accordance with one's own will. This link between the two passages may suggest the notion that becoming the one that one is amounts to becoming independent in the sense outlined by the *Genealogy*. This link is further confirmed, I think, by the suggestion in both passages that the completion of maturity carries with it the attainment of a special power or privilege. This is evident from the use of the notion of a right: in the case of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's right to bury his forty-fourth year, and in the case of the *Genealogy*, the sovereign individual's right to make promises.

But, returning to our discussion of the epigraph, we find that it also gives us an indication of what is involved in this process of maturity. For Nietzsche deploys alongside the image of maturity the symbol of gazing. As we saw, Nietzsche had already used this notion of gazing to speak of the act of becoming what one is in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. Here the metaphor is developed along the same lines. We are told that an eye of the sun has come down upon Nietzsche's life: he has examined his life with a resulting sense of affirmation and approval. This I take to mean that a sort of clarity has befallen him, a clarity that springs from a certain act of observation, namely, an act of self-scrutiny. Nietzsche has looked back and forward and in this movement of introspection he has become transparent to himself, he has been enlightened. Maturity is thus a form of self-understanding that is constituted through a process of introspection.

This is, of course, a very vague approximation to the problem. In itself it tells us very little about the specific character of this process of self-observation. Fortunately, in the epigraph Nietzsche develops another set of metaphors that provide further content to this notion of maturity. These are the images of burial, death, life and immortality. Nietzsche claims to have buried his forty-fourth year and to have had a right to do so. And this suggests that the act of introspection does not consist in simply bearing one's past but in actively burying it. Hence, it is no mere passive process of self-contemplation that is involved in the notion of maturity. Instead, this peculiar sort of self-observation has a practical component that consists in an active engagement with oneself and with one's past. As a kind of grave-digging activity the introspection that is required to achieve maturity is a highly selective process, it entails the preservation of certain aspects of oneself and the negation of certain others. What remains becomes immortal; it continues living in and through oneself while the rest perishes. This image of immortality as something intimately bound to a dynamic relation between life and death will be invoked again through the course of the book. "One pays dearly for immortality" Nietzsche tells us at one point, "one has to die several times while still alive" (EH, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', 5; see also 4).

The duality of life and death is immediately echoed in the opening lines of the book, where Nietzsche writes: "the good fortune of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother I am still living and becoming old" (EH, 'Why I am so Wise', 1). This duality is a crucial element of the text, for this dynamic relation between opposites

will recur constantly throughout the work under different guises (Nietzsche speaks of sickness and health, of destruction and creation, of decadence and ascending life, of negation and affirmation, of self-forgetfulness and self-consciousness). It is, I think, a touchstone for a series of couplings that are key for understanding the sort of process that is involved in the achievement of maturity. Just as immortality, maturity too is achieved by a dynamic play of opposites. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, Nietzsche seems to believe, somewhat paradoxically, that becoming who one is occurs in the process of relinquishing and regaining one's capacity for autonomous agency. Such process is prefigured in the epigraph itself. For the epigraph plays with a contrast between an active self that "looks" and "buries" and a passive self that receives presents and is grateful for the goods that are bestowed upon it. The self-understanding that signals the achievement of maturity somehow occurs in the movement between these two moments, between an active self that initiates action and a passive self that disables his will and lets things flow.

In order to explore this aspect of Nietzsche's account I want to discuss three very important passages in *Ecce Homo*. The first takes place towards the end of the first section of the book. There, Nietzsche writes:

Freedom from *ressentiment*, enlightenment about *ressentiment* – who knows how much I am indebted, in this respect also, to my protracted sickness! ... If anything at all must be adduced against being sick and being weak, it is that man's really remedial instinct, his *fighting instinct* wears out. One cannot get rid of anything, one cannot get over anything, one cannot repel anything – everything hurts ... Against all this the sick person has only one great remedy: I call it *Russian fatalism* ... no longer to accept anything at all, no longer to take anything, no longer to absorb anything – to cease reacting altogether ... Because one would use oneself up too quickly if one reacted in *any* way, one does not react at all any

more: this is the logic. Nothing burns one up faster than the affects of *ressentiment* ... I displayed the “Russian fatalism” I mentioned by tenaciously clinging for years to all but intolerable situations, places, apartments, and society, merely because they happened to be given by accident: it was better than changing them, than *feeling* that they could be changed – than rebelling against them. Any attempt to disturb me in this fatalism, to awaken me by force, used to annoy me mortally – and it actually was mortally dangerous every time. Accepting oneself as fated, not wishing oneself “different” – that is in such cases *great reason* itself (EH, ‘Why I am so Wise’, 6).

There are two things I wish to highlight about this passage. The first is that Nietzsche is here recommending a course of action that is of a peculiar sort: it consists in the suspension of the will, in the abandonment of one’s capacity to take initiatives. The second is that he is giving a special sort of rationale for this course of action. The rationale is that, when one is sick, exercising one’s will has damaging effects (indeed, even fatal effects). What is interesting is that the recommendation seems to presuppose the truth of autonomous agency as I have discussed it in this paper. It is precisely *because* the person is capable of contributing to his own behavior that Nietzsche thinks he must not do so whenever he is sick.¹⁷ To contribute to one’s own behavior when one is sick is to put oneself at peril. In particular, as Nietzsche suggests in that section, it is to put oneself in a situation that curtails one’s capacity to heal. The explanation for why this is so turns on the notion that every exertion of the will requires the expenditure of energy. But sickness is precisely the condition in which energy is scarce. Accordingly, Nietzsche thinks that exercising one’s will under such conditions would mean the continued

¹⁷ Though he does not cite it directly, in a footnote Leiter considers the implications of the last sentence in this passage. His discussion turns on a point about translation. He argues that Kaufmann mistranslates the passage rendering Nietzsche’s comment as “accepting oneself as if fated,” thereby suggesting that Nietzsche does not really believe in fatalism. Once the phrase is rendered in the appropriate way – Leiter argues – the problematic suggestion goes away and Nietzsche’s comment can be more easily accommodated to his philosophical outlook as Leiter understands it: one should accept oneself as fated because, after all, one really is fated (See Leiter, 2001: 286). However, it should be clear from our discussion that, even when rendered in the appropriate way, Nietzsche’s comment in this section raises the very difficulty that Leiter worries about. It is precisely because one is *not* fated that Nietzsche thinks one must take oneself *as* fated under conditions of general weakness.

drainage of energy without the possibility of replenishment and, thus, the perpetuation of sickness. The proposed solution is to suppress one's own contribution and to let one's behavior take its course in the particular situation (places, apartments, society) one is in without one's intervention.

This is one of the first indications Nietzsche gives us in *Ecce Homo* of his implicit belief in our capacity to be autonomous agents and his appreciation of its power. Not only does he seem to believe that people are capable of more than passive contemplation of their lives, he thinks their ability to be active contributors to it is so powerful it can, under certain circumstances, become a danger for them. Let us now look at another place where we get a similar indication of the need to counterbalance the power of agency. Nietzsche spends most of the section entitled "Why I am so Clever" discussing the effects of place, climate, nutrition and recreation in a person and, in particular, of course, in himself. After discussing his experiences with respect to these things Nietzsche avers:

In all these matters – in the choice of nutrition, of place and climate, of recreation – an instinct of self-preservation issues its commandments, and it gains its most unambiguous expression as an instinct of *self-defense*. Not to see many things, not to hear many things, not to permit many things to come close – first imperative of prudence, first proof that one is no mere accident but a necessity. The usual word for this instinct of self-defense is *taste*. It commands us not only to say No when saying Yes would be "selfless" but also to say *No as rarely as possible*. To detach oneself, to separate oneself from anything that would make it necessary to keep saying No. The reason in this is that when defensive expenditures, be they ever so small, become the rule and a habit, they entail an extraordinary and entirely superfluous impoverishment... Merely through a constant need to ward off, one can become weak enough to be unable to defend oneself any longer... Another counsel of prudence and self-defense is to *react as rarely as possible*, and to avoid situations and relationships that would condemn one to suspend, as it were, one's "freedom" and initiative and to become a mere reagent. As a parable I choose association with books. Scholars who at bottom do little nowadays but thumb books ... ultimately lose entirely their capacity to think for themselves.

When they don't thumb, they don't think. They *respond* to a stimulus (a thought they have read) whenever they think – in the end they do nothing but react (EH, 'Why I am so Clever', 8).

In this passage, unlike the prior one, Nietzsche is not considering the case of a person who is already sick and needs to shut down his autonomous agency in order to heal. But in a manner that is reminiscent of the prior passage, here too there is the suggestion that a certain way of exercising autonomous agency may be detrimental, may lead to a type of sickness of the will, more precisely, to an exhaustion of the will. In this section Nietzsche is suggesting that our autonomy, our power to be contributors to our own behavior, requires the development of an instinct of self-defense, a discriminatory capacity, in order to keep working properly.¹⁸ The absence of such an instinct would mean not only the impoverishment of our will by the pursuit of purely negative ends, but also the transformation of our will into a merely negative faculty. The latter implication is suggested by the parable. The scholar is a person who exercises his will only in the manner of a reagent, someone whose capacity to take initiatives has been reduced to a capacity to respond to stimuli. That this is a sickness of the will is attested by Nietzsche's insistence that scholars are decadents, and his association of decadence with sickness (*Ibid.*; EH, *Why I am so Wise*, 1).

But the introduction of an instinct of self-defense as a means to ensure that our autonomy is not wasted and does not turn itself into a purely reactive capacity raises the

¹⁸ At other places Nietzsche seems to describe this instinct not as a discriminatory capacity, but as a capacity to shut down our autonomous agency: "To learn to *see* – to accustom the eye to composure, to patience, to letting things come to it; to put off judgment, to learn to walk around all sides of the individual case and comprehend it from all sides. That is the *first* preliminary schooling in spirituality: *not* to react to a stimulus right away, but to keep in check the instinct to restrict and exclude. Learning to *see* as I understand it, is almost what is unphilosophically termed will-power: what is essential is precisely *not* to 'will,' to be *able* to put off a decision" (TI, 'Germans', 6).

specter of passivity again. The way Nietzsche speaks in the passage not only gives the impression that there are two different faculties, one of choice and another of self-protection, but also appears to relegate the first to the second. In our choices, Nietzsche seems to be telling us, there rules an instinct that issues its commands. Thus, this instinct enlists us as vehicles for its expression. Our role is that of passive spectators of forces that are beyond our control but that have their meeting place in us and that employ our bodies as means for their discharge and fulfillment.

When we couple this passage with other things Nietzsche has to say, however, I think it becomes clear that this is not what is going on at all. Prior to this point, Nietzsche spends many pages reporting to his readers the absolutely dismal experiences he has had with respect to matters of climate, place, recreation and nutrition. He suggests that for a very long time his choices on these matters represented a senseless neglect on his part, a kind of thoughtlessness in questions having to do with the consumption and the replenishment of energy. As he explains at some point: “Any refined self-concern, any protection by some commanding instinct was lacking; I simply posited myself as equal to any nobody; it was a ‘selflessness,’ an oblivion of all distance between myself and others that I shall never forgive myself. When I was close to the end, *because* I was close to the end, I began to reflect on this fundamental unreason of my life – this ‘idealism.’ Only my sickness brought me to reason” (EH, ‘Why I am so Clever’, 2). The thing to notice here is that, according to Nietzsche, he acquired the aforementioned instinct of self-preservation *after* a process of reflection. Prior to his reflecting and understanding reason in reality the instinct was lacking. Thus, the acquisition of the instinct for self-defense turns out to be

dependent on, or, at least, to be very much influenced by, the exercise of autonomous agency. It is not the instinct that enlists us as vehicles for its expression; it is we who enlist it to ensure the continued existence of our capacity to contribute to the workings of our own lives and our own behavior. More precisely, the very mechanisms through which we exercise autonomous agency, namely, reflection and self-understanding, recruit and develop the instinct for self-preservation in the service of their continued existence and their proper functioning.

I have now introduced the elements required for spelling out the workings of our capacity to be autonomous agents in a way that is compatible and makes sense of what Nietzsche is saying here. My analysis has revealed that consciousness in the form of self-reflection and self-understanding plays a significant role for Nietzsche in the exercise of autonomy. These moments of conscious awareness disrupt the flow of our life and change the course of events in that life and in that sense seem to act as causes of our own behavior.¹⁹ Here I must pause a moment to consider how they do that exactly. I think we can attribute to Nietzsche the implicit endorsement of something like the following

¹⁹ Some things Nietzsche says in the *Genealogy* also attest to his belief in the disruptive power of consciousness. In the Second Essay, for instance, he insists that the active faculty of forgetting is essential for leading a happy life precisely because it keeps consciousness clean; it helps preserve psychic order (GM, II 1). It is important to remark, however, that Nietzsche's pronouncements with respect to the phenomenon of consciousness are as complex as they are varied. Here I am highlighting an aspect that I believe is clearly present in his account of "becoming who one is." But this aspect is in tension with other things Nietzsche says about consciousness elsewhere. In particular, it seems to be in contradiction with certain passages in which Nietzsche appears to question the causal efficacy of consciousness altogether. See, for example, GS 11, 333 and BGE 17. It is certainly a worthwhile project to attempt to resolve the apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's work. However, I do not take myself to be engaged in such project here. I wish only to examine a small but very significant part of Nietzsche's writings that implicate consciousness in a way that appears to make it more than merely ephiphenomenal. The reader may no doubt find this profoundly disappointing. I can only hope to make my case for this horn of the dilemma compelling enough so that those who wish to engage in the project of dispelling apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's work will find themselves seriously constraint to either interpret the problematic passages in a way that makes them consonant with the view that is expressed here or be force to bite the bullet and attribute (perhaps embarrassingly) inconsistent views to Nietzsche.

picture.²⁰ When we reflect on what we are doing or on what is happening to us we are not simply detached observers of ourselves. The reason for this is that the conclusions we draw when we engage in such a reflection will affect the things that we do and that happen to us. They will do so by prompting us to form intentions that correspond to what we have understood about ourselves, intentions that will then commit us to engage in the sorts of movements that will bring them about. In this way, we end up doing what we have understood by formulating and endorsing some understanding of what we are doing.²¹ Our self-understanding introduces an additional link in the causal chain of our actions. But, because it is our self that is here understanding it-self, what our self does when it understands itself can be attributed to him. It is thus a way that he has of participating in his action. Once Nietzsche understood reason in reality he formed intentions that reflected such an understanding and, consequently, changed the course of his life. In the last of the three passages I wish to examine we find confirmation of this causal power of self-consciousness, as I have described it, and we learn about the relation it has to our ability to become what we are.²²

Towards the end of the section ‘Why I am so Clever,’ and following the previous excerpt, Nietzsche finally explains how it is that one becomes what one is. He writes:

²⁰ As will become clear in a moment, I am indebted to David Velleman’s work for the ideas that drive the discussion that follows. See Velleman (2007).

²¹ Velleman puts this point in the following terms: “The agent’s desire to understand what he’s doing inhibits him from acting until he has committed himself to the truth of some [act-description], whereupon it reinforces his antecedent motives for acting in accordance with that description, with the result that he does what he’s prepared to understand and understands what he’s doing” (Velleman, 2007: 18).

²² In my view, this way of rendering our capacity to be autonomous is indifferent between an incompatibilist and a compatibilist conception of human agency (that is to say, it can be recruited by either camp). I think this makes it even more consonant with Nietzsche’s general philosophical outlook which, as I understand it, tends to accept, affirm and incorporate a kind of metaphysical opacity with respect to fundamental questions on the nature of reality. This is, of course, a claim I cannot defend here.

At this point the real answer to the question, *how one becomes what one is*, can no longer be avoided. And thus I touch on the masterpiece of the art of self-preservation – of *selfishness*. For let us assume that the task, the destiny, the fate of the task transcends the average very significantly: in that case, nothing could be more dangerous than catching sight of oneself *with* this task. To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their own meaning and value – the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, “modesties,” seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. All this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum* [Know thyself] would be the recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself, *misunderstanding* oneself, making oneself smaller, narrower, mediocre, become reason itself. Morally speaking: neighbor love, living for others, and other things *can* be a protective measure for preserving the hardest self-concern. This is the exception where, against my wont and conviction, I side with the “selfless” drives: here they work in the service of *self-love*, of *self-discipline*. The whole surface of consciousness – consciousness *is* a surface – must be kept clear of all great imperatives. Beware even of every great word, every great pose! So many dangers that the instinct comes too soon to ‘understand itself’ – Meanwhile the organizing “idea” that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down – it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole – one by one, it trains all *subservient* capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, “goal,” “aim,” or “meaning” (EH, ‘Why I am so Clever’, 9).

I want to approach the passage by first pointing out that it resonates strongly with some things Nietzsche says in the third essay of the *Genealogy*. There, Nietzsche argues that in the early stages of his development the philosopher was required to adopt the ascetic ideal in order to avoid becoming conscious of himself too quickly. This was necessary, according to Nietzsche, because otherwise the philosopher would not have become what he was in the process of becoming. Nietzsche argues that the various traits of the philosopher (his bent to doubt, to deny, to suspend judgment, etc.) were so novel when they first appeared on earth that they must have been seen as contrary to the demands of morality and conscience. Thus, in order to create the new type of life he embodied, the philosopher had to be “intentionally” ignorant of what he represented and of what he was

doing, of the various faculties that he was cultivating and that were growing in him (GM III, 9). It should be clear from this brief characterization that there is a strong parallel between that discussion and the passage we are considering here. Becoming who and what one is requires the exercise of self-forgetfulness; the suspension of one's drive to know oneself, to understand what one is doing. The important thing to highlight is that the very injunction to suspend one's drive to self-knowledge presupposes the causal power of consciousness we have been considering. Why would Nietzsche insist that consciousness be kept clear of all great imperatives if it is not because he believes that conscious endorsement of such imperatives would cause the person to alter his behavior in a way that would prevent him from becoming what he is. The lesson seems to be that one can never be merely a passive spectator of one's life. To be a spectator is already to participate in the action that happens on stage, it is to influence what we observe and thus to contribute causally to what happens.

I thus disagree with Leiter's reading of this passage. Leiter interprets this passage as suggesting that one becomes what one is "by making no special effort *directed towards that end*, because one becomes what one is *necessarily*" (Leiter, 2001: 287). Leiter observes correctly that becoming what one is entails making no conscious effort to become what one is, but he misunderstands Nietzsche's reasoning for why this is so and thereby misunderstands what this means. On Leiter's view Nietzsche is making a descriptive claim to the effect that one's life follows a necessary course, and using this claim to warrant the conclusion that a particular point in one's life, the point at which one becomes what one is, is brought about without one's intervention. Leiter must therefore

interpret the recommendation Nietzsche is making in the passage as being purely theoretical, a recommendation about how one should view one's own life from a purely intellectual perspective: one must see it as following a necessary course and not as being subject to one's own control.²³

In my interpretation, by contrast, Nietzsche is recommending, not the *theoretical* renunciation of our belief in autonomy, but the *practical* renunciation of our autonomy. One does not become what one is necessarily; one must keep oneself out of one's own way in order to do so. This is what makes this passage so interesting for Nietzsche is suggesting that a certain type of contribution to one's own life, the type of contribution that corresponds to a kind of consummation of one's life, must be implemented in a delayed manner. The intentions, goals, aims or meanings that spring from who and what we are require time for their formulation because they are supposed to represent something like our fully mature self. What this means is that one's capacity to understand oneself and thereby inject oneself in the causal stream of one's own life must be kept in check until one is "ripe" enough to understand oneself properly. This is why Nietzsche warns us against understanding ourselves too soon and even tells us what sorts of signs we should look for in order to prevent such premature and hasty self-understanding: we should beware of great poses, great words, and great imperatives. Accordingly, becoming who and what one is requires a great deal of self-surveillance. The successful implementation of such self-scrutiny paves the way for the moment when the self can

²³ Indeed, Leiter suggests that in the section Nietzsche is viewing his own life in the way an apple tree would view itself. So from the onset Leiter interprets the passage as conveying a purely speculative perspective, instead of seeing it from within the point of view of giving (and acting on) practical injunctions.

finally understand what he is (more properly, what or who he is in the process of becoming) and in that way can do what he understands.²⁴ I take it that Nietzsche's descriptions of Zarathustra's and Wagner's gaze, of which we spoke earlier, are meant to correspond precisely to that moment when the fully mature self finally "recollects" itself and understands itself in a manner that commits him to a certain way of life.

I end this essay with two question marks. I have argued that Nietzsche, in a way that I think sets him apart from the German philosophical tradition that preceded him, recognized in self-consciousness (and in its surrogate forms, self-understanding and self-reflection) not only a positive power of tremendous significance, but also and for very much the same reasons a negative force of perhaps equal magnitude. The drive to know oneself is not always good; under certain circumstances it can represent a real danger. This means, to put in Nietzschean terms, that it is healthy, for organisms such as we are, to adopt a general policy of skepticism toward our own (and other's) understanding of ourselves and of our environment. In particular, for those who seek to become authentic, this type of skepticism should be directed toward the received values of society. Becoming who one is requires running those values through the sieve of critical reflection; what survives becomes truly one's own and, in that way, it can be said that one lives according to one's own laws and standards.

But this raises the problem of just what is the nature of this type of skeptical attitude. In the *Antichrist* Nietzsche says that all great spirits of the likes of Zarathustra are skeptics, and in *Beyond Good and Evil* he distinguishes between two types of

²⁴ Again, I borrow the phrase from Velleman. See footnote 20.

skepticism: of weakness and of strength (A, 54; BGE, 208-209). What makes these skepticisms different? How does one know when one is in the grips of one or the other? Presumably, the skepticism of strength is what is operative in becoming who one is, but what are the standards of such skepticism? At one point in the *Gay Science* Nietzsche remarks that “one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination, a *freedom* of the will, in which the spirit takes leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, practiced as it is in maintaining itself on light ropes and possibilities and dancing even beside abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence” (GS, 347). The image is forceful and inspiring, but it also underscores the problem. Even the most skilled funambulist needs the rope he stands on. What is that rope and why should relying on it impress the whole process of value questioning and value fashioning with the mark of authenticity?

My analysis raises another puzzle in this connection that is worth exploring. It is not so difficult to appreciate why Nietzsche cautions against the use and acceptance of great words, great poses and great imperatives. The person who adopts such postures rings false. We tend to suspect that he does not know who he is and, with a kind of youthful enthusiasm, is embracing roles in which he can feel that he is somebody and, moreover, somebody important. Instead of becoming independent, the person becomes in this way the valet of someone or something else, be it a religion, a political party, an ideology, or the like.

The admonition to beware of these postures is a call not to understand oneself in a particular way. But Nietzsche also recommends something different; he recommends a kind of *misunderstanding* of oneself, that is, the embracing of a false conception of what one is. In the passage from *Ecce Homo* he renders it in terms of the adoption of a kind of altruistic persona, the understanding of oneself as someone who lives for others and other things. Independently of the question of why such altruism should be understood as a form of self-deception, the fact that Nietzsche thinks of it as a misunderstanding of oneself raises a pressing problem: How is this type of falsity different from the one discussed previously? Why is it that it is not inimical to the project of becoming who one is but rather seems to contribute to it? In my view, this problem leads us in the direction of what Nietzsche calls the dangerous concept of the artist (GS, 361). For Nietzsche artists are creatures that take delight in falseness and pretense, beings that like to adopt masks and who long for appearance. To the extent that a kind of falseness seems to be implicated in the enterprise, one can, at least partly, characterize the process of becoming who one is as an exercise in a kind of artistry of sorts – an idea that seems to be insinuated in the passage from the *Gay Science* where Nietzsche speaks of the desire to become who one is as a desire to create oneself (GS, 335). And this raises the interesting, if difficult, question of how can self-deception constitute a road to independence and authenticity.

Chapter 3

On Sovereignty and Guilt

I. Introduction: The Puzzle

A strange puzzle confronts the reader of Nietzsche's second treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. It is a puzzle that has to do with the relation between the discussion at the beginning of the treatise and the one that ensues shortly after.

The treatise opens with a description of a problem Nietzsche calls the authentic problem of man. This consists in transforming the human creature into an animal that is not simply capable, but – in a much stronger sense – *legitimately authorized* to make promises.²⁵ Nietzsche thinks this is a paradoxical problem, but one which for the most

²⁵ Nietzsche himself stresses the expression in the text: “Ein Tier ... das *versprechen darf*” (usually rendered: an animal *that has the right to make promises*). I believe this is meant to emphasize the distinction between the person who is merely capable of promise-making and the person who actually has the authority to do so. However, it is important to note here that this rendering has been criticized in recent literature, most notably by Christa Davis Acampora (Acampora, 2004). Acampora and others suggest that the traditional translation encourages readers to find more normative significance in the text than Nietzsche intends: it makes it sound as if promise-making is an entitlement of sorts. Readers are thus advised to make use of more accurate translations such as that of Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen, who render the phrase as “an animal that *is permitted to promise*” (Clark and Swensen, 1998). I do not want to ensnarl myself in a debate about translations, but I do want to point out that there may have been good reasons for traditional translators to render the text in the normatively laden way they did. In its most literal translation the German would read: “an animal that *may make promises*”. However, this would make uncertain whether the task of nature is to breed an animal that has the possibility of making promises, and in that sense is merely capable of promise-making, or an animal that has the authority to do so, in which case he is licensed to make promises. Nietzsche's own stress in the original might be construed as an indication that he wants the reader to disambiguate the meaning in some specific direction. Contrary to Acampora and others, I think there is independent support for one of those readings. In the next section Nietzsche speaks

part nature has already solved. The solution is embodied in the person of the *sovereign individual*, for precisely this type of individual enjoys the *extraordinary privilege of responsibility*. He does so because he possess the power to exert his mastery over nature, over the circumstances, over all short-willed and unreliable creatures, and, most importantly, over himself (GM II, 2). The sovereign individual can act as guarantor of himself and is thus rightfully endowed with the requisite authority to make promises. Moreover, Nietzsche tells us that the sovereign individual is fully cognizant of this power and privilege, to the point that this cognition has become a dominant instinct in him. He calls this dominant instinct his *conscience (Gewissen)*. The sovereign individual does not only rule his life in accordance with the proud consciousness he has of his own power and privilege, Nietzsche suggests that he also has his *measure of value* in this: he *evaluates* things from and through the conception he has of himself as a sovereign individual (*Ibid*).

But – and here is the puzzle –, after only a few sections discussing these matters and, apparently, setting the stage for what promises to be a commentary and an exposition of how nature managed to accomplish this incredible transformation in man, the treatise takes a different and unexpected turn. Nietzsche starts telling us the story of how that other “somber thing” called the bad conscience came into the world. This remains his focus of attention for the remainder of the treatise, which – heralding the

of those who make promises without having the right or the authority to do so (welche versprechen, ohne es zu dürfen); he describes the sovereign individual as one who recognizes himself as endowed with the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility* (das ausserordentliche Privilegium der *Verantwortlichkeit*) and as having a power over himself and over fate ([eine] Macht über sich und das Geschick); see GM II, 2. All this makes apparent that Nietzsche means to distinguish between a mere capacity to make promises and a legitimate exercise of that capacity. The latter is the *privilege* of the sovereign individual.

discussion of the next treatise on the meaning of ascetic ideals – culminates with the ghastly description of the man of the bad conscience in its most gruesome expression: the man who, aided by religious presuppositions, carries his feeling of guilt to the most extreme and severe levels of self-torture and self-flagellation.

The puzzle, then, is this: what is the relationship between that proud, scintillating conscience of the sovereign individual and that other shameful, gloomy thing called the bad conscience? Is the latter a stage in the history of the development of the sovereign conscience? If that is so, why is it that the history of this development has yielded the contrary fruit from the one that seemed to be promised in it? Or is it that this history yields two different and opposing fruits embodied in different individual types? Or, must the fruit first appear in its rotten form as a guilty conscience, in order to be overcome – to use one of Nietzsche's favorite terms – in the final stage of this development? Then again, perhaps the bad conscience as the feeling of guilt is not a stage in the formation of the sovereign conscience, but an aberration, even if a very prevalent one, of what should otherwise have been a natural progression from a simpler form of the bad conscience to the proud conscience described in the opening sections of the second treatise.

This is the line of inquiry I want to pursue in this essay. My discussion of these matters will lead me to conclusions that differ in significant ways from some important recent studies of the second treatise of the *Genealogy*, most notably those of Brian Leiter and Mathias Risse, but also those of Christa Davis Acampora and Paul S. Loeb. For the most part, I will express my disagreement with these interpreters, as it were, on the

margins, devoting footnote space for that purpose. Anticipating a bit, I will argue that, contrary to what these (and most) interpreters think, the feeling of guilt is a necessary component of the psychic structure of the sovereign individual as Nietzsche envisions him.

II. The Genealogical Approach

Before proceeding with the argument, a slight digression is in order here. Later on, this initial digression will prove helpful for understanding and solving many of the difficulties raised by Nietzsche's account. I have said that in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche seeks to reproduce the history of a particular phenomenon – though it is somewhat unclear which phenomenon that is. But the word “history” is a bit misleading here. For, as is well known, Nietzsche meant his genealogical method to differ in novel and important ways from ordinary historical inquiry.²⁶ Unfortunately, doing full justice to Nietzsche's understanding and criticism of history as a discipline, would lead me too far afield. For the purpose of this essay it will suffice to simply mention a couple of important respects in which Nietzsche's own approach to historical questions diverges from more traditional methods.

To begin with, Nietzsche conceives of history as a fundamentally *interpretative* activity and not as a merely descriptive enterprise. He spares no words of contempt for

²⁶ Nietzsche's quarrel with and criticism of the historical method is patent from very early on in his career. See the Second Untimely Meditation: *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. For different accounts of Nietzsche's understanding of Genealogy see Foucault (1977), MacIntyre (1990), Geuss (2002), Leiter (2002).

modern historiography for its alleged “objectivity” and its desire to serve simply as a “mirror” and do nothing more than ascertain and present the facts (GM III, 26). It would be a mistake, however, to think that Nietzsche’s repudiation of modern historiography signals or foreshadows a kind of “postmodern” disdain for and suspicion of facts and factual language. Nietzsche’s point of contention with the practice of history is not that it naively believes in facts, but that it rests on the assumption that facts speak for themselves and that they can tell a history if one simply lays them down and reports them coolly. A genealogy of morality or of moral concepts must indeed begin, in Nietzsche’s words, “[with] what is documented, what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short [with] the entire long hieroglyphic record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind”(GM Preface, 7). But this is just the starting point of the historian’s labor. Notice that Nietzsche equates here the historical or factual record with a hieroglyphic, that is, with a symbol that is in need of interpretation. The genealogist’s task is precisely to construct such an interpretation, on the knowledge that he must proceed cautiously and rigorously, since the historical record is very hard to decipher.²⁷ Such interpretations will invariably involve normative or evaluative judgments that attempt to reveal the hidden significance of the known facts.²⁸

²⁷ Throughout the *Genealogy* Nietzsche reminds his readers that it is hard to see what really lies behind or at the bottom of the historical events he is examining. See, GM II, 6.

²⁸ Here it is also worth noting that in Nietzsche’s own case many of these interpretations aim to reveal aspects of the past for which there actually is no historical record left, but whose shape and significance can be guessed, nonetheless, from the historical facts that have been preserved. As we shall see later, this is especially true of the second treatise of the *Genealogy* in which we find Nietzsche, for the most part, trying to imagine on the basis of the historical record what the *prehistoric past* of mankind must have been like. I think this also makes Nietzsche’s account different from accounts, prevalent in much of early modern philosophy, that employ hypothetical state of nature scenarios. Unlike the latter, the hypothesis Nietzsche offers is not meant to be a merely fictional heuristic device, but rather is meant to describe real historical developments of the prehistoric past as they are likely to have occurred given what we currently know.

We encounter this type of interpretative work throughout the *Genealogy*. I will take a simple and rather minor example to illustrate the point. In section 5 of the second treatise Nietzsche alludes to the Twelve Tables legislation of Rome (GM II, 5). He is discussing the primitive notion of compensation as a “right to cruelty” bestowed upon creditors, to be exercised in the case debtors failed to fulfill their contractual obligations. Nietzsche is interested in stressing the idea that such a “right to cruelty” consisted above all in a license to inflict bodily harm on the person of the debtor himself or perhaps on that of someone that still belonged to him (e.g. his wife, his children). In exercising this right, the creditor would engage in the most horrendous acts, like cutting from the body of the debtor as much as seemed commensurate with the size of the debt. Nietzsche claims that, from early on in the history of humanity, the “right to cruelty” was written into law with a shocking level of detail and minuteness concerning the exact procedures of such violent acts of compensation. This, of course, is a claim that is supposed to find confirmation in the historical record of ancient legal codes and, in part, Nietzsche cites the Twelve Tables of Rome as an example of such a legislature, one in which one can see the right to cruelty written into law.

Presumably, a traditional historian of the type Nietzsche decries would have merely reported these things, as I have just done, in the interest of constructing a history of jurisprudence or some such project. But Nietzsche is interested in doing more than that: he also wants to read in these facts particular lessons, mostly psychological ones. The most important lesson in this case is that the “right to cruelty” betrays a human predilection that, Nietzsche thinks, seems strange and repugnant to modern sensibilities:

the predilection to do evil for the pleasure of doing it. Indeed, he argues that only if one assumes such a tendency can one make sense of the fact that, in place of a literal reparation (in terms of money, or possessions, or the like), the wronged party was afforded a compensation in terms of the opportunity to cause pain and suffering on his debtor. In the case of the Twelve Tables of Rome, Nietzsche further interprets the fact that the law decreed it a matter of indifference how much or how little a creditor was allowed to cut off from the body of his debtor, as a sign of a more advanced and a freer conception of the law (*Ibid.*). In this way, he continues to sound one of the major themes of the *Genealogy*: that the higher the degree of culture and civilization a human community exhibits, the more abstract, refined, crystallized and complex is the conceptual apparatus it employs; and, conversely, the more one goes back towards primeval humanity, the more coarse, literal, concrete and trite is the conceptual understanding one encounters.²⁹ That the Roman legislature thought it was of no consequence how much a person could cut off from the offender, is a sign that the concept of legal compensation has become more abstract, less straightforward and simple and, thus, constitutes a step in the direction of that process through which such macabre methods of compensation end up being finally suppressed.³⁰

This may serve as a good segue to the other important sense that is worth highlighting here in which Nietzsche's approach differs from traditional history. This

²⁹ Already in section 6 of the first treatise Nietzsche writes: "all the concepts of ancient man were rather at first incredibly uncouth, coarse, external, narrow, straightforward, and altogether *unsymbolical* in meaning to a degree that we can scarcely conceive" (GM I, 6).

³⁰ In section 10, Nietzsche speaks of the self-overcoming of justice in the form of mercy or grace. See GM II, 10.

concerns the notion that a concept has no single undifferentiated history. One place where Nietzsche states this point succinctly is in an earlier work entitled *The Wanderer and his Shadow* which constituted the last of three installments of the book *Human, All Too Human*. There Nietzsche writes:

The word 'revenge' is said so quickly it almost seems as if it could contain no more than one conceptual and perceptual root. And so one continues to strive to discover it: just as our economists have not yet wearied of scenting a similar unity in the word 'value' and of searching after the original root-concept of the word. As if every word were not a pocket into which now this, now that, now several things at once have been put! (HAH II, *Wanderer*, 33).

Nietzsche repeats this idea in section 12 of the second treatise of the *Genealogy* within the context of a discussion about the origin of punishment. In a manner that resonates strongly with the pocket analogy used in the quotation above, Nietzsche describes the history of a "thing," or an organ or a custom, as a series of independent processes that come together rather haphazardly and whose causes need not be connected with each other (GM II, 12). This means that the historian must assume the role of private eye and dissector in one, a person who looks for the clues left by the synthesizing process of history and attempts to pull apart or to follow the various strands that have become almost impossible to disentangle or even perceive in the present state of the thing.

Part and parcel of this understanding of history is the recognition and adoption of certain principles of interpretation that, according to Nietzsche, have been largely ignored thus far by historians and even by natural scientists. Chief among them is the notion that a *will to power* operates in all events. This, of course, touches on a very contentious and widely discussed element of Nietzsche's philosophy, one for which he is probably most

famous. I do not pretend to come to terms with Nietzsche's notion of the will to power or to contribute to that debate. I will merely rely on Nietzsche's own characterization in the *Genealogy* and on my own and the reader's intuitions about what it means. Simply put, the basic point is that life and history are fundamentally the *activity* of certain "spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, *form-giving* forces that give new interpretations and directions" (*Ibid.*; emphasis mine). Presumably, these forces can be all sorts of things, from individuals, to groups of people, to nations, to institutions, to drives, to ideals, to cultures, to instincts, and so on.

One important consequence of thinking of life, and of history in particular, as the result of the interplay of such forces is that investigators will (or should) learn to distinguish the origin of a thing from its purpose. Obviously, the forces that gave rise to a thing in the past need not be the same forces that are in control of the thing in the present. Indeed, in all likelihood the original forces themselves will have been transformed or will have disappeared in the course of history, since they will have been actuated by other forces. This means that the original intention or purpose that was expressed at the inception of the thing will be quite different from the one contained in it afterwards. As Nietzsche puts it, "whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured" (*Ibid.*). This point is important because it partly accounts for the critical force that a historical study like the

Genealogy is supposed to have.³¹ Inquiring into the history of a thing is essential for a critical project because it reveals that, despite appearances to the contrary, things *need not* have the meaning or purpose that they currently have. Moreover, it may also reveal that, unbeknownst to us, there are still certain vestiges of purposes in things operating, as it were, in the shadows; purposes which on reflection we may want to purge or redirect in the hope of employing those things in healthier or more fruitful ways.

Nietzsche illustrates the multifaceted aspect of history I have been discussing here by using the concept of punishment as a case study. Against the traditional genealogists of morality who naively imagine that the act of punishment must have been invented for the purpose of punishing, Nietzsche suggests that, prior to advancing any such conjectures, one must distinguish two different elements in the concept of punishment: “on the one hand, that in it which is relatively *enduring*, the custom, the act, the ‘drama,’ a certain strict sequence of procedures; on the other, that in it which is *fluid*, the meaning, the purpose, the expectation associated with the performance of such procedures” (GM II, 13). Viewed strictly as an act, punishment consists simply in the set of operations by means of which a human being inflicts harm on another creature, usually on another human being (or under certain circumstances on himself).³² One sense in which such a set

³¹ Indeed, this is an important issue that is often raised with respect to the *Genealogy*: how can something that is a historical work be of any consequence to a critical enterprise of the sort Nietzsche is interested in? Looming over this question is the worry that Nietzsche may be inadvertently falling prey to the genetic fallacy: the mistake of thinking that the questionable origins of something somehow demonstrate the shadiness of its value. Obviously my comments here are not meant as an answer to these problems.

³² I thus disagree with Clark’s interpretation of what Nietzsche is calling here the enduring element of punishment. For Clark, this element consists in “the act of inflicting a harm or loss on a person based *on a judgment that the person deserves this loss owing to something he or she has done*” (Clark 1994: 21; my emphasis). Judgments of desert belong not to the enduring element, but to the fluid element, that is, to the sense or meaning that the practice has. In the beginning, the procedures of inflicting harm on another need

of operations is relatively enduring is that, once established, it tends to remain the same, though, of course, it is also subject to change and variation. Nietzsche, for instance, credits the Germans with the dubious honor of having used some of the most gruesome methods of punishment in history like stoning, breaking on the wheel, piercing with stakes, tearing apart or trampling by horses, boiling the person in oil or wine, flaying alive, cutting flesh from the chest, and smearing someone with honey and abandoning him to the flies under a burning sun (GM II, 3). There are probably few things human beings have been more creative at in history, than at conceiving and devising novel procedures for inflicting harm on each other. But these procedures are also enduring in a more important sense, namely, that, no matter how varied, they all have the same intended effect: they make their target suffer. This means that *essentially* the procedure remains the same throughout all variations; something which is not true of the fluid element of punishment, since the act of inflicting harm on another can be used for purposes that are *essentially different* and even opposed to each other (e.g. for pedagogical purposes or for revenge).

not have been understood as deserved. In the next paragraph I suggest a number of other ways in which such procedures might have been understood, none of which has the implication that their target deserves them. Of course, *our* modern understanding of punishment *does* include the idea of perceived desert: we do not think that a person who is harming another is punishing him, *unless* that person believes, even if mistakenly, that his actions are somehow warranted by something the other person has done or refrained from doing. But Nietzsche is precisely warning us against projecting such meanings back into the more primitive procedural notion of punishment. The procedure was not invented for the purpose of what nowadays we call punishing, just as the hand was not invented for the purpose of grasping (GM II, 13). I must say in fairness to Clark that she recognizes the reading I am suggesting here as the one that is most reasonable given what the text actually says. She, nonetheless, opts for her own interpretation because she finds it difficult to understand why Nietzsche would say that the procedural element of punishment is more enduring than the purpose, since there are at least as many procedures for inflicting punishment as there are purposes for punishing. I obviously do not share Clark's concern. As I suggest below, I think it makes sense for Nietzsche to say that the procedure is relatively enduring because no matter how varied the procedures may be, they all share something in common: they have the same effect, they make their target suffer. This means that the procedure remains *fundamentally the same* despite variations. The same is not true of the purposes of punishment since, as Nietzsche tells us, the same procedure can be used for *fundamentally different* purposes.

Nietzsche claims that the enduring element is the older element of punishment. It comes before the actual use of the procedure for the intended purpose of punishing (GM II, 13). In other words, the suggestion here is that, in its inception, the practice of harming others was exercised in a very different sense (perhaps in a number of senses) from the sense it later acquired, namely, as a way of castigating the recipient of such practices for something he did. In section 13 Nietzsche provides some examples of different senses that the act of punishment can serve and has served in the past; though he does not claim that these correspond to the more primordial or prehistoric senses of the act – to the senses punishment had in its inception – the reader can nonetheless speculate on the basis of them what such more primordial uses might have been.³³ Perhaps the practice of inflicting harm on others was a way of demonstrating one’s superiority over them; maybe it was used for recreation; or it could have been a way of satisfying some curiosity or other; possibly it was simply used as a means for venting a quantum of accumulated energy; or some such other alternative. What matters here is that none of these senses requires the executioner to engage in the act of harming another as a way of scolding him, that is, as a way of injuring him *because* of something he has done or refrained from doing. This comes at a later stage. As history progresses, the enduring element of punishment gets appropriated, interpreted and employed for new ends and purposes that may be fundamentally distinct. Until we arrive at the present stage where the concept of punishment, as Nietzsche tells us, “finally crystallizes into a unity that is hard to

³³ Among the things Nietzsche mentions in that section are the use of punishment as a way of instilling fear in another; as a way of isolating a disturbance and preventing its further spread; as a way of celebrating; and so on (GM II, 13). None of these seem to me to require the idea of perceived desert in order to be exercised against someone.

disentangle, hard to analyze and, as must be emphasized especially, totally *indefinable*. (Today it is impossible to say for certain *why* people are really punished: all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable)” (*Ibid.*).

III. Sovereign Conscience and Guilty Conscience: Some Affinities

This much must suffice with respect to Nietzsche’s particular understanding of history and the method of genealogy which he favors. Let us now go back to the issue that concerns us here. What history is the second treatise suppose to recount? As I mentioned at the beginning, the treatise seems a bit misleading on this point.³⁴ According to the opening lines we are led to believe it will be the history of how the conscience of the sovereign individual came into the world, but beginning on section 4 the treatise shifts into an investigation of the origin of the bad conscience as consciousness or feeling of guilt.

Yet, though these seem to be distinct phenomena, Nietzsche clearly suggests that there are strong connections between them; at the very least historical connections.³⁵ In section 2, he avers that the task of making the human creature into an animal capable of

³⁴ Indeed, referring to the treatises of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo* that every time the beginning “is *calculated* to mislead: cool, scientific, even ironic, deliberately foreground, deliberately holding off” EH, *Genealogy of Morals*. I will come back to this point in the last section of this essay.

³⁵ The title of the treatise could also be construed as suggesting, albeit subtly, a strong connection here. The treatise is entitled “Guilt,” “Bad Conscience,” and the Like. The German word that gets translated as “the Like” here is “Verwandtes” which stems from the word for “relative” (Verwandte), in the sense of family member. Since Nietzsche begins talking about the sovereign individual and then switches to the bad conscience, it is not too much of a stretch to think that the sovereign conscience is one of the “family members” that are not mentioned directly in the title.

responsibility, the task of making human beings into sovereign individuals, “*presupposes as a preparatory task* that one first *makes* men to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular and consequently calculable”(GM II, 2; my emphasis). This preparatory task, according to Nietzsche, is performed by the morality of custom (Sittlichkeit der Sitte) which constitutes the *prehistoric* labor of man upon himself. This labor, according to Nietzsche, is extremely severe and tyrannical: in order to follow customs, in order to adjust himself to a rule of conduct, man must learn to remember, he must cultivate an active memory within himself. Nietzsche thinks this is extremely difficult because, like all animals, prehistoric man lived completely absorbed in the present; he lived in the grips of forgetfulness (die Vergeßlichkeit). This, Nietzsche insists, is not a passive, but an active power by means of which all lived experience is thoroughly digested and processed by the psyche of the animal organism (GM II, 1). Accordingly, Nietzsche asks:

“How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?” One can well believe that the answers and methods for solving this primeval problem were not precisely gentle; perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his *mnemotechnics*. “If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in memory” – this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth (GM II, 3).

With the aid of this – from our modern perspective – sinister method of mnemonics the morality of custom achieves its objective: it makes man into a regular creature, one that for the most part can be counted on to reliably follow the customs and the precepts of communal life.

It is important to emphasize that Nietzsche thinks this is a preparatory task which is simply *not* equivalent to the task of breeding an animal with the *right* to make promises. Many commentators miss this point.³⁶ Leiter, for instance, claims that the sovereign individual has the right to make promises “because he can pull it off, i.e. his behavior is sufficiently regular and predictable so that he can be ‘answerable for his own future’ (GM II: 1), and he is able to remember what he has promised and honor that memory” (Leiter, 2002: 228). In doing so, Leiter conflates the individual who is necessary, regular and calculable (the product of the morality of custom) with the sovereign individual. To be sure, part of Leiter’s motivation here is that he thinks Nietzsche is a naturalist of a particular sort, namely, someone who believes that human beings have no free will and that their actions are thoroughly determined by essential traits over which they have no control. This makes Nietzsche’s description of the sovereign individual as “autonomous” somewhat problematic for Leiter. But he is able to solve the problem by insisting that Nietzsche is using familiar words in an unfamiliar sense: autonomy is simply equivalent to regularity and necessity of behavior (Leiter, 2002: 227-228).

I think Leiter is right in trying to recover and defend the naturalist element in Nietzsche work, but he is guilty of overemphasizing and sometimes even misconstruing this aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In particular, Nietzsche’s use of autonomy and sovereignty in the *Genealogy* does not seem as unfamiliar as Leiter would have us

³⁶ In what follows I discuss Leiter’s interpretation, but see also Hatab (1995), Risse (2001), Acampora (2004) and Loeb (2005). Despite their differences, all these commentators seem to share the assumption that once the morality of custom has made man into a calculable, regular being, it has also ipso facto made him into a sovereign individual.

believe. In order to establish this point it is worth quoting extensively Nietzsche's description of the sovereign individual. He writes:

If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises* ... This emancipated individual, with the actual *right* to make promises, this master of a *free* will, this sovereign man – how should he not be aware of his superiority over all those who lack the right to make promises and stand as their own guarantors, of how much trust, how much fear, how much reverence he arouses – he "*deserves*" all three – and how his mastery over himself also necessarily gives him mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures? (GM II, 2).

There are two things I want to highlight about this passage. First, at the onset, Nietzsche repeats the idea that the morality of custom serves a preparatory task: its results are a necessary *means* for the production of the sovereign individual but they are not sufficient. The point is further supported by Nietzsche's insistence that the autonomous individual is supramoral (übersittliche) in the sense that he has liberated himself from the morality of custom (Nietzsche says that autonomous and moral are mutually exclusive. The adjective that is translated as moral here is the German word "sittlich" which can also mean ethical and which obviously is related by root to "Sitte" or custom, and is also operative in "die Sittlichkeit der Sitte," the morality of custom or the ethics of custom.

But, second, Nietzsche is describing the sovereign individual in terms that are quite familiar to the language of autonomy: the sovereign individual is a *master over himself* and, as a result of that, – indeed, as a *necessary* consequence of it – he is also a master over his circumstances and over nature. In other words, the sovereign individual

has *the right* to make promises because he is in control of his life, not because he is necessary and calculable. This is made even more explicit by Nietzsche's claim, later on that same section, that sovereigns are people "who give their word as something that can be relied on because they know themselves strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents, even 'in the face of fate'" (*Ibid.*).³⁷ Indeed, the language here resonates strongly with the very familiar and Kantian understanding of autonomy: sovereign individuals are such that they will fulfill their promises even if in the future they should find themselves strongly inclined to break them (because fate or circumstances tempt them to do so); as Kant would put it, sovereign individuals act from duty, they do not act heteronomously or from mere inclination.

But let us return to the original point I intended to establish. If, according to Nietzsche, the morality of custom furnishes some of the elements that are necessary for the formation of a sovereign individual, the same seems to be true with regard to its role in the emergence of the individual of the guilty conscience. Here too, the prehistoric labor of the morality of custom turns out to be a necessary though not sufficient means.

One of the earliest customs is the custom of incurring debts, of entering into the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor. Nietzsche thinks this is one of the most fundamental forms of association. As he puts it, "no grade of civilization, however, low, has yet been discovered in which something of this relationship has not been noticeable. Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging –

³⁷Towards the end of the section Nietzsche again describes the rare freedom of the sovereign individual as a power over oneself and over fate.

these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such*” (GM II, 8). The development of memory is of course crucial for the success of this type of relationships. The debtor must come to regard his debt as an obligation, something that binds him to act in a particular way in the future. This means that he must not only conceive of himself as someone who is required to repay a debt he incurred in the past he must actually remember to repay such a debt when the time comes. Consequently, the type of mnemonics that Nietzsche describes as part and parcel of the morality of custom will be especially prevalent in this type of associations, since it is here above all that a memory is urgently needed.

Nietzsche singles out this type of prehistoric custom because he thinks that it played a very important role in the formation of the guilty conscience. “It was in *this* sphere,” he tells us, “the sphere of legal obligations, that the moral conceptual world of ‘guilt,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘duty,’ ‘sacredness of duty’ had its origin: its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time” (GM II, 6). Nietzsche is here partly following etymological clues and, in the spirit of the historical method discussed earlier, arguing that the principal moral concept of guilt [Schuld] had its origins in the very straightforward, unsymbolic and coarse juridical concept of having debts [Schulden]; a concept that originally was not entangled with any moral emotions whatsoever. Only when this juridical notion gets co-opted by the forces that are trying to give new interpretations and directions, the forces that work in the interest of erecting a moral world, does the concept of being indebted transfigure and give rise to the moral concept of guilt proper. One of the most important of these forces is

the instinct for freedom that has turned back on its possessor and generated the bad conscience. I will discuss this element of Nietzsche's story later. Here it is important to note that Nietzsche's strategy introduces a slight difficulty for the reader of the *Genealogy*, since it is not always immediately clear whether Nietzsche's use of "Schuld" in a given context refers to a moral concept or to a proto-moral concept that is related to the notion of having debts. Thus, for example, in section 20 Nietzsche refers to a "Shuldgefühl" felt by primitive men towards the divinity, and the question emerges whether he thinks this amounts to a moral feeling of guilt or whether he means to indicate a proto-moral feeling related to indebtedness towards the divinity.³⁸

The domain of contractual obligations fulfills an indispensable locating function for Nietzsche: it serves as the locus on which the moral concept of guilt emerges. In other words, the sphere of legal obligations prepares the terrain out of which the tree of concepts that will be recruited in the service of constructing a guilty conscience will grow.³⁹ Much of the agricultural labor that takes place within this terrain consists in irrigating the soil with blood. It is precisely in this labor that the morality of custom finds its justification and reveals itself as an essential means. It achieves what Nietzsche calls the uncanny and possibly inextricable meshing of the ideas of 'guilt' and 'suffering' (GM II, 6). When the debtor for whatever reason forgot to repay his debt, the full force of the mnemonic method of the morality of custom would fall on him in order to *remind* him of

³⁸ The ambiguity and uncertainty in meaning here is evidenced by the differences in translation of the relevant sentence. Clark and Swensen, for instance, have it as "the feeling of guilt toward the deity" whereas Kaufmann and Hollingdale try to disambiguate by rendering it as "the guilty feeling of indebtedness to the divinity".

³⁹ It is important to stress here that Nietzsche's claim is that the *concept* of guilt has its origin in this terrain and not the *feeling* of guilt.

the fact that he was supposed to repay and thus to reiterate the importance of *remembering* to repay debts in the future. But the more it did so, the more the very idea of repaying a debt became associated with the notion of having to endure punishment and hence with the notion of having to suffer in order to expiate the debt. The intertwining of debt and suffering later becomes an essential part of the guilty conscience which experiences the feeling of guilt as a kind of pain or affliction.

I have said that one of the key functions of the morality of custom is to furnish the conceptual materials that will be transformed and enlisted in the service of the guilty conscience. It is crucial to stress that Nietzsche does not claim that the legal associations between creditors and debtors by themselves produce the moral concept of guilt. Nor does he think that the punitive methods employed within these associations produce the feeling of guilt itself. Nietzsche is emphatic on this point. He claims that, contrary to popular thinking, punishment does not possess the power of awakening the feeling of guilt in a person culpable of wrong doing (GM II, 14). Nietzsche considers this a psychological fact about contemporary man, but he thinks it is even truer of prehistoric man. Indeed, he suggests that during the millennia before the history of man, punishment actually served to hinder the development of the feeling of guilt in the victim of the punitive force. The very procedures employed by the judicial and disciplinary apparatus prevented the criminal from considering his actions reprehensible *as such*, since he saw those same actions used systematically and with an untroubled conscience in the service of justice.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Nietzsche mentions things like entrapment, spying, bribery, deception, and in general the whole cunning art of the police and the prosecutors, together with torturing, robbing, violence, defamation, even murder,

In the same vein, Nietzsche argues that repeated punishment did not produce the feeling of guilt in the criminal because neither he nor the judges and executors conceived the act as authored by a morally accountable person. As Nietzsche explains:

during the greater part of the past the judges and punishers themselves were *not at all* conscious of dealing with a 'guilty person.' But with an instigator of harm, with an irresponsible piece of fate. And the person upon whom punishment subsequently descended, again like a piece of fate, suffered no 'inward pain' other than that induced by the sudden appearance of something unforeseen, a dreadful natural event, a plunging, crushing rock that one cannot fight (*Ibid.*).

The principal effect of punishment is to intensify intelligence, to lengthen memory, to make the person more cautious, more secretive, more prudent and mistrustful. The lesson for the criminal, then, was not that he acted in a blameworthy way or that he should not have done what he did, but only that something had gone unexpectedly wrong in the execution of his deed, that he should have been more careful, that he was not as powerful as he thought he was (GM II, 15). In order for the person to feel the bite of conscience and come to regard his act as something he should not have done he must first acquire a conception of himself as a *responsible* agent and not just as an *effective* agent. In other words, the instigator of harm must come to understand himself not only as a person who as a matter of fact performs certain acts, but as a person who is the *liable author* of his own actions. According to Nietzsche, this change in self-understanding is a historical event for which the morality of custom is not directly responsible, though it is an event for which, as we shall see shortly, the methods and results of the morality of custom are indeed essential.

all practiced systematically and without the excuse of being the result of blind passion or any such emotion. All these actions were not condemned as such by the judicial system; they were only condemned when applied to other ends. *Ibid.*

I think this begins to suggest some closer affinities between the sovereign and the guilty conscience than might have been expected. As has been argued above, in both cases Nietzsche seems committed to the idea that the morality of custom serves a preparatory task and in this sense both forms of conscience seem to possess a shared history (they share a kind of kinship). But, on top of this, we can now begin to appreciate even stronger family ties between them: both very much seem to require that the person come to know or understand himself in a particular way, namely, as the responsible author of his own actions. In order to fully grasp this connection it is necessary to discuss the emergence of the guilty conscience out of a more primitive form of the bad conscience. It is to this task that I now turn.

IV. A Special Type of Self-Conception: The Bad Conscience

In his important study of the *Genealogy*, Aaron Ridley suggests that Nietzsche's account of the emergence of the bad conscience is very confused (Ridley, 1998; especially chapter 1). Ridley finds Nietzsche at times equating the bad conscience with the feeling of guilt (GM II, 4); at times claiming that bad conscience in its beginnings is no more than the internalization of man (GM II, 17); at times arguing that punishment does not produce the bad conscience (GM II, 14); at times contradicting this very claim and suggesting that the bad conscience results from the repression of instincts by means of punishment (GM II, 16); at times displaying a neutral attitude toward the bad conscience as something that can be either good or bad (GM II, 19), yet at other moments

condemning it as definitely bad (GM II, 11, GM II, 22). Ridley thinks these confusions partly spring from Nietzsche's own need to protect the noble type of the first treatise, from the taint of the bad conscience. Something that proves notoriously difficult for Nietzsche, since, according to Ridley, the nobles require a bad conscience in order to fulfill the functions Nietzsche wants to assign to them in the second treatise.

I believe many of the confusions Ridley identifies disappear once we bear in mind some of the things that were mentioned earlier with respect to Nietzsche's method of history. There are a number of more or less independent strands at work in the emergence of any phenomenon Nietzsche discusses. Accordingly, we should expect the bad conscience to be subject to transformations and redirections by different forces, both in its inception and in its subsequent development throughout history. This explains why Nietzsche sometimes does, and other times does not, speak of the bad conscience as the feeling of guilt. The latter develops in stages and requires the coming together of several processes. In this respect I am in agreement with Risse and Leiter who also recognize the gradual and developmental element of Nietzsche's account of the guilty conscience.

Yet, Ridley's study does touch on an important aspect of the discussion in the *Genealogy* which often goes unnoticed by many commentators. This consists in the fact that the second treatise actually exhibits a somewhat bewildering proliferation of consciences. We have the sovereign conscience of the beginning sections, and then the bad conscience and the guilty conscience of the ensuing sections. But the attentive reader will find that there are other less noticeable consciences too: for instance, in section 5

where Nietzsche discusses the aforementioned contractual relationship between creditor and debtor, we read that the debtor made a contract with the creditor in part to “impress repayment as a duty, an obligation upon his own *conscience (Gewissen)*” (GM II, 5; my emphasis). Recall that these contractual relationships do not require the existence of a bad conscience nor do they give rise to it. This means that the type of conscience Nietzsche is accrediting to the debtor here must be something prior to and hence different from the three forms of conscience mentioned above. In the next section we find Nietzsche describing ancient human beings as possessed by an innocent thirst for cruelty. He tells us that “they posited ‘disinterested malice’... as a *normal* quality of man – and thus as something to which the conscience cordially *says Yes!*” (GM II, 6). Once more we find here the claim that primitive human beings have a conscience, one which is again prior and therefore distinct from the one (or ones – given the ambiguity mentioned at the beginning of this essay) whose history Nietzsche is trying to unravel.

Finally, to give a sense of just how widespread and problematic this proliferation of consciences is, let us mention another important case. In section 11 of the first treatise, Nietzsche introduces the infamous image of the primitive noble men as creatures that are often nothing more than mere beasts of prey. As we shall see shortly these beasts of prey are instrumental in the emergence of the bad conscience. But the point I wish to highlight here is that Nietzsche describes these beasts as creatures possessing a type of conscience themselves. He writes:

[These noble men] ...the same men who are held so sternly in check *inter pares* by custom, respect, usage, gratitude, and even more by mutual suspicion and jealousy ... once they go outside, where the strange, the *stranger* is found, they

are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey. There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go *back* to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey (GM I, 11).⁴¹

Ridley finds this passage problematic because he thinks that what distinguishes man from the beast is conscience, and he understands this to be the power to make promises. But he reads Nietzsche as suggesting that this power is the result of the internalization of man that takes place when man starts to live under customs.⁴² So he finds the suggestion that a human beast living in the wilderness has a conscience incoherent. The nobles cannot really go back to such a form of conscience because prior to socialization there is simply no conscience to be had (Ridley, 1998: 20).

I think Ridley misreads this passage because he is too focused on understanding Nietzsche's use of the notion of conscience as a faculty of self-reflection that emerges when the bad conscience in, what he calls, its "raw state" (the internalization of man) first appears. This leads him either to disregard or to dismiss as incoherent the subtle proliferation of consciences I mentioned above. I think that a more profitable approach here would be to think of Nietzsche's treatment of conscience along the same lines as his treatment of punishment. Perhaps we should distinguish two different elements in the

⁴¹ Undoubtedly there is a touch of irony and humor in Nietzsche's characterization of the nobles as "[going] back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey", but that does not curtail the possibility that there is also a touch of seriousness; in this connection one does well to remember Nietzsche's own dictum: *ridendo decire severum* (to say serious things laughing). One of the serious points Nietzsche is making here is that the beast of prey man is innocent (*Unschuld*) because he is "free" in a very literal non-symbolic sense: he is incapable of acting in a faulty manner because he is under no constraints whatsoever, he is unbounded. I say a little bit more about this below. Something close to the characterization offered in this quote from the first treatise is also found in the second treatise. In section 11, for instance, Nietzsche claims that "the aggressive man, as the stronger, nobler, more courageous, has in fact also had in all times a *freer* eye, a *better* conscience on his side: conversely, one can see who has the invention of the 'bad conscience' on his conscience – the man of *ressentiment!*" (GM II, 11).

⁴² In this respect I think Ridley is guilty of the same type of conflation I attributed earlier to Leiter and to other commentators.

concept of conscience: a relatively enduring element and a more fluid one. We can then understand these different consciences as so many different expressions of the enduring element, as fluid forms that constitute appropriations of the enduring element into new directions and uses.

The question, then, is what is the relatively enduring element in all these different forms of conscience? Sticking to the analogy with punishment, I submit that it must be some procedural aspect that they all share in common, something that all forms of conscience essentially do or are engaged in doing despite their different ways of doing it. I suggest that this element consists in man's ability to produce a conception for himself of the type of creature he is.⁴³

This would explain why, for Nietzsche, the noble "beast of prey" can indeed have a conscience and, moreover, an *innocent* conscience. The "beast of prey" conceives of itself as a being that is under no constraints whatsoever. As Ridley correctly notes, it exists outside the morality of custom, hence it must think of itself as a creature that,

⁴³ It is important to point out that nowhere in the *Genealogy* does Nietzsche use the word *Selbstvorstellung* (self-conception) or *Selbstverständnis* (self-understanding) or even *Selbstbewusstsein* (self-consciousness). I have arrived at this characterization of the generic term "conscience" because of the puzzle I have identified above: namely, the problem of what is it that makes all the very different occurrences of the word "conscience" in the *Genealogy* fall under one general concept (or belong to the same family)? The answer I give to this question is not arbitrary or unsupported, however, since I take my cues from a similar strategy Nietzsche has employed to explain the history of another general concept, namely, "punishment". My solution is compatible with all the places Nietzsche uses the term conscience in the *Genealogy*. In those places one can read self-conception or self-understanding without a loss in meaning. Moreover, my solution is broad enough to include even our ordinary use of the notion of a conscience. In our everyday usage a conscience refers to a kind of internal voice that tells us what is right or wrong in a given situation and that exhorts us to do what is right. This is compatible with the characterization of such a voice as a type of self-conception or self-understanding since, in effect, what a conscience does is produce for the person a conception of himself as standing under certain constraints and obligations that must be met whenever he acts. Finally, as shall become clear shortly, this solution has enormous explanatory power and allows us to make better sense of many of the strange claims Nietzsche makes in the course of his investigation.

among other things, has no debts (Schulden) to repay and thus no obligations. This is why it can commit the most heinous acts unperturbed and with the impression of being perfectly innocent (Unschuld). This also explains why Nietzsche claims that the debtor, who initially does not conceive of himself as someone who is under constraints or obligations, has to impress the notion of repayment as a duty on his own conscience by means of a contract with the creditor, a contract that allows the latter to inflict any kind of mortification and torture upon the body of the debtor in case he fails to repay his debt.

What all this means is that Nietzsche must be operating under the assumption that very primitive man, the man who is closest to the natural beast, was the possessor of concepts even if to a very limited and rudimentary degree. Of course, this in turn means that he not only had a mind, but, more importantly, a conscious mind.⁴⁴ Once again, I touch on a very contentious and, in my judgment, somewhat understudied aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, namely, that which deals with his views on consciousness and conscious thinking. And, yet again – in a manner that might have become somewhat frustrating for the reader by now – I must dodge the issue of what exactly Nietzsche understood by consciousness.⁴⁵ Here it suffices to note that, at least in certain places, Nietzsche thinks conscious thinking occurs in words and thus requires the employment of concepts (GS, 354). In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche is not concerned with the task of explaining the emergence of consciousness. Instead, as I have said and as we shall see

⁴⁴ This is evident by Nietzsche's insistence in GM II, 16 (see below) that when the human animal was first imprisoned under the rule of society (with the aid of its principal instrument the morality of custom) it was reduced to relying on its most feeble organ: consciousness. Thus, prehistoric men (the beast-of-prey-men) who predate society have consciousness and therefore, as mentioned before, the conceptual tools to furnish self-conceptions (in particular the conception of being Unschuld [innocent], i.e. of being incapable of fault because of their freedom from societal obligations).

⁴⁵ For an interesting discussion of this issue see Katsafanas (2005).

below, he presupposes that prehistoric man already comes equipped with this special power.⁴⁶

But let us return to our problem. How does the bad conscience come into the world? Nietzsche's answer to this question begins in section 16 where he asserts that the bad conscience was the illness man was bound to contract once he found himself enclosed within the walls of society and peace (GM II, 16). Nietzsche thinks this was one of the most momentous and fundamental changes human beings ever experienced. However, it is crucial to stress that the claim is not that the bad conscience is created by this change; the claim instead is that this change generates the conditions under which man is bound to acquire a bad conscience. As I will show shortly, this dissolves the contradiction remarked by some commentators that Nietzsche seems to both deny and assert a primary role to punishment in the explanation of the emergence of the bad conscience.

Part of the reason Nietzsche thinks this was such a crucial transformation is that it marks the beginning of man's genuine detachment from animal nature; it inaugurates the real separation of man from the rest of nature.⁴⁷ Unlike other creatures, the semi-animals that become incarcerated in the walls of society can no longer roam free, they must now

⁴⁶ I think this sheds an interesting light on Nietzsche's claim at the beginning of the treatise. Contrary to what one might perhaps expect, Nietzsche does not think that the paradoxical task of nature is to breed an animal with the capacity for self-conscious thinking. Instead, the paradoxical task is to breed an animal that has truly emancipated itself from nature, an animal that is autonomous.

⁴⁷ It should be clear that this separation is something that is the result of natural processes. Thus, it does not signal any kind of metaphysical splitting up of humans and nature. Part of the task of the *Genealogy* is precisely to recover a true sense of pride for humans (this is especially true in the third treatise), one that does not require us to think of ourselves as descended from a divine order.

learn to adjust themselves to rules of conduct; they become constrained by societal norms. As Nietzsche tells us, in this process “they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, coordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their ‘consciousness,’ their weakest and most fallible organ!” (*Ibid.*). Notice again that Nietzsche is assuming that consciousness and conscious thinking is already in place when this happens. Moreover, and perhaps surprisingly, Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that what actually separates us from nature is not consciousness but something for which consciousness is necessary, something that begins almost at the same time that primitive societies are created and that acts as the engine of civilization, namely, culture. Though not supported at this point, this last claim will be vindicated a bit later when we discuss in more detail how the bad conscience makes culture possible by permitting conscious imagining and idealization.

The creation of the first “state” is the result of the oppression and coercion exerted by “some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, which ... lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad” (GM II, 17). In doing this, the beasts of prey expel a tremendous quantity of freedom from nature: the freedom of those creatures that must now conform to the rules of society. Through punishment and through the whole apparatus of the morality of custom, the oppressed are prevented from giving free reign to their animal nature and this means that they are no longer able to vent their aggressive instincts externally, instincts like cruelty, joy in persecuting, in change, in destruction (GM II, 16). But this has an awesome consequence. For now those instincts turn back upon their

possessors. They discharge themselves in and against the person whose instincts they are. Nietzsche calls this process the internalization of man and claims that it was in this way that man first developed what was later called the “soul” (*Ibid.*). As we learn in the first treatise, this concept of the soul is intimately bound up with the notion of a subject, that is, with the notion of a thing that underlies all actions and events (GM I, 13). The connection between the bad conscience and the idea of a subject will become clear in a moment when we explain in greater detail the essential feature of this form of conscience.

The internalization of the aggressive instinct in man is, according to Nietzsche, the origin of bad conscience. As he states it, “this *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent ... pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings” (GM II, 17). The key point to stress here is that it is not the incarceration itself, and hence not punishment itself, that originates the bad conscience.⁴⁸ What originates the bad conscience is the instinct for freedom discharging itself on its possessor, something for which the incarceration is a mere means. Thus, there is no inconsistency in Nietzsche’s statement that punishment itself cannot generate the bad conscience and his insistence that the bad conscience originates when man is incarcerated by means of punishment. For the role Nietzsche is assigning to punishment here is not that of genitive cause, but merely that of instrumental means. Punishment is the

⁴⁸ Strictly speaking, given what Nietzsche says in section 16, on this hypothesis it would be the fearful bulwarks of the political organization that would be responsible for originating the bad conscience; punishment is just the principal of these bulwarks. This subtle point will be important for explaining how the bad conscience can spread to the noble caste, since in effect it leaves room in Nietzsche’s account for other ways in which the political organization can eventually incarcerate all people and, in particular, the noble types, within the walls of society. I will recall this point later when the time comes to discuss this issue.

mechanism by which the instinct for freedom changes orientation and is redirected inward toward the possessor of the instinct. The actual creator of the bad conscience is this instinct for freedom itself.⁴⁹

This becomes even clearer once we ask the question: what exactly has emerged here? What is a bad conscience? Following the principle I laid down above, the answer to this question must be: a new type of conception of oneself. What conception is that? Nietzsche's answer is contained in a passage that is worth quoting at length. He claims that the instinct for freedom at work here is:

The same active force that is at work on a grander scale in those artists of violence and organizers who build states ... only here the material upon which the form-giving and ravishing nature of this force vents itself is man himself, his whole ancient animal self – and *not*, as in that greater and more obvious phenomenon, some *other* man, *other* men. This secret self-ravishment, this artists' cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labor of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer – eventually this entire *active* 'bad conscience' ... as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. – After all, what would be 'beautiful' if the contradiction had not first

⁴⁹ There is a more direct way of solving this apparent contradiction. This consists in noting that what Nietzsche actually denies in the text is that punishment creates the bad conscience *understood as a feeling of guilt* and not that punishment creates the bad conscience *simpliciter*. If one adopts the view that the guilty conscience develops in stages, as I and others have suggested we should do, one can understand the apparently contradictory claims as applying to two different moments in the development of this conscience and hence as not being really contradictory. In other words, under this option punishment would be responsible for producing the bad conscience that is devoid of feelings of guilt, but it would not be responsible for producing a later form of the bad conscience which actually includes those feelings. However, I have chosen this approach instead because I think it is important to realize that Nietzsche never assigns the function of producing the bad conscience (plain or otherwise) to punishment. This is a point that is often left in the dark by those who adopt the developmental strategy. Risse, for example, claims that "Nietzsche denies that punishment causes the bad conscience *as a feeling of guilt*. But punishment had its impact on the bad conscience *at an earlier stage*, when the latter was still detached from guilt." (Risse, 2001: 58). This statement leaves ambiguous what kind of impact punishment is supposed to have had at the earlier stage. I think it should be clear from what I have said before that this impact cannot be that of acting as cause of the phenomenon (the bad conscience). This point is made more poignantly manifest in what follows.

become conscious of itself, if the ugly had not first said to itself: 'I am ugly'?" (GM II, 18).

The important point in this passage is the one that describes the type of labor that the instinct for freedom performs in and against its possessor. This labor consists in impressing in the person (and, as I am suggesting, more properly in his conception of himself) a critique, a contradiction and contempt, a No. What this means is that the instinct for freedom creates or instigates in the person a view of himself as contemptible in the sense of *abject*, *vulgar*, *ordinary* or *low*; it generates in the person a conception of himself as, above all, situated *below* what he could or should be. In other words, the instinct for freedom brings to life a conscience that is *bad* very much in the sense initially introduced by Nietzsche in the first treatise of the *Genealogy*: it produces a conception of a person that is imperfect or incomplete, someone who is not well-formed, a being that is unexceptional and therefore worthy of disapproval and dislike (GM I, 4-5).⁵⁰ To be sure, echoing the arguments of the first treatise, the disapproval at stake here must not be understood as being moral in nature; at least not in its inception; not until the bad conscience transforms into the guilty conscience. (This will be the subject of section V of this essay).

I think this clarifies Nietzsche's somewhat strange claim that the bad conscience is the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, that it provides the condition for ideals like beauty or even moral ideals like selflessness, self-denial, and self-sacrifice (GM II, 18). An ideal is something one either adopts or aspires to realize; it provides an image of what one could be or of what one could become. To have an ideal, then, (to

⁵⁰ In this respect my account stands on the side of Ridley and opposed to Risse who tries to argue against such continuities between the three treatises.

adopt one or to aspire to one) one must have a conception of what one is not – at least not yet. That is, one must have a conception of oneself as incomplete or imperfect. But that just is the conception that the bad conscience affords. It is on the basis of this conception that one can then see oneself as capable of changing, as capable of being other than one is.⁵¹ This further explains why Nietzsche claims that with the bad conscience the inner world of man, which was “originally thin as if inserted between two skins,” spreads and grows in depth, breadth and height (GM II, 16). For the instinct for freedom that has reverted upon itself, *by necessity*, makes its possessor conceive of himself as a piece of matter to be shaped and formed, as something upon which he can exercise the full force of his artistry: his own inner world becomes for him a frontier to be explored, expanded, conquered and colonized. In turn, this means that the person will start to understand himself as something that stands over and above the possible and actual conceptions that he has of himself. Those conceptions, after all, are something that he now understands as being subject to change and manipulation by him; which means that, in his mind, he himself must therefore be something distinct from all of them. Hence Nietzsche’s claim that the emergence of the bad conscience is intimately bound with the development of the concept of a “soul,” that is, with the notion of a subject that underlies all actions and events.

⁵¹ To be sure, it is compatible with our having a conception of ourselves as incomplete or imperfect that we think ourselves condemned to such a status. In that case, we would adopt a fatalistic attitude and need not think that we can change ourselves. However, as I try to stress below, Nietzsche’s characterization of the instinct for freedom as an active, creative force and a harbinger of change and transformation means that the person in whom this instinct has reverted must come to see himself not only as incomplete or imperfect, but, more importantly, as capable of changing (as a sort of canvas that can be painted over and transformed) and as capable of executing such a change himself (by way of the instinct for freedom operating in him). I think such a conception is the natural result of the instinct’s own drive as Nietzsche has described it. If in the end the person still ends up adopting a fatalistic attitude, then we must understand this as resulting from other psychic forces operating in him or as the result of a general weakening of his instinct for freedom.

Similarly, this also allows us to appreciate more clearly why Nietzsche does not think that this new conception is generated by punishment. At most, punishment can make a person reassess the perception he has of his own power; it can teach the person that he was not as strong as he thought he was. But this is not equivalent to making him think of himself as something that is incomplete or worthy of disapprobation, something that needs to be reshaped or changed. This type of self-loathing results only from an internal kind of rearrangement and self-configuration that is not imposed from the outside. It is possible only on the assumption that man is conceiving of himself as a target for his own creative activity, which is just the type of conception that the bad conscience inaugurates.

Finally, this also explains why the noble warriors for some time must not have been affected by the bad conscience even though, once they formed the state, they themselves were subject to societal constraints and were kept in check by the punitive force of the morality of custom. The difference between them and the rest of the subjugated populace was that, every time the pressure created by prolonged confinement within the state had become unbearable, they could always return to the wilderness and discharge their instinct for freedom outside of society. After all, they were the ones who were in charge, the ones who had the power to go and conquer new worlds, to subjugate other people, and so on. Thus, for the primitive noble type, the instinct for freedom must not have reverted itself against its possessor as quickly as it did for the rest of the populace, since it always had the option of an unconstrained external outlet. This is in

consonance with what Nietzsche says about the primitive nobles in the first treatise. As mentioned earlier, there they are described as often nothing more than mere beasts of prey. But the beast of prey is precisely the type of creature that has no ideals, no aspirations, a creature that does not conceive of itself as lacking anything and, hence, does not think of itself as needing to become something other than it already is. Because the prehistoric nobles remained so close to the beast, for a long time they must have conceived of themselves as more complete animals, as psychically “wholer men (ganzere Menschen)”⁵² who do not suffer from the inner conflict and turmoil associated with the bad conscience.

But this presents a problem for Nietzsche’s account; one which he does not take on directly, yet one whose solution, I think, lies within the elements afforded by his own analysis in the *Genealogy*. I shall take a moment to discuss it and outline its solution. The problem is this: how did the prehistoric noble men acquire a bad conscience? That they must at some point have acquired it is made plain by the fact that Nietzsche claims that the instincts of reaction and *ressentiment* are the *instruments of culture*, through which the beast of prey, the barbarian, was finally civilized (GM I, 11).⁵³ It seems clear that part of what it must have meant for the beasts of prey to become “civilized” is that at some point they started to *disapprove* of their own aggressive nature. Of course, this need not imply that they suspended their aggressive behavior completely, but rather that they must have eventually acquired a conception of themselves as creatures that needed a

⁵² Nietzsche uses this expression in BGE, 257 again within the context of a characterization of the primitive aristocracy, the barbarian cast.

⁵³ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche avers that the people of his time that are capable of commanding (presumably, the active noble types) suffer from bad conscience; see BGE, 199.

justification, a conscious reason, for engaging in acts of violence outside of society.⁵⁴ In other words, they must have gone from being unconscious artists to being more conscious and *conscientious* ones. Indeed, in the section I am referring to, Nietzsche claims that the bearers of the reactive instincts *are not* the representatives of culture, even though their instincts are the instruments of culture. This must mean that the active, aggressive, noble men are the actual agents of culture who use the reactive instincts to create works of art. Since advancing culture in this way requires conscious imagining and idealization, the noble men must somehow have been infected with a bad conscience.

Ex hypothesi, the primitive noble men, the warriors, could not have acquired a bad conscience by direct enslavement since they are the ones who wield power, who are in control of the punitive force, and who can escape the confines of society. So their instinct for freedom must have been *persuaded* to change direction, to revert itself against its possessor, by some other means. Who could have yielded this type of influence and how could he have yielded it? It must have been someone who was very powerful, but who exerted power in a different way from the way in which the noble warriors did. What Nietzsche seems to require here, is a human being that can act as a sort of bridge between the noble warriors and the slaves, someone who can exert influence over the warriors in virtue of having traits belonging to both classes. More specifically, Nietzsche needs a person that belongs to the noble caste, but is not in the habit of externalizing his aggressive instincts outside of society; someone who is not a slave, yet shares with the

⁵⁴ Again, it is important to bear in mind that the type of disapproval at stake here is not necessarily moral in nature, and therefore neither is the justification I am claiming the noble men must think of themselves as needing. Instead of remorse, a prudential fear (of perceived repercussions) or a similar feeling may be enough to elicit the required sense of disapprobation.

slave an incapacity for external action, for aggression, that makes him susceptible to acquiring a bad conscience. If there were such a person, he could still be powerful enough to “convince” the other noble men to acquire bad consciences of their own.⁵⁵ Fortunately, Nietzsche’s account does have someone that fits this characterization: the priest.

In the first treatise, Nietzsche claims that the priestly aristocracy constituted the highest caste in primitive societies. But he suggests that this segment of the aristocracy was very different from its counterpart, the warriors. As he puts it, “there is from the first something *unhealthy* in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them which turn them away from action and alternate between brooding and emotional explosions” (GM I, 6). This aspect of the priestly aristocracies, their peculiar aversion to action, must have made them very susceptible to the contagion of the bad conscience, since it is precisely the lack of an outlet for aggressive action that makes the instinct for freedom revert itself against its possessor. Of course, in this case the way in which the person is denied such an outlet is not so much through repeated punishment, as it is by virtue of the very dynamics inherent to the practices of the institution to which he belongs. It is the priestly institution itself that in this case acts as bulwark of the societal organization and drives its members away from the type of behavior characteristic of the warriors.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ I say convince, but it should be obvious that this need not mean convince by way of argument. Indeed, the “persuasion” at stake here was likely effected by the impact of the particular practices proper to this type of person and the forces at work in them, as will become clear shortly.

⁵⁶ In this connection, recall that Nietzsche had left room for other things to act as bulwarks not just the morality of custom. See footnote 48.

Possessed with a bad conscience himself, the priest can become one of the fiercest and most effective forces in the process of civilizing the beasts of prey. In a telling passage of the third treatise, Nietzsche describes the type of war the priest will wage against the beasts of prey as a war of cunning, that is, a war of the spirit rather than of force. To fight this war, Nietzsche tells us, “[the priest] will under certain circumstances need to evolve a virtually new type of preying animal out of himself, or at least he will need to *represent* it – a new kind of animal ferocity in which the polar bear, the supple, cold, and patient tiger, and not least the fox seem to be joined in a unity at once enticing and terrifying” (GM III, 15). The most important trait of this new type of preying beast, its peculiar art, consists in being the herald and mouthpiece of obscure and mysterious powers, precisely the type of powers that can seek out and pursue the beasts of prey beyond the confines of society, even beyond life. If such powers were to disapprove and chastise the warriors for their aggressive nature, they would contribute enormously to the eventual development of a bad conscience in the warriors themselves. My aim in this brief detour has not been to construct a complete and coherent explanation of this process, but to show that the elements for such an explanation are available in Nietzsche’s story. I think what I have said so far goes a long way towards that goal. It also allows us to transition to the next section, for it is precisely with the aid of religion and its moralizing forces that the bad conscience transforms into a guilty conscience.

V. From the Bad Conscience to the Guilty Conscience and Beyond

At the end of section 16 Nietzsche seems to suggest that the advent of the bad conscience had something to do with, if not the inception, at least the development of religion and religious dogmas. The appearance on earth of an animal soul that had turned against itself, that suffered because of itself, was something so extraordinary, Nietzsche tells us there, “[that] divine spectators were needed to do justice to the spectacle that thus began and the end of which is not yet in sight” (GM II, 16). Nietzsche had expressed a similar idea earlier in section 7 where he advanced the hypothesis that the gods were created to justify evil and suffering. There he claims that the chief function of the gods was to act as spectators of human suffering, to take pleasure in the ills that befell mankind and, on occasion, to affect what happened “on stage” by becoming the actual causes of some of those ills. Nietzsche maintains that, in a very fundamental and vital sense, human beings need to explain away their suffering, and the system of divine purposes and religious interpretations furnished reasons that provided a way for them to do so.

In section 19, however, Nietzsche proposes a different hypothesis about the origin of the gods. He suggests that the gods emerged out of a modified interpretation of the relationship between creditors and debtors: namely, the relationship between the current generation and its ancestors. Nietzsche thinks that, from the historical point of view, this reinterpretation of the relationship between creditors and debtors is strange and even somewhat problematic. Nonetheless, he insists that in prehistoric times, the living generation felt indebted to the prior generation, and especially to the founders of the tribe. Nietzsche avers that a crude kind of logic governed this kind of relationship, leading the

living generations to the conviction that the more prosperous and powerful their tribe became, the more acute and cumbersome was their indebtedness to their ancestors, and vice versa. Nietzsche suggests that, bound by this kind of reasoning, the most successful tribes eventually ended up transfiguring their ancestors into gods (GM II, 19).

I do not think these two hypotheses about the origin of the gods are necessarily at odds with each other. In this connection it is important to recall, once more, that for Nietzsche the emergence of any thing, any concept, any institution, any organ, is the result of the confluence of various influences and various motivations that can be radically distinct from each other. Thus, it is perfectly consistent on his part to mention and inspect different aspects of the history of the formation of the concept of god on earth. The discussion of the link between the two aforementioned aspects of this history does not belong to this essay. What interests me here is the connection Nietzsche establishes between the concept of god and the primitive form of the bad conscience.

In his essay on the second treatise of the *Genealogy*, Mathias Risse argues that Christianity plays a unique and crucial role in Nietzsche's story of the transformation of the bad conscience into a guilty conscience. He focuses a great part of his analysis on what he deems the pivotal section of the second treatise, namely, section 21. In that section, Nietzsche asserts that the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt emerges as the result of the moralization of the material concepts of "guilt" (Schuld) and "duty." According to Nietzsche, this moralization is brought about by pushing back these concepts into the conscience or – in his own words – "more precisely, [by] the

involvement of the *bad* conscience with the concept of god” (GM II, 21). Risse construes this last claim as indicating the entanglement of the primitive form of the bad conscience with the idea of the Christian God. He takes many of his cues from Nietzsche’s rhetoric in the section, which focuses mostly on Christian concepts like original sin and eternal punishment.⁵⁷ For Risse this means that the moralization at stake here is one that very much follows the pattern of what Leiter has called elsewhere a “morality in the pejorative sense” (Leiter, 1995). That is to say that Nietzsche’s attitude towards the moral concept of guilt is one of wholehearted condemnation and disdain.⁵⁸ Leiter himself agrees in this respect with Risse, though for him what turns the bad conscience into guilt is not its connection to Christianity *per se*, but rather its attachment to the ascetic ideal: Christianity is one of the most notable exponents of this ideal, but the ideal itself is much broader in scope including other religions like Buddhism and sometimes even non-religious disciplines like modern science (Leiter, 2002: 244).

I disagree with the assessment of these interpreters. In my judgment, both Risse and Leiter miss important nuances in Nietzsche’s treatment of the moral concept of guilt. In particular, they fail to notice the positive regard Nietzsche has for this concept, which goes as far as to assign to moral guilt a crucial role in the process of *ennoblement* of other

⁵⁷ However, it should be noted that Christianity is not the only force mentioned in that section; Nietzsche also speaks of a nihilistic withdrawal from existence in general, which he directly associates with Buddhism and the like religions (GM II, 21).

⁵⁸ Leiter and Risse are not alone in this respect. Indeed there seems to be almost unanimous agreement among most commentators that a substantial part of Nietzsche attack on morality is focused on the moral notion of guilt. A good example of this position is Bernard Williams (1993). See also Clark (2001), for a nice and concise discussion of the view. Not even those who defend positive Nietzschean notions of free will and responsibility, like Ken Gemes and Christopher Janaway, go as far as to question this assumption. See Gemes and Janaway (2006).

things. In order to appreciate this point we need to look closely at the main arguments of sections 20 to 23.

In section 20, Nietzsche claims that (once the ancestors were transfigured into gods) for several millennia, the feeling of having unpaid debts toward the deity or deities increased in the same measure as the concept of god grew on earth. This process, we are told, reached its pinnacle with the arrival of the Christian God, which marked the advent of the greatest feeling of “guilty indebtedness” ever felt.⁵⁹ However, Nietzsche concludes the section expressing his hope that the irresistible decline of faith in the Christian God will also mark the decline in mankind’s feeling of debt; specifically, the decline in mankind’s feeling of debt toward its origin. Thus, the progress and development of atheism constitutes, for him, a historical process that flows counter to the movement of ever increasing indebtedness.

But at the beginning of the next section (the pivotal section for Risse) we are told that the description of this process has been one-sided: Nietzsche has spoken of one historical strand in isolation (the progressive formation of more abstract and more universal deities and the feeling of “guilty indebtedness” that accompanies it), he has neglected to mention other strands that also belong and get entangled in this history of the relationship between the concept of god and the material concept of “guilt”. In particular, he has omitted the moralization of the concepts of “guilt” and “duty.” As was mentioned earlier this moralization is what turns the purely material concept of “guilt” into a moral

⁵⁹ Again, it is crucial to keep in mind that, at this stage, this feeling of “guilt” or of being at “fault” refers to a material feeling related to having debts, not to a moral feeling. See footnotes 29 and 38.

concept. Nietzsche is interested in discussing this aspect of the story because he considers that the ensnarement of the moral concept of guilt in the process of ever growing indebtedness toward the divinity significantly alters, in a negative way, the impact of the whole atheistic movement and its promise of emancipation. Since what this movement promises is to redeem us from the maximal feeling of indebtedness ever experienced on this planet, Nietzsche is principally interested in discussing how this maximal feeling of indebtedness is affected by the appearance of the moral concept of guilt. This is why he focuses most of the discussion in section 21 and section 22 on Christianity since, as he had announced in section 20, it is with the arrival of the Christian God that we reach the maximum feeling of indebtedness ever experienced on earth, and thus also the maximum feeling of guilt.

Told in this way, and contrary to what Risse claims, it seems clear that for Nietzsche the moralization of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” must have happened very early on in the course of the story he is recounting, especially if we consider that the prehistoric form of the bad conscience is an essential element in this transformation. I realize that this claim is mere gesturing at this point and that I have provided insufficient evidence against Risse’s reading. Fortunately, there is another place where one can find support for the thesis I am defending here. Nietzsche cannot think that the moralization of the material concept of “guilt” happens with the arrival of Christianity because in section 23 he attributes to the Greeks the use of the moral concept of guilt for the ennoblement of their gods. This, I think, is evidence that weighs more decisively in my favor, and I shall discuss it shortly. However, before doing so, I wish to offer my own

interpretation of the admittedly strange claim that the moral concept of guilt emerges with the *pushing back* of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” into the conscience or, more accurately, with the entanglement (*Verwicklung*) of the *bad* conscience with the concept of god.

To begin with, note that by claiming that the concepts must be subjected to a “pushing back” (*Zurückschiebung*) Nietzsche gives the impression that those concepts are to be shoved toward a location they formerly occupied, as if they were somehow standing outside of the place they once resided in. I interpret this as an indication that the pushing of those concepts had already happened but must now happen again, or that the concepts must be placed again in the space they occupied once before, but under a different guise. Hence, what Nietzsche is trying to say here is that the moralization of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” occurs when those concepts get *reinserted* into the conscience. What can that mean? As was argued earlier, the initial insertion of these concepts into the conscience was carried out by the morality of custom. It was through the methods of the morality of custom that the person learned to conceive of himself as a debtor, that is, as someone who *must* repay – someone who has the “*duty*” to repay and can be at “fault” (*Schuld*) for not repaying – a debt he incurred in the past. If the concepts of “guilt” and “duty” are now to be re-appropriated by the person or, better still, introduced back into his conception of himself, then they must do so under a new meaning. Nietzsche himself gives us the key to unlock this new meaning by declaring in section 21 that the pushing back consists more precisely in “the involvement of the *bad* conscience with the concept of god,” and by insisting a bit further along that same section

that the moralization of the concepts in question is equivalent to “their being pushed back into the *bad* conscience” (*Ibid.*).

Recall that the bad conscience is the conception the person has of himself as incomplete, imperfect, ordinary or low. This conception, which is also equivalent to the thought that one is situated below what one could (potentially) be, is concomitant with an understanding of oneself as material for change, as capable of transforming into someone other than one already is. If the concepts of “guilt” and “duty” are to be inserted into this conception of oneself, then the result must be a mixture of two conceptions of oneself and their corresponding feelings: the feeling of being at fault for not paying one’s debt (the feeling of being still indebted) and the feeling of dislike (non-moral) for who one is. What I take this mixture to involve is a new conception of oneself according to which one’s “guilt” for an unpaid debt and one’s “duty” to repay it, directly affect one’s sense of self: adversely, should one indeed fail to repay the debt, or favorably, in case one fulfills one’s duties and pays it. Both possibilities are felt as self-chosen since, as was said before, the bad conscience entails, even if in a still incipient manner, the thought that one is the author of one’s own self (one’s self is a material upon which to exercise the full force of one’s artistry). In other words, through the re-conceptualization of “guilt” and “duty”, through their reinsertion into the bad conscience, we get a new understanding of ourselves as entrusted with actions upon which hangs our own sense of self-worth. But this means that our transgressions, our failure to return the thing entrusted or lent, are now felt as contemptible in a moral sense, since they constitute acts that threaten our

dignity and our worth as a person, and the resulting conscience can thus be properly called, no longer simply a bad conscience, but a guilty one.

I have claimed above that the contempt that the person feels is moral in nature. But, how did we get this moral sense of disapproval? I seem to have pulled a rabbit out of an empty hat. After all, by my own account, the primitive form of the bad conscience involves a feeling of disapproval that is not moral. Why should the involvement of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” with the bad conscience yield a feeling of self-contempt that is? To answer this question notice that what causes the feeling of diminished self-worth characteristic of the primitive form of the bad conscience is the instinct for freedom that has changed directions and turned inward toward the person whose instinct it is. Thus, the feeling of contempt or disapprobation at stake here is equivalent to the thought that one could or should be other than one currently is. This feeling is not moral in nature because it is not accompanied by the thought that one’s character is reprehensible as such or that one’s actions are those of a morally blameworthy person (of a wrong-doer). Indeed, it is compatible with seeing oneself as someone worthy of disapprobation that one does not necessarily think this is the result of something one did or something one is responsible for. The bad conscience simply brands this self-contempt into the person and impels him to change so as to get rid of it, but it in no way specifies why it is present or connects its presence with the person’s will and choices. In the guilty conscience, by contrast, what triggers the contempt the person feels for himself is his failure to fulfill certain “contractual” obligations. Because it is so directly linked to the person’s actions and volitions, the resulting feeling of diminished

self-worth is in this case equivalent to the thought that one ought to have been someone different (someone more decent) *by actually doing something other than what one ended up doing*, that is, that one could or should have done otherwise. This feeling is, therefore, moral in nature because it involves the sensation of polluting oneself through one's own – now questionable – actions, through one's own wrong doings.

The preceding couple of paragraphs explain how the consciousness of moral guilt emerges from the reinsertion of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” into the bad conscience. The question I have not answered yet is how this reinsertion happens? Why should all these things mix in the way Nietzsche suggests and I have described? After all, the mere coexistence of the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty” and the bad conscience within one psyche does not necessitate their entanglement. It is perhaps to answer this problem that Nietzsche asserts that the moralization of the concepts of “guilt” and “duty” consists more precisely in the involvement of the bad conscience with the concept of god.

We know from our discussion earlier that it is very unlikely that the judicial sphere would produce the moralization we are looking for, since the procedures employed by the judiciary prevented the wrong doer from considering his acts reprehensible as such. Here we can add another consideration that makes this possibility improbable. This consists in the fact that Nietzsche believes that the history of justice essentially amounts to the struggle against the reactive feelings on the part of the active and aggressive powers that seek, through their strength, to limit the excesses of the

reactive passions, to impose restraint, and to end the senseless raging of rancor and resentment (GM II, 11).⁶⁰ According to Nietzsche, the principal method for achieving all this is precisely the institution of the law, whose function is to remove its subjects from the injuries caused to them by others, by interpreting those injuries as offenses against the law itself and not as transgressions directed against particular individuals or groups of people. Historically, then, the essential thrust of the judicial institution, as Nietzsche understands it, is to train the conscience of its subjects to evaluate all wrong doings in an increasingly *impersonal* manner. It is no wonder that Nietzsche does not claim that the moralization of “guilt” and “duty” occurs when the bad conscience gets entangled with the concept of law. For the basic trend of justice is not to instigate feelings of remorse or of diminished self-worth in the violators of the law, but to redress in an impartial and objective manner the wrong perpetrated by them, to balance once again with a good will the momentary disturbance of forces, to reach a mutual understanding or to compel those involved to accept a compromise (*Ibid.*).⁶¹

Where, then, can we find in primitive societies an institution that will transform the conscience of its subjects so as to instigate in them feelings of diminished self-worth whenever they contravene the mandates of the institution itself, an institution in which

⁶⁰ Nietzsche’s target in the section is Eugen Dühring who claims that justice arises from the sphere of the reactive feelings itself as an extension of the feeling of being aggrieved.

⁶¹ It should be clear by now that Nietzsche need not be committed to the claim that modern judicial systems are necessarily closer to the realization of the goals contained in the basic historical trend of justice than prior forms of judicial organization. Supposing Nietzsche is correct about the basic historical orientation of justice, his understanding of historical processes still allows for the possibility of arresting the progress of judicial development during the course of history. Though he does not discuss this directly, given his overall critical posture towards modernity, Nietzsche’s own view might well have been that the modern judiciary constitutes an obstruction, perhaps even a regression, in the historical advancement of justice. If such were the case it would mean, according to his account, that the reactive powers have won (if perhaps only momentarily) the battle against the aggressive forces (the promoters of justice), and have gained control of the judiciary, reinterpreting it according to their own interests and mandates.

one can find an vested interest in mixing the bad conscience with the material concepts of “guilt” and “duty”? According to Nietzsche we can find this type of institution in the religious organizations of primitive societies. As was argued earlier, because of its historical origin the concept of god is already intertwined with the material concept of “guilt” (by way of the debt one has towards the divinity) and, by extension, with that of “duty”. Because those concepts have been incorporated into the religious institution from its inception, all that is needed to effect the moralization described previously is to mix the concept of god with the bad conscience. The normal result of this intertwining of concepts will be a guilty conscience: a conscience in which feelings of diminished self-worth are triggered any time the person fails to live up to the standards and contractual obligations imposed by the deity or deities. Later, partly as a result of the natural progression of this new conscience, the feeling will encompass all transgressions, to the point of being likely to extend beyond the confines of moral actions altogether (today it is not uncommon for people to feel guilty for things for which they are not really at fault as in the case of survivor’s guilt).

Furthermore, according to Nietzsche, the primary function of all religious institutions consists in handling human suffering and human sickness in a very peculiar way, namely, by interpreting the causes of all human maladies in psychological-moral terms and by prescribing cures of the same sort (GM III, 17). This means that religions are by their very nature ideal breeding grounds for the sort of moralization process we are

after. For this purpose they also count with the aid of one of the most cunning, serious, shrewd and commanding forces in the Nietzschean panoply of characters: the priest.⁶²

Nietzsche consistently describes the priest as someone who is bent on domination, not only of those situated below him (the herd) but also of those he considers his equals, the noble warriors (GM III, 15-16). In order to manifest his will to power in this way the priest has all sorts of devices and resources at his disposal. Chief among them is the pool of reactive passions that brew in the soul of all individuals both low and high, and that are specially recalcitrant and damaging in the souls of the base and the sick.⁶³ Nietzsche claims that the priest is particularly adept at turning these passions – the feelings of resentment and rancor, as well as the lust for revenge – back against the possessor of those feelings. Releasing these emotions against their possessor has the effect of temporally alleviating the person’s misery and depression (his sickness) by relieving and deadening the displeasure that accompanies these states. This unbridling of passions, however, comes at the cost of making the sick sicker and is thus not really a cure (GM III, 15, 17, 20). For this reason Nietzsche calls this kind of priestly medication (and method of domination) “guilty” by modern standards. But, more important for our account, is to notice that this method also shapes in a very specific way the whole tenor of religious organizations. For, contrary to what happens in the judicial institution where the aim is to simply put an end to the violence of the reactive passions, in the case of

⁶² Nietzsche is particularly interested in the Christian priest. But it is clear that throughout most of the sections in the three treatises of the *Genealogy* he is discussing the particular features, role, and character of the ascetic priest who, according to Nietzsche, appears everywhere in almost every age, emerges from all social classes, and does not belong to any one particular race (GM III, 11).

⁶³ In the noble man the reactive passions are discharged in action the moment they arise so they do not consume him. The weak and the sick cannot do this because they are united by a general incapacity for or aversion to action.

religious institutions the aim is often to exploit those reactive passions and to give them full reign, albeit in controlled and modified directions. Thus, in the same way as the unhampered development of justice will foment consciences trained to appreciate actions in a progressively more *impersonal* manner, the development of religious institutions will tend to encourage their subjects to assess all actions (especially those implicated with the reactive passions) in an increasingly *personal* way.

Indeed, in section 20 of the third treatise, Nietzsche speaks in more detail about the particular form that the moralization process we have been discussing acquires when it is taken a step further, and this priestly strategy of unleashing the reactive passions within a person's soul is allowed to develop in its most frightful and damaging way. This new development in the moralization process consists in exploiting the feeling of moral guilt to the point of transforming the person into a sinner. As Nietzsche puts it, "it was only in the hands of the priest, that artist in guilty feelings that [the feeling of guilt] achieved form – oh, what a form! 'Sin' – for this is the priestly name for the animal's 'bad conscience' (cruelty directed backward) – has been the greatest event so far in the history of the sick soul: we possess in it the most dangerous and fateful artifice of religious interpretation" (GM III, 20).⁶⁴ To understand why Nietzsche believes this is so calamitous we need to look more carefully at how the priest achieves this transformation.

⁶⁴ The reader should bear in mind that the ambiguity in Nietzsche's use of the word *Schuld* that was mentioned earlier is perhaps specially conspicuous and difficult to solve in this section of the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche claims that the origin of the *Schuldgefühl* (moral feeling of guilt? or material guilty feeling of being indebted?) had been briefly suggested in the second treatise, as no more than a piece of animal psychology. This coupled with his parenthetical characterization of the bad conscience as cruelty directed backwards, could suggest that he is speaking of a feeling that is implicated with the primitive form of the bad conscience, with the bad conscience in its state *prior* to the moralization process discussed above. If that is so, then *Schuldgefühl* must be construed as a material "guilty feeling of having debts" and not as moral "feeling of guilt." This is the interpretation that Risse favors (Risse, 2001: 77, footnote 23).

The priest introduces the concept of sin as a device to explain the general sense of malaise that is the natural by-product of having a bad conscience. Recall that the possessor of a bad conscience is someone who is constantly discharging his own instinct for freedom (his own artistic cruelty) against himself. One natural outcome of this relentless exercise in psychological cruelty is a general sense of physical and emotional pain that permeates the person's whole being.⁶⁵ Because it is so pervasive, the person that suffers from this kind of pain finds in it no recognizable origin, and this uncertainty, Nietzsche tells us, makes him thirst for reasons and remedies for his general condition. Nietzsche continues: "at last [man] takes counsel with one who knows hidden things, too – and behold! he receives a hint, he receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the *first* hint as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*" (*Ibid.*). From then on the person learns to conceive of himself as a "sinner," as someone who is essentially corrupt, someone who is "guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for" (GM II, 22), someone for whom existence as such is worthless, a being that is nothing other

However, in my judgment this raises the problem of explaining Nietzsche's claim that the priest is an artist in material guilty feelings of being indebted, or that he exploits the material guilty feeling of having debts and gives it the form of sin. If we construe Schuldgefühl as a moral feeling of guilt, these problems can be accounted for more easily. What Nietzsche is suggesting is that the priest takes advantage of the moralization of the concepts of "guilt" and "duty" that, being in the moralizing business of religion, he had already helped to bring about (this is why Nietzsche claims that the priest is an artist in guilty feelings). The priest gives the moral feeling of guilt the form of sin, a molding job that results in the transformation of the moral concept of guilt which, as was argued earlier, applies to the person's particular trespasses, into the concept of sin which applies to the person as a whole, to his full character, to the entire state of his human nature. I think this reading not only makes more sense of the text, but is supported by Nietzsche's use of Schuld throughout this section, where for the most part it seems clear that he means the moral concept of "guilt" and not a material concept.

⁶⁵ This general feeling is probably made even more acute once the bad conscience is transformed into a guilty conscience, since the person can then experience all sorts of mental states like remorse, compunction, contrition and the like, that are bound to shake in profound ways his whole psychic structure and to leave it injured and weakened long after they have passed.

than an evil piece of an equally evil nature (GM II, 21). For the most part, Nietzsche appears to clearly privilege Christianity as the unique inventor of this type of conception of oneself. However, it is important to point out, that the discussion in the *Genealogy* seems to suggest that something of this conception is also found in other religions as well, specifically in Buddhism and the like. In Nietzsche's view, these religions share with Christianity a general nihilistic longing for nothingness and a condemnatory appreciation of existence in general, and the self in particular; they also share with it the fact that they arrive at these forms of valuation *via* the moralization of the material concept of "guilt", *via* its transformation into the moral concept of guilt (*Ibid.*).⁶⁶ This similarity notwithstanding, as was argued earlier, Nietzsche thinks that Christianity represents a pinnacle in the creative use of the moral concepts of guilt and sin, and that it is without a doubt the most fateful exponent of the type of self-crucifixion and self-violation of man that can be achieved by means of them.

The concept of "sin" is the most dangerous artifice of religious interpretation because it embodies a frenzied will to ruin everything that is worth something in life: a will to destroy physical and emotional health, to corrupt taste in culture and the arts, to

⁶⁶ Throughout the *Genealogy* Nietzsche establishes a very strong affinity between Buddhism and Christianity. In the preface, for example, he suggests that under the influence of the morality of pity (Christianity) the European culture is now on the verge of a new Buddhism, a Buddhism for Europeans (GM Preface, 5; see also GM III, 27, where Nietzsche suggests that Christian morality follows an evolutionary process that parallels the one experienced much earlier in the East). In the *Antichrist*, written a year after the *Genealogy*, both religions are still described as belonging together, insofar as they are both nihilistic religions (religions of decadence), but Nietzsche now clearly states that the difference between them is considerable. In particular, he argues that Buddhism "is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity" (A, 20). Unlike the latter, Nietzsche tells us, Buddhism respects reality because it speaks a language that has been purged of moral concepts. Thus, it does not fight against sin, but against suffering (*Ibid.*; see also A, 22-23). Still, even here Nietzsche seems to adhere to the view that these religions follow a similar evolutionary process: what distinguishes Buddhism from Christianity is that the former comes at the end of this evolutionary process, it has already situated itself beyond good and evil, while Christianity, according to Nietzsche, is only now on the verge of such a transformation (see GM III, 27).

castrate the intellect, to distort happiness and beauty, and, in general, to poison once and for all the very essence of existence and the whole of nature through a deplorable tyranny of concepts like “guilt,” “suffering,” “eternal damnation,” “punishment,” and so forth (GM III, 20, 22). According to Nietzsche, after two millennia of exposure to this type of training in the vilification of life, and in self-desecration and abuse, today we find ourselves under siege: “everywhere one looks there is the hypnotic gaze of the sinner, always fixed on the same object (on ‘guilt’ as the *sole* cause of suffering); everywhere the bad conscience ... everywhere the past regurgitated, the fact distorted, the ‘jaundiced eye’ for all action; everywhere the *will* to misunderstand suffering made the content of life, the reinterpretation of suffering as feelings of guilt, fear, and punishment” (GM III, 20). Just how ubiquitous is this type of understanding of oneself and of life, in Nietzsche’s view, is made evident by the last sections of the third treatise of the *Genealogy*, where he describes in more detail the widespread influence of the ascetic ideal. Indeed, Nietzsche avers that this ideal – which lies at the bottom of the priest’s moralizing efforts and provides the impetus for the transformation of the bad conscience (in its guilty form) into the sinful conscience⁶⁷ – infects with its poisonous values even those who think themselves immune to it, like academic scholars and modern scientists (Nietzsche argues that science only combats the external appearance of the ascetic ideal, but in reality constitutes its latest and noblest manifestation as well as its strongest ally) (GM III, 23-25).

⁶⁷ Explaining in more detail the function of the ascetic ideal in the priest’s moralizing efforts requires a more careful analysis of the third treatise than I can give in this essay. In particular, it requires explaining what exactly Nietzsche means by the ascetic ideal. Here I can only remark that, for Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is the ideal in which the ascetic priest has “not only his faith but also his *will*, his *power*, his *interest*” (GM III, 11; my emphasis).

It is not my intention in this essay to evaluate Nietzsche's characterization of the modern human condition and the predicaments of Western culture. Instead, I will now wrap up our discussion of the transformations of the bad conscience by turning to a "healthier" form of moralization that Nietzsche considers towards the end of the second treatise. He attributes this alternative form of moralization to the ancient Greeks, who "for the longest time ... used their gods precisely so as to ward off the 'bad conscience,' so as to be able to rejoice in their freedom of soul – the very opposite of the use to which Christianity put its God" (GM II, 23). Nietzsche had already announced his discussion of this topic in section 19, referring to it as the process of "aristocratization" (Veradligung) and "ennoblement" (Veredelung) of the gods. In order to discuss this issue let us briefly return to a previous point.

Throughout his analysis, particularly in the third treatise, Nietzsche seems to suggest that whenever the moralization process is left largely in the hands of the ascetic priest, the development of the guilty conscience will move inexorably in the direction of sin or any of its nihilistic counterparts.⁶⁸ What level of virulence the sinful (or nihilistic) conscience reaches as a result of this process will depend in large measure on a series of factors that have to do with the idiosyncrasies of each culture. Though, according to Nietzsche, it is Western culture that has excelled the most in this area, as a general rule, no culture escapes the drive towards some form or other of this type of conscience and life-evaluation. After all, as Nietzsche eloquently puts it, "read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence would perhaps lead to the conclusion that the

⁶⁸ Properly speaking, what Nietzsche suggests is that the evolutionary process of the ascetic ideal is the same everywhere, that the ideal's evolution leads to the same conclusion: to a nihilistic withdrawal from existence.

earth was the distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at the themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain – which is probably their only pleasure” (GM III, 11). Still, like most general rules, this one too admits of exceptions; in Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality, the ancient Greeks constitute precisely one such exception.

Why the ancient Greeks were so lucky, is a question that Nietzsche never really answers. He only suggests that they were healthier men, by which he presumably means in part that they were especially resistant to pain and suffering. Their overall healthier constitution, their adaptability and resilience in the face of suffering, must have made the Greeks less susceptible to the pernicious influence of the ascetic ideal and of its mouthpiece, the ascetic priest. However, Nietzsche clearly indicates that this stroke of fortune did not exempt the Greeks from going through a moralization process of their own, albeit one that took on a different form and led them in a very different direction. The originality of the Greeks in this area consisted mainly in taking the concept of guilt along a path that allowed them in the end to understand themselves in terms of “foolishness” and not in terms of “sinfulness” (or the like). Nietzsche invokes the authority of the Homeric Zeus of the *Odyssey* to support this interpretation. In the passage he cites, Zeus is marveling at how the mortals blame the gods for the evils that befall them, when it is clear that they are the ones that bring those evils on themselves because of their “folly” (GM II, 23). After citing this passage, Nietzsche suggests that the ancient Greeks admitted as much of themselves and that they conceded that their

“foolishness” was the reason for much that was bad and calamitous in their lives. Yet, he claims that this admission was not without difficulties. The text at this point is worth quoting extensively. Nietzsche writes:

Even this disturbance in the head, however, presented a problem: “how is it possible? How could it actually have happened to heads such as *we* have, we men of aristocratic descent, of the best society, happy, well-constituted, noble, and virtuous?” – thus noble Greeks asked themselves for centuries *in the face of every incomprehensible atrocity or wantonness with which one of their kind had polluted himself*. “He must have been deluded by a god,” they concluded finally, shaking their heads ... This expedient is *typical* of the Greeks ... In this way the gods served in those days to justify man to a certain extent *even in his wickedness*, they served as the originators of evil – in those days they took upon themselves, not the punishment but, what is *nobler, the guilt* (*Ibid.*; my emphasis).

I want to draw attention to two things in this passage. The first is that the type of Greek Nietzsche is imagining here is not someone who thinks his acts have gone unexpectedly wrong. Instead, he is envisioning someone who thinks that his acts are such that he ought not to have done them. This means that the Greeks Nietzsche is describing in this section have already moralized the material concept of “guilt” and are, thus, in full possession of a moral concept. These Greeks were conscious of being culpable of wrong doing and of treading through very shaky moral grounds. The prospect of being consumed by their guilty conscience was so overwhelming, that not even the maneuver of reinterpreting their immoral acts as being caused by their own stupidity or foolishness seemed to suffice in order to ward it off. A more decisive expedient was needed here. Fortunately for them, the Greeks managed to find a way out of this labyrinth of guilt by laying the blame for their own “foolishness” on their gods. This allowed the Greeks to keep their guilty feelings at bay (or at arm’s length), that is, it allowed them to ban those feelings to the periphery of their psychic structure, to keep them far away from their mind’s eye, as it

were; to remove them from the core of their psyche. In this way, the internal struggle characteristic of the bad conscience (as consciousness of guilt) was diffused and poetically transfigured into a struggle against the gods.⁶⁹

The second thing I wish to highlight about the passage is that Nietzsche claims that there is something ennobling about this expedient of the Greeks: by taking upon themselves the moral guilt, instead of the punishment, the gods are depicted as doing what is more noble. This is not the only place where Nietzsche makes this claim. The phrase recurs in *Ecce Homo*, interestingly, in inversed manner. There, Nietzsche writes: “If one is rich enough for this, it is even a good fortune to be in the wrong. A god who would come to earth must not *do* anything except wrong: not to take the punishment upon oneself but the *guilt* would be divine” (EH, ‘Why I am so Wise’, 5). Thus, whereas in the *Genealogy* taking upon themselves the concept of guilt makes the gods more like noble humans, in *Ecce Homo* it is suggested that adopting the same maneuver would make a human being more like a god. What is intriguing about this remark in both cases is that it implies that there is a way to use the moral concept of guilt (and if so perhaps also the guilty conscience?) for clearly positive purposes. Realizing that the concept of moral guilt can have positive connotations for Nietzsche provides an important clue for understanding the relationship between the sovereign conscience and the guilty conscience.

VI. Conclusion: What of the Puzzle?

⁶⁹ Greek literature is in great measure all about the struggle between the mortals and the gods. In the *Iliad*, for example, the gods constantly intervene in the battles in part because the mortals, by exercising their free will, threaten very often to disrupt their divine plans.

This allows me to transition to the last section of this essay. For, indeed, I now seem to have lost track of the puzzle that instigated this whole discussion. The puzzle, recall, was this: what is the relationship between the scintillating conscience of the sovereign individual and the gloomy conscience of the guilty person?

One thing about this relationship that now seems to have clearly emerged as a result of my analysis is that both forms of conscience are more closely connected than one might expect, and, certainly, more so than most commentators would be prepared to admit or would like to accept. Not only do both forms of conscience require the same set of conditions in order to make them possible (in particular, the prolonged labor of the morality of custom and the emergence of a primitive form of the bad conscience resulting from a reversal of the instinct for freedom), but they both rest on the same conception of oneself, namely, a conception of oneself as the *liable author* of one's own actions. To have a guilty conscience, after all, is to be tormented by what one has done: it is to feel responsible for, and therefore ashamed of, one's own wrongdoings. Similarly, but in a reverse fashion, to have a sovereign conscience is to be gratified by what one has done or is going to do: it is to feel responsible for, and therefore proud of, one's own accomplishments and good deeds and of one's power to bring them about. In this sense, the two forms of conscience are really two sides of a single thing, a single conception; the conception of oneself as a responsible person. Here it might serve us well to stop to consider once again the somewhat treacherous and deceptive nature of Nietzsche's initial remarks in the treatise; a deceptive strategy that he owns up to in *Ecce Homo* by

confessing that in each of the three treatises the beginning “is *calculated* to mislead”(EH, ‘Genealogy of Morals’).

As I mentioned earlier, the beginning is misleading because it promises to be a commentary on a phenomenon that turns out not to be the primary focus of attention in the treatise. But, now we can see that this misdirection betrays a deeper deception: for in drawing this apparent contrast between the sovereign individual and the individual of the guilty conscience, Nietzsche caters to the reader’s prejudices and foments in him a default disposition to treat the two phenomena as absolutely distinct and separate. Among other things, I believe this has had the unfortunate consequence of contributing to a widespread misunderstanding of Nietzsche as someone who opposes the morality of guilt and promotes some other ideal that does not include the feelings and attitudes associated with it. However, the fault for this misunderstanding does not lie primarily in Nietzsche’s strategy but in the reader himself. For we should understand the strategy of misdirection as having a pedagogical aim: Nietzsche is not trying to confound his readers, but is instead attempting to instigate in them the sort of puzzlement that should lead them to question the text, to approach it slowly, to take their time, to put off judgment, in short, to put into practice, and thereby learn, the sort of activities that amount to an exercise in the art of reading well.⁷⁰ Exercising such an art should reveal, I think, the close affinities that exist between the two phenomena that Nietzsche at first appears to treat as being distinct;

⁷⁰ In this connection, it is worth remembering that the preface to the *Genealogy* ends with an exhortation to the reader to practice the art of reading well, an art that requires, as Nietzsche tells us, “something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays ... something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a ‘modern man’: *ruminatio*.” (GM, Preface).

affinities, one may add, that are after all preemptively announced by the very title of the treatise.

One finds independent confirmation of this reading in *Ecce Homo*. Commenting on the new truth that each of the three inquiries of the *Genealogy* reveals, Nietzsche writes: “the *second* inquiry offers the psychology of the *conscience* – which is not, as people may believe, ‘the voice of God in man’: it is the instinct of cruelty that turns back after it can no longer discharge itself externally. Cruelty is here exposed for the first time as one of the most ancient and basic substrata of culture that simply cannot be imagined away” (EH, ‘Genealogy of Morals’). What Nietzsche seems to be asserting here is that the second treatise is actually concerned with the history of what we ordinarily understand by a *conscience*: namely, that internal voice in a person that tells him what is right and wrong with respect to his actions and urges him to act on that knowledge. This claim seems surprising given the analysis of the second treatise pursued in this essay and appears at first to be quite at odds with its results; quite at odds, that is, until one recalls the ending of GM II, 2. There Nietzsche tells us that the proud awareness of the privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of the rare freedom that it represents, has penetrated to the depths of the sovereign individual and has become a dominant instinct, an instinct that the sovereign individuals calls his “*conscience*” (GM II, 2). We can now understand this claim to mean that a conscience, in the ordinary sense in which we understand this word, is precisely the sort of thing that a sovereign individual has in virtue of the rare and extraordinary freedom that he has been endowed with. Why is this so? The answer, I think, is that to be responsible is to be possessed with an internal voice that will stay

one's hand when everything else is pushing one to deviate from the things one has resolved to do. This voice is not something alien to the person who understands himself as a responsible individual, but rather something with which he identifies completely, it is after all, the voice of his freedom, the voice of that extraordinary privilege that he feels is most his own. Of course, to speak to oneself in this voice is also to be liable to its scorn and not just its praise. We can betray the responsibility that comes with our freedom. In doing so, we will come to feel the bite of our own conscience that speaks to us in a recriminating voice and punishes us for not living up to that privilege that has been bestowed upon us. The guilty conscience is thus just the other side of that coin we call responsibility.

This result should make us reassess the way we understand Nietzsche's critique of morality. In the literature it is commonplace to make sense of Nietzsche's critique of morality and his self-proclaimed immoralism by distinguishing between two different conceptions of morality, one of which Nietzsche is taken to reject from the standpoint of the other which he is said to favor.⁷¹ I have no qualms with this strategy of distinguishing between different senses of morality in order to dissolve apparent inconsistencies in Nietzsche's claims about morality, but I do have problems with what gets put in one category or the other. In particular, I take issue with a tendency in the literature to assume that certain things like moral guilt cannot possibly belong to the sort of morality Nietzsche takes himself to recommend to us. To be sure, there are many things Nietzsche says in his writings that contribute to our falling prey to this tendency, not the least of

⁷¹ E.g. For Clark: a narrow and a broad morality. For Leiter: morality in the pejorative and non-pejorative sense. See Clark (1994) and Leiter (1995).

which is his often vitriolic attack on Christian morality (which for many is simply equivalent to an attack on the morality of guilt). However, if the interpretation I have offered here is correct and if we can consider the sovereign individual to be an ideal Nietzsche recommends, or at the very least regards favorably (and it is hard to argue that he does not given the normative language he deploys to describe this individual in the first 3 sections of the second treatise), then we must conclude that moral guilt is not something Nietzsche rejects. For indeed, as has been argued, a moral concept of guilt and a guilty conscience are the sorts of things that a sovereign individual must bear as necessary costs to his being free. He could not enjoy the extraordinary privilege of responsibility without also being susceptible to moral guilt.

That Nietzsche's approach to moral guilt is more nuanced than is usually acknowledged allows us to appreciate better and perhaps solve a puzzle that the opening remarks of the second treatise present to us, but which I have not yet discussed. Nietzsche claims at the beginning of section 1 that the problem of breeding an animal with the right to make promises "has been solved *to a large extent*" (GM II, 1; my emphasis). In saying this, Nietzsche implies that there is still some work to be done in order for the human creature to become truly sovereign: the task is incomplete. How come? What has happened in the course of history to prevent its ripest fruit from being brought forth? Why can man not yet claim sovereignty and feel in his flesh "that sensation of mankind come to completion"? (GM II, 2). Nietzsche's answer is that the moralizing tendencies of the ascetic ideal and the cunning work of its greatest champion, the ascetic priest, has derailed the process and brought to life as the end product of history the sinful

conscience. Modern man cannot be completely sovereign because, for the most part, he is in the grips of an ill-conceived notion of responsibility: he thinks of it in terms of sin.

Earlier I claimed that for Nietzsche the sinful or nihilistic conscience is ubiquitous, it is not confined to religious institutions and religious thinking but spreads even to secular disciplines like modern science. What is characteristic of this form of self-understanding is that it incarnates the ascetic ideal's goal, which Nietzsche describes in the third treatise as a "will to nothingness". Why does the sinful conscience incarnate such a will? A full answer to this question would require a close analysis of the third treatise; here I can only gesture towards what I take the answer to involve. One thing that is manifested by the will to nothingness is a disposition to treat nature and, in particular, all of man's natural inclinations as evil, as something to be extirpated or transcended. In this sense the will to nothingness is a will to "the beyond", to a metaphysical realm of truth located outside of nature. This aspect of the will to nothingness fits well with the notion that religions like Christianity are advocates of the ascetic ideal since they all posit the existence of a transcendent world of truth and happiness that lies outside of the confines of nature. But why would modern science be an ally of an ideal that aspires to the beyond? It seems that science is precisely in the business of combating such metaphysical postulates of a world that exists outside of nature. How can Nietzsche claim that it is in the grips of the ascetic ideal? His answer is that all of science "has at present the object of dissuading man from his former respect for himself, as if this had been nothing but a piece of bizarre conceit. One might even say that its own pride, its own austere form of stoical ataraxy, consists in sustaining this hard-won *self-contempt* of man

as his ultimate and most serious claim to self-respect” (GM III, 25). What makes science ascetic is that it expresses a self-contempt of man: it is thus a more spiritualized and subtle incarnation of the same sort of disposition to treat man as something loathsome and evil. Part of the reason Nietzsche thinks science manifests such a disposition is that it is in the business of showing that our faith in the dignity and uniqueness of man is mistaken. For science, man is nothing more than an animal, literally and without qualification (*Ibid.*). This links this discussion to that of the sovereign conscience, for the latter represents the last reincarnation (or the latest transformation) of the primitive bad conscience, whose birth signaled, as was argued earlier, the real separation of man from nature by making culture and idealization possible. The sovereign individual is the ultimate expression of self-affirmation and self-glorification; he is proud of the power vested in him and thinks of this power as setting him apart from everything and everyone else. This power makes him irreplaceable; a necessary link in the chain of being and culture; in particular, it makes him consider himself as something without which culture would be impossible to sustain and develop to ever new heights.

The will to nothingness is a flight from responsibility that manifests itself in different ways. In essence, it amounts to the belief that one is insignificant, that one is not in control of one’s own life or of one’s own actions. This will has spoiled the fruit that was promised to us as the end result of history. But not all is lost. Nietzsche thinks that the process is reversible and that we can rid ourselves of the sinful conscience that has come to dominate our understanding of ourselves. To do this we require a new ideal that will truly oppose the ascetic ideal. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche seems to suggest that such

an alternative ideal can be found in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. However, interestingly, he also claims that there are other things we could begin to do now in order to contribute to this process of liberation, things which do not require us to construct a new ideal with which to oppose the will to nothingness. Instead, all that this strategy requires is “to wed the bad conscience to all the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short to all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world” (GM II, 24). I take it that the bad conscience Nietzsche speaks about here is not the primitive form of the bad conscience but its fully moralized guilty form. In other words, the suggestion here is that we can use the apparatus of moral guilt that our conscience is now equipped with, in order to learn to feel moral outrage at our tendency to fall prey to the sorts of dispositions that the ascetic ideal promotes in us. Doing this does not require that we posit a new ideal in its stead, but it does require that we not think there is something wrong with feeling guilty.

Chapter 4

On Wholeness

I.

In several places throughout his published works Nietzsche seems to recommend some sort of ideal of wholeness or unity to his readers. Perhaps the most poignant formulation of this ideal is the one given in a well known aphorism of the section entitled “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” in *Twilight of the Idols*. There Nietzsche praises Goethe for being a truly Dionysian spirit who managed to realize in his own self the ideals of a higher humanity. “What he wanted,” Nietzsche tells us, “was *totality*; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will ... he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself” (TI, ‘Skirmishes’, 49). Some aphorisms earlier he had written that “today the individual still has to be made possible by being *pruned*: possible here means *whole*” (TI, ‘Skirmishes’, 41).

We find similar notions expressed in other books too. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, we are told that today a philosopher “would be compelled to find the greatness of man, the concept ‘greatness,’ precisely in his range and multiplicity, in his

wholeness in manifoldness” (BGE, 212).⁷² We hear Zarathustra also advocate an ideal of wholeness when he proclaims in one of his discourses: “Physician, heal thyself: then wilt thou also heal thy patient. Let it be his best cure to see with his eyes him who maketh himself whole” (Z I, The Bestowing Virtue, 2); and even more poignantly when he describes himself as one who “walks amongst men as amongst fragments and limbs of human beings” and one who aims through all his poetization and aspiration “to compose and collect into unity what is fragment and riddle and fearful chance” (Z II, Redemption).⁷³

Nor is this preoccupation with wholeness one that lies exclusively in Nietzsche’s so called “late period.” The idea can be found expressed in the books of the “middle period” as well. In aphorism 78 of *The Gay Science*, for example, he praises artists for having taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes, the art of staging and watching ourselves, and concludes by suggesting that a similar merit could perhaps be conceded to “the religion that made men see the sinfulness of every single individual through a magnifying glass ... By surrounding him in eternal perspectives, it taught man to see himself from a distance as something past and whole” (GS, 78). In *Human all Too Human*, he welcomes and commends the transformation that sees the true sign of morality not in the impersonal nature of actions, as has hitherto been the case, but in their personal character: “to make a whole *person* of oneself and keep in mind that person’s

⁷² In aphorism 257 of the same book, Nietzsche seems to suggest that wholeness is a distinctive trait of aristocratic natures, one whose history can be traced back to the fact that the predominance of the noble caste in primitive societies was not due mainly to their physical strength but to their strength of soul, to their being “*wholer men (ganzeren Menschen)*”.

⁷³ Zarathustra will recall this point later in the third part of the book, where we find him saying: “I taught them all my poetization and aspiration: to compose into unity what is fragment in man, and riddle and fearful chance” (Z III, Old and New Tables, 3).

greatest good in everything one does—this takes us further than any pitying impulses and actions for the sake of others” (HAH I, 95).

Yet, despite the undeniable presence of this ideal in Nietzsche’s work, his concern with wholeness has received little direct attention in the secondary literature. Part of the explanation for this is familiar enough. Nietzsche rarely treats a topic in a sustained manner, which coupled with the fragmented, aphoristic style of his writing, makes the task of interpreting his allusions to an ideal of wholeness extremely difficult. The situation is aggravated by the fact that, even if the ideal is clearly present throughout all the periods of his productive life, the unambiguous and direct references to this ideal in Nietzsche’s published work seem few and far between. Moreover, the most popular of these references is the one with which I began. Perhaps influenced by an excessive reliance on this aphorism from *Twilight of the Idols*, which seems to establish a relation of equivalence between creating oneself and realizing an ideal of wholeness of some sort, commentators have tended to assume without argument that becoming whole is just another way of naming that ideal that looms much more emphatically over Nietzsche’s writings: the ideal of becoming who or what one is. The result is that most of the focus has centered on trying to understand what it means to become who one is in a way that derivatively allows us to make sense of the injunction to become whole. In other words, the tendency has been to explain the injunction to wholeness in the light of an understanding of what is required to become what one is.

In this paper I propose to reverse this order of explanation. I want to see if there is some interpretation of the ideal of wholeness in the offing that can stand on its own, and that, perhaps, can then be used to shed some light on what becoming what one is might mean. In pursuing this strategy, I do not take myself to be arguing against the claim that these are just two different names for the same ideal. They may well amount in the end to the same thing, but I prefer to initially treat them as separate and to concentrate on the one that purports to be about wholeness. In order to do this, I will set my investigation against the background of what I take to be the most influential and current interpretations of the injunction to become whole, bearing in mind that they are not necessarily consciously intended as interpretations of this ideal. I will distinguish two broad camps: one that has a more or less well established tradition and whose principal exponent is perhaps Alexander Nehamas, and another that, though not yet fully articulated, seems to be looming in the horizon and has begun to gain strength in the figure of those who defend a “scientific naturalist” Nietzsche and whose main spokesmen are perhaps Mathias Risse and Brian Leiter. After briefly presenting these interpretations I will turn to an examination of Nietzsche’s most sustained discussion on this topic, namely, that which is found in his *Untimely Meditations*. Because it is located in Nietzsche’s “early period,” the interpretation of the ideal of wholeness that I will provide faces some difficulties that I will raise at the end of this paper and which, though I may not be able to fully answer, I will nonetheless attempt to deflate to some extent.

Let me turn then to the first camp, which I will call the “aesthetic” camp, and to what has been probably the most influential interpretation of the idea of wholeness to

date. I refer to Nehamas's treatment of this topic in his book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.⁷⁴

II.

The guiding thought of Nehamas's interpretation consists in the suggestion that Nietzsche's model for understanding the world and the objects within it – both organic and inorganic – is the literary text and the rules that govern its structure, interpretation and composition (Nehamas, 1985: 90). One virtue of Nehamas's view is that, by deploying this model, he is able to construct a compelling reading of Nietzsche's philosophy that accounts for the notoriously obscure doctrines of the Will to Power and the Eternal Recurrence in an integrated and coherent way. On his reading the Will to Power is understood as a doctrine about the inextricable interconnectedness of everything in the world, while the Eternal Recurrence amounts to a psychological doctrine about the

⁷⁴ Above I said that the ideal of wholeness, while widely recognized as part of Nietzsche's moral psychology, for the most part has not been treated as a topic of its own, but has been handled tangentially in conjunction with the interpretation of becoming who or what one is. One exception in this regard is the important study by Lucy Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung: the Whole Self in the Union of Opposites*, which actually alludes to a concept of wholeness in its very title (see Huskinson, 2004). Huskinson's book belongs to a tradition of commentators that have sought to explore the relation between Nietzsche's thought and psychoanalysis; people such as Paul Bishop (1995), Graham Parkes (1994), and, especially, Patricia Dixon (1999) whose work Huskinson engages with the most, in a relation of both opponent and ally, characterizing her own arguments as more thorough and profound explorations of the sort of aim pursued by Dixon: the aim of demonstrating that the quest for wholeness, which is the central theme in Jung's work, is also the principal thread that runs through the entire fabric of Nietzsche's philosophy. Because of its roots in psychoanalysis, this tradition interprets the ideal of wholeness as an ideal of psychic unity or integration. In turn, this means that the sort of interpretations offered by these commentators, and, in particular, that offered by Huskinson, share many features with Nehamas's own. Since the latter is rooted more squarely in the philosophical tradition and is also better known, I have chosen it as representative of the camp I will be discussing first, instead of focusing on Huskinson's study which might seem *prima facie* to be more relevant given the topic I am exploring here. When appropriate, I will refer to Huskinson's book. Here it suffices to say that one important difference between the two is that Huskinson tries to incorporate the notion that there is an unconscious and irrational element to the process of becoming whole, whereas for Nehamas the process seems to be regulated by purely rational and self-reflective considerations.

nature of the self according to which the self is something that has to be created through the integration of everything that one has done into a coherent whole. I cannot do full justice here to Nehamas's arguments for these claims, but I will briefly characterize the place the two doctrines occupy in Nehamas's understanding of the process of self-creation.

The main lesson Nehamas's draws from Nietzsche's doctrine of the Will to Power is that the world is not constituted by metaphysically abiding substances or unities. The world is a world of becoming in which everything is essentially interconnected and in constant flux. If any sort of permanence can be discerned and if we can speak of "things" in the world, it is because of the effects of the activity that constitutes the world at its most fundamental level, the activity Nietzsche calls Will to Power. This activity determines the fundamental character of objects in the world: those objects are constituted by the sum of the effects they have on other objects which in turn are constituted by the sum of the effects they have on other objects, and so on (Nehamas, 1985: 79-81). Although this sum provides a kind of unity to the objects in question, it is in no way equivalent to a metaphysical unity, since said sum is constantly altering during the life-span of the object and nothing is left over beyond it.

This interpretation shapes in important ways Nehamas's subsequent discussion of the process of self-creation. Since the self is also an object in the world, for Nehamas the problem becomes how to understand meaningfully Nietzsche's idea that the self can and should achieve unity through a process of self-creation given the absence of metaphysical

unity. Nehamas's solution is to distinguish between the sort of unity the self has as part of the world and the psychological unity that it can achieve by the process of self-creation. Strictly speaking, as part of the world, the self is simply the totality of its experiences and actions, understood as the effects of its activity on other objects, including other selves, and the effects of those objects on it. For Nehamas, this means that there is no way to distinguish noteworthy from inconsequential actions and experiences, since all of them without exception are essential to who and what one is. But if this is true from the perspective of the world as Will to Power, there is still room, psychologically speaking, to shape the nature of the self, for the *significance* of one's actions and experiences can still be variable and, thus, *what* nature they serve to constitute is, according to Nehamas, always an open question (Nehamas, 1985: 154-158). The variation is introduced by the way in which each person interprets the actions that attach to his own life, by the way in which he fits those actions into a pattern that is characteristic of his own conduct as he understands it or wishes it to be.

On Nehamas's story, then, the self-creation that Nietzsche espouses consists in the interpretative act of accepting everything that one has done and blending it into a coherent whole that is so unified that nothing can be removed from it without making that whole crumble (Nehamas, 1985: 191). For Nehamas, the limiting case of this act of integration is given by the test of Eternal Recurrence. If the person is willing to repeat his life exactly as it has been without removing anything from it, then he must have assembled everything he has done into a unity that merits such acceptance. The mark of a successful self-creation consists in the ability to admit that everything one has done

constitutes who one is and to accept responsibility for it. Our freedom in self-creation manifests itself in our not wanting things to be otherwise (Nehamas, 1985: 190-191). According to Nehamas, this is precisely the sort of achievement Nietzsche credits Goethe for realizing in the aforementioned passage from *Twilight of the Idols*.

For our purposes, the chief thing to emphasize about this interpretation is the particular character of the ideal of wholeness or unity that Nehamas arrives at and attributes to Nietzsche. The unity that is emblematic of a successful process of self-creation is one that consists in a kind of psychic refashioning or restructuring whose primary goal is the organization of the various parts that comprise the personality of each individual into a coherent and harmonious whole. Following a suggestion in *Zarathustra*, Nehamas claims that the correct analog for this kind of unity is provided by the organism, more precisely, by the body. The body, when working properly, is a multiplicity that is organized harmoniously: the various parts have needs and fulfill purposes that are not, usually, in conflict with each other but rather work together to ensure the proper functioning of the organism as a whole. As it is with the body, so it should be with the soul. It too should consist in the coordination and cooperation of its multiple elements, which in this case comprise things like instincts, desires, thoughts, and actions. One important difference with the body is that in the soul those elements often conflict with each other. However, when the soul has been properly unified, this multiplicity is controlled and a higher order accord is imposed among the different aspects of the personality directing them toward a common end or goal (Nehamas, 1985: 180-182).

As I mentioned previously, this has probably been the most influential interpretation of Nietzsche's practical philosophy to date. To be sure, many commentators take issue with various aspects of Nehamas's reconstruction, but they tend to agree with the two main features of his reading: the first is that Nietzsche recommends an ideal of agency (that, for our purposes, turns out to be also an ideal of unity or wholeness) which consists in some kind of psychic organization of the personality; and the second is that this organization is not something given to the agent naturally, but something that he must freely achieve through a process of self-creation.⁷⁵ The second of these features is the main target of the other camp I will discuss here and which, for convenience's sake, I will call the "naturalist" camp.

Perhaps the person that has done the most to advance a "naturalist" interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of the sort relevant for our purposes here is Brian Leiter.⁷⁶ According to Leiter, Nietzsche belongs to a tradition of philosophers who were greatly influenced by the methods and principles of the natural sciences and adopted a thoroughgoing materialist outlook in their theorizing. The main tenet of Leiter's position is that Nietzsche should be construed as a causal essentialist, that is, as someone who believes that there are essential properties that necessarily determine the space of possible trajectories that a person can traverse in his lifetime. Under this interpretation, Nietzsche's injunction to become who or what one is, turns out to be a description of the process whereby a person becomes what, according to his essential attributes, he was

⁷⁵See, for example, Schacht (1992); Gemes and Janaway (2006).

⁷⁶ See Leiter (2002).

always causally determined to become (Leiter, 2002).⁷⁷ On Leiter's interpretation, then, Nietzsche's commitment to naturalism leads him to reject altogether the concept of free will and the cluster of notions associated with it, such as those of guilt and responsibility. Instead of understanding himself in terms of those categories, a person who endorses Nietzsche's doctrines learns to conceive of himself – in Nietzschean parlance – as an utterly necessary being, as a piece of destiny.⁷⁸ Such a person will replace the usual explanations of agential behaviors (his own and that of others) with naturalistic descriptions that capture the phenomena in physiological and biological terms.

However, since it is undeniable that Nietzsche emphasizes the themes of freedom and self-creation in his philosophy, to be complete this “naturalist” interpretation must also provide a revisionist account of those concepts, one that can preserve the meaningful usage Nietzsche gives them while, at the same time, placing them within a perspective that answers traditional philosophical questions on the basis of a scientific or naturalistic outlook. Thus, for instance, Leiter interprets Nietzsche's description of the sovereign individual as “autonomous” in the second treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals* in a way

⁷⁷ Although I say “causally determine,” Leiter is careful to point out that the causal determinism involved here need not be understood as including a commitment to the existence of laws of nature. This is what distinguishes it, according to Leiter, from classical determinism which usually involves belief in such laws. Nonetheless, the main point remains the same in both positions, namely, that a person's so called free choices are the necessary result of causal processes over which they have no control, regardless of whether such processes are governed by laws of nature or not.

⁷⁸ A significant portion of the textual support that is used in defense of this “naturalist” interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy is found in various sections of *Twilight of the Idols*. Apart from the passages on Goethe found in the section “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, which I will discuss shortly, two other excerpts are used to buttress the reading I am discussing here: one is found in the section “Morality as Anti-Nature” where Nietzsche says that “the single human being is a piece of *fatum* from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be” (TI, ‘Morality’, 6); the other is taken from the section “The Four Great Errors” in which Nietzsche asserts that “one is necessary, one is a piece of destiny, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole” (TI, ‘Errors’, 8; translation altered). I flag these passages here, because I will have occasion to provide a different interpretation of them later on.

that fits Nietzsche's alleged "naturalism" by insisting that he is using familiar terms in unfamiliar ways: for Leiter autonomy in this case simply means necessity and regularity of behavior (Leiter, 2002: 227-228).⁷⁹ Another somewhat more elaborate version of this highly revisionist strategy is offered by Mathias Risse, who shares Leiter's "naturalist" perspective and has written a number of essays in defense of this reading of Nietzsche's philosophy. In order to explain how Nietzsche can be a philosopher of freedom while also being a determinist and an incompatibilist, Risse develops a Spinozistic interpretation according to which freedom is measured in terms of degrees of power possessed by the agent (Risse, 2007: 75).⁸⁰ Said degrees of power are causally determined in their entirety and consists in the increase in the number of causal relations that run through the agent.

But what about the ideal that is the focus of our investigation? If the "naturalist" camp offers a revisionist account of the Nietzschean concepts associated with the notions of self-creation and freedom, how does it interpret his ideal of wholeness? To my knowledge the only one who has tackled this issue is Risse. In a couple of articles devoted to the critique of Kantian ethics and the advancement of a Nietzschean alternative, Risse touches on the problem of wholeness. Importantly, for Risse this problem is part of a more general issue that has to do with the unity of agency, or with the answer to the question of what allows an agent to think of himself as *one* agent (Risse,

⁷⁹ To advance this claim Leiter needs to equate the sovereign individual with the individual that is the result of the prolonged labor of the morality of custom, an equation that has become commonplace among commentators of the *Genealogy*. I argue against this interpretation in Chapter two.

⁸⁰ It is not at all in clear in my mind why this camp wants to make Nietzsche into an incompatibilist and not a compatibilist or why the revisionist strategy does not amount to a compatibilist view. I obviously leave it to those who are interested in defending this version of Nietzsche's philosophy to clarify this issue.

2007: 76-80). More specifically, the ideal of wholeness is the complement to Nietzsche's conception of agential unity as the joint presence in one body of a complex structure of drives and affects with shared memories and cognitive capacities. What the realization of the ideal of wholeness signals is a particular instance of this kind of agential unity or integration; one that Risse calls *Wohlgeratenheit* – well-turn-out-ness (Risse, 2007: 77). The ideally unified agent exhibits a kind of physiological co-functionality within his organism: in him, everything works well together; he is mentally and physiologically well-balanced and stable (*Ibid.*). According to Risse, the individual who has turned out well is characterized by the successful integration of various elements of his personality into a single pattern and the absence of internal psychological and physiological turmoil. The chief example in this regard is again Goethe. Risse emphasizes two things about Nietzsche's description of Goethe in the aforementioned passage of *Twilight of the Idols*: on the one hand, Goethe instantiates a healthy self-centeredness and self-assuredness that manifests itself in the integration of various parts of his personality into a whole through which he is able to find peace of mind and to rest in himself; on the other hand, Goethe is a fatalist who comprehends and accepts his place in the causal web that comprises the whole universe (Risse, 2007: 78-79). For Risse, this second aspect of Nietzsche's ideal of wholeness supports the first: the person who has turned out well is able to self-assuredly rest in himself because he embraces a fatalistic attitude through which he understands himself as a part of a causal web that relieves him of any thoughts of responsibility, blame, and guilt (Risse, 2007: 80).

This fatalistic feature is one that sets Risse's reading most at odds with the aesthetic interpretation we discussed previously. Indeed, what distinguishes both camps is that the former, but not the latter, believes that wholeness is an achievement attributable to the free agency of the person. However, despite this important difference, both camps share certain things in common: on the one hand, for both the ideal of wholeness is an ideal of psychic unity and integration; it consists in the harmonious structuring of the mental phenomena that comprise the person and make up his personality. On the other, both interpret this psychic integration as a sort of backward-looking event. For both camps wholeness is solely the result of the interplay of past and present considerations, or the working out of the past in the present: for Nehamas it consists in the active unification of one's past with one's present, while for Risse it consists in the fortunate, but wholly passive, manifestation of past physiological determinants in one's present state of being. What is absent in both positions is the notion that the future may play an important role in the person's process of becoming whole.⁸¹ As we shall see later this is an important aspect of Nietzsche's account.

III.

Having set these two frameworks in place, we can now test them against Nietzsche's earlier preoccupation with wholeness in his *Untimely Mediations*. One striking feature of these four books is that infused throughout them all is a concept that also seems to lie at the heart of the ideal of wholeness, namely the concept of unity. The

⁸¹ Indeed, for Nehamas the future constitutes a danger to the ideal of wholeness, since future events and actions that one may perform could prove to be impossible to unify or integrate with the self one has fashioned for oneself (Nehamas, 1985: 185).

notion of unity had, of course, already played an important role in Nietzsche's first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. There it figures prominently in descriptions of the phenomenon of the Dionysian: an artistic, religious and metaphysical element or reality in which the person is stripped of his individuality and absorbed back into the Primordial One, where he finds redemption in a mystic feeling of unity with nature and his fellow men. What I think is distinctive about Nietzsche's discussion of unity both in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in the *Untimely Meditations*, is its connection to the theme of redemption: unity is the thing that justifies the individual person's life, that gives meaning to his being and furnishes some type of consolation in the face of the absurdity of existence and death. This provides an important clue for understanding the ideal of wholeness and I will return to it later.

In the first meditation, entitled *David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*, the concept of unity appears briefly, but significantly, in Nietzsche's bold and strange thesis that "culture is, above all, unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people" (UM I, 1). Nietzsche uses this definition to castigate the false complacency of the "cultivated" German nationalists who – following the foundation of the second German Reich in the aftermath of Prussia's victory over France in the Franco-Prussian war – were convinced that world events had proven the superiority of their culture and had vindicated the greatness of German taste and ideas. Against these conceited and self-deluded chauvinists, Nietzsche argued that there was no culture to speak of in Germany. Instead, he claimed, one found a fragmented and pastiche society, resting merely on empty forms and incapable of giving expression to any true or genuine inwardness.

Although in this first meditation Nietzsche does not bother to elaborate or explain what he means by his somewhat cryptic definition of culture, he reaffirms it again in the next book, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. This time Nietzsche took special care to warn the reader not to misunderstand this definition as implying an antithesis between beautiful and barbaric style; as if having a culture meant simply exhibiting a uniformity of pleasing and beautiful modes of aesthetic expression or an agreement in artistic techniques. This constitutes a superficial way of rendering the thesis. Instead, Nietzsche insists that “what is meant [by this thesis] is that a people to whom one attributes a culture has to be in all reality a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form” (UM II, 4). What does Nietzsche mean by this statement? And how can one tell whether a living unity among these things (content and form) exists or has been achieved? Interestingly, Nietzsche discusses these issues in the context of furthering the indictment that “cultivated” Germans and German culture in general suffer from a “weak personality.” What defines this weakness in personality is precisely the antithesis between interior and exterior: to be weak is to incarnate a being in which content and form fail to correspond to one another (*Ibid.*).

How exactly is it that this failure of correspondence manifests itself? The answer Nietzsche gives to this question in the second meditation is bound up with a complicated argument about history and its relation to the individual human being, as it has come to be understood and practiced by modern historiographers. I cannot do full justice to that argument in the space of this essay. For our purposes it suffices to say that, in essence,

Nietzsche's quarrel with contemporary historians in this work boils down to the claim that they pose a real threat to life because they have made history into a positivistic science that is concerned with knowledge of the past for its own sake: modern historians have transformed history into an exercise for emasculated individuals, who suck the life out of everything that they touch and are at the brink of becoming walking corpses themselves (*Ibid.*). These individuals reveal their weakness precisely in their incapacity to put history into creative use and their tendency to turn history itself into a creative wasteland; their weakness is a kind of impotence. As Nietzsche provokingly puts it, "this is a race of eunuchs, and to a eunuch one woman is like another, simply a woman, woman in herself" (UM II, 5). The sexual language that Nietzsche employs here is no accident. Truth – *all truth*; whether historical, or biological, or psychological, and so on – is a woman⁸², Nietzsche asserts: it desires individuals who are strong enough to conquer and engender something out of her; it wants to be inseminated and give birth to the future.

Here Nietzsche is sounding a theme that he will continue to hammer throughout his intellectual life: that the unconditional will to truth, the pursuit of truth at all costs and for its own sake, is a sign of sickness.⁸³ It is worth dwelling a little further on this point, since this sickness is equivalent to the weakness of personality we are searching after. By focusing on it we can hopefully uncover and be able to understand the failure of correspondence between content and form that so worries Nietzsche. Surmising the arguments in the second meditation, I think one can extract the following ways in which

⁸² See also BGE, Preface.

⁸³ For more on the unconditional will to truth, see GS, 344.

the unconditional will to truth manifests itself in modern historiography: first, it foments a mistaken notion of “objectivity” according to which to be objective means having a disinterested relation to one’s object of study (UM II, 6). The investigator of history according to this model should be a dispassionate spectator of past and present events; he should capture them as they happened or are happening without ever interposing his own subjectivity (or personality) in the matter. His operations should be analogous to those of a photographic camera that generates, through a purely passive medium, true reproductions of the phenomena it captures (*Ibid.*). This objectivity, Nietzsche claims, leads historians “to tolerance, to allowing validity to what they cannot deny happened, to explaining away and extenuating” (*Ibid.*); characteristics, he claims, that are often interpreted as indications that historians possess the highest virtue of all, namely, justice. But this interpretation is of course mistaken: the type of objectivity that modern historians are proud of has nothing to do with true justice.⁸⁴ To be just, according to Nietzsche, is to exercise power of judgment correctly, and this is opposite to being “disinterested”. On the contrary, the individual who imparts justice is someone who, far from according equal validity to everything that happened, is in the business of discriminating and appraising the past in order to adjudicate and evaluate its importance. “Only superior strength can judge,” Nietzsche claims, “weakness is obliged to tolerate” (*Ibid.*).

The second and related feature of modern history that Nietzsche decries is its preoccupation with the accumulation of facts. Contemporary history pursues two tasks

⁸⁴ In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche continues this quarrel against the modern notion of objectivity and the tendency to imagine the concept of justice in terms of it. See GM II, 11.

that are related to this feature and it pursues them as if they were ends in themselves: one results from treating history on the model of the natural sciences and consists in the goal of uncovering the “laws of history”, those generalizations that explain human actions in terms analogous to the mechanisms that operate in the natural world, of which human history is simply a subdivision (*Ibid.*). The other is the collection of the events that are underlain by such laws in a comprehensive registry or encyclopedia of history that, going back to Nietzsche’s metaphor above, can be likened to a photographic album in which all the empirically veridical moments of reality are contained and displayed (UM II, 4). The essential problem with these two tasks is similar to the one contained in the modern notion of “objectivity” and that is that they constitute purely passive attitudes with respect to the past. Nietzsche insists that the importance of history cannot reside in uncovering banal generalizations about human behavior that do not mean anything to the person who studies them, other than as curious trinkets of knowledge to be talked about; instead the value of history lies in taking past events and extracting meaningful and comprehensive symbols from them that “[disclose] in the original theme a whole world of profundity, power and beauty” (UM II, 6).⁸⁵ Past events should be appropriated by the historian in order to produce “effects”, they should not become the objects of pure “critical” musings that only generate further “critical” musings and that leave everything as it was before (UM II, 5). For the same reason, the goal of the historian cannot be to simply collect information about what has happened. Insofar as history is used in this way, it contributes to foment a form of spiritual dyspepsia that leads again to stagnation.

⁸⁵ Some sections later, we find the following remark concerning this issue: “What, can statistics prove that there are laws in history? Laws? They certainly prove how vulgar and nauseatingly uniform the masses are: but are the effects of inertia, stupidity, mimicry, love and hunger to be called laws? Well, let us suppose they are: that, however, only goes to confirm the proposition that so far as there are laws in history the laws are worthless and the history is also worthless” (UM II, 9).

As Nietzsche puts it, “knowledge, consumed without a hunger for it and even counter to one’s needs, now no longer acts as an agent for transforming the outside world but remains concealed within a chaotic inner world” (UM II, 4). The problem with an unconditional pursuit of knowledge and truth, then, is physiological: it is like ingesting things that do not stimulate the organism’s nourishment, but lay rumbling or dormant in the belly.

Finally, Nietzsche focuses on a third feature of modern history that he thinks is symptomatic of the weakness of personality afflicting German culture, namely, its total submission to Hegelianism. On this view, history is seen as a narrative of the progressive unfolding of reason and freedom. It is the account of how the human race emerged from primitive chaos and barbarism and gradually developed with logical necessity into the highest and strongest form of order and civilization. On this interpretation, modern culture is regarded as the end point and completion of this story, the final rung in which genuine freedom is realized and actualized most fully (UM II, 8). For Nietzsche, the effect of this type of conception of oneself and one’s relation to history is of the worst kind, since it makes us utterly passive and resigned to accept things as they are. He insists that in itself there is nothing wrong with considering oneself a latecomer of previous ages, insofar as this serves as a spur for life and leads to action; otherwise, it is a danger and a disease. Worst of all when we not only consider ourselves the inheritors of the past, the necessary fruit of a historical process, but with unbridled pride elevate ourselves to the godlike status of perfected beings in which the ultimate goal of world-history is fulfilled (*Ibid.*). This sort of arrogance is comical, and Nietzsche thinks he can discern in

it an ironic self-awareness that eventually leads to a cynicism and to a practical egoism that destroys the forces of life. The irony is that deep down the modern historian knows that there is nothing to rejoice about in this alleged self-completion of history, and he harbors the presentiment that our hopes and energies may not survive into the future (UM II, 9). Many find refuge from this awareness and fear by taking a step further and embracing a cynical attitude that Nietzsche finds epitomized in a phrase he takes from Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*: "the total surrender of the personality to the world-process" (Hartmann, 1869: 638). In essence, the cynicism inherent in this phrase, as Nietzsche understands it, consists in the belief that the individual is nothing but a cog in the machine of the world-process which will be served no matter what the individual does or fails to do (*Ibid.*). For Hartmann there is a promise of redemption that comes with the realization of the utter powerlessness of the individual: the redemption from the suffering and absurdity of existence by the painlessness of non-being, by the complete extinction of the personality, by the cultural nihilism of the will to nothingness. In my view, all this anticipates the theme of the third treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals* on the ascetic ideal, whose fundamental character and goal is precisely the will to nothingness.

Although earlier Nietzsche had announced a connection between this cynical mood and the development of a practical egoism that paralyzes and destroys the forces of life⁸⁶, by the time he gets around to discussing it, he does not actually develop that connection in detail. In the last sections of the meditation he simply asserts that this kind of historical approach he has been discussing (bent on writing history from the standpoint

⁸⁶ See, UM II, 5.

of the masses and the laws that move them), prepares the way for “systems of individualist egoism, brotherhoods for the rapacious exploitation of the non-brothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity” (UM II, 9). And he laments later on that “mankind seems near to discovering that the egoism of individuals, groups or the masses has at all times been the lever of the movements of history; at the same time, however, this discovery has caused no perturbation of any kind, but on the contrary it has now been decreed: egoism shall be our god” (*Ibid.*). What Nietzsche fails to explain, however, is how these things are connected; an explanation that is made all the more urgent given the previous analysis: after all, as we just saw, Nietzsche believes that modern history foments cultural nihilism, that is, it furthers a will to nothingness that spells out the utter extinction of the personality, the annihilation of all individual willing. But now he seems to contradict this claim by suggesting that modern history actually leads to an exacerbated egoism that *prima facie* seems to be the opposite of a renunciation of all individual willing. Is there a way to reconcile these two views?

To answer this question we need to take a step back and observe that the thing that unites all these criticisms that we have been discussing is Nietzsche’s preoccupation with the way modern historical practice contributes to a dangerous passivity of the will. This is the essence of that weakness of personality whose scrutiny we hoped would allow us to interpret Nietzsche’s claims about unity (between inner and outer, content and form). But what does this passivity of the will have to do with the petty egoism Nietzsche speaks about towards the end of the second meditation? What does it have to do with utilitarian vulgarity? Above I claimed that for Nietzsche this passivity of the will amounts

to a will to nothingness, whose fundamental character, at the individual level, crops up as a renunciation of the personality. Such a renunciation can take place in a variety of ways. I have mentioned some already: for instance, as a completely disinterested pursuit of truth and knowledge; or as the adoption of a purely contemplative disposition toward the past; or as the disposition to become tolerant of everyone and everything and to relinquish one's power of judgment; or as the lack of belief in one's capacity to affect things (the cynical attitude); to name a few. But this renunciation of the will can also manifest itself in a slavish tendency to adopt the received conventions of society and in the individual's complacent search after comfort and ease. This latter permutation is the one that I think links the will to nothingness to the petty practical egoism that Nietzsche attributes to our modern nihilistic culture. Modern life is ruled and defined by the pursuit of individual wellbeing and pleasure: what people desire is relief from the exigencies of life. If we labor, it is in order to procure the monetary security that will allow us to comfortably afford those things that we take to be the ultimate goals of life, namely, food, shelter, recreation, and the like. For Nietzsche, this means that we are preoccupied with a life that has been degraded to the most vulgar level, a life that mistakenly believes that the maximization of happiness and of egoistic concerns can justify and give meaning to one's existence. This is a life whose overarching goal is not action, but rather the opposite of action: rest. As such, it is a life that is geared toward a practical egoism that, in common with the cynical mood we discussed earlier, seeks the renunciation of the personality and the abandonment of the individual's will.

Instead of seeking to give expression to his individuality by revealing in external form his interior self, the person who settles for this kind of life loses himself in the pursuit of goals that are meant to satiate or satisfy his animal nature, that is, the part of him that is less suited to make him distinct or to manifest his own creative willing.⁸⁷ Notice that this means that the practical egoism that Nietzsche is talking about shares with the unconditional will to truth a general incapacity to nourish or stimulate the spirit into creative activity. The goal in both cases is either to appease the interior self that seeks to express itself in outward movement or to fill it with things that will simply rumble in its entrails, keeping it distracted from becoming a unity (i.e. finding a form that will truly correspond to his own interior). I think this also allows us to see that the failure of correspondence we have been investigating is a kind of evasion of responsibility. Each of us has been endowed with an interior that is uniquely our own, a spiritual nature that must be expressed outwardly in an authentic fashion. Unifying oneself, then, is a matter of being true to one's inner drive and fashioning for it a form that will genuinely correspond to it, and in this way manifest one's unique personality. Failing to do so is, in a sense, failing to execute a task that has been entrusted to each of us alone. Since it is a task that is always within our reach, the individual that persists in being a fragmented entity in which outer form fails to correspond to an inner content, is guilty of this failure

⁸⁷ In this connection it is worth remembering that the second meditation begins with a reflection about animal happiness and its relation to the capacity to live unhistorically (see UM II, 1). Nietzsche claims that this kind of happiness is no longer possible for us because we also have an obverse capacity to live historically (to remember and recycle lived experience). This is why human beings often envy the happiness of the animal. Yet, we should not allow our envy to dictate the course of our lives and make us think mistakenly that our happiness resides in approximating this animal condition or that we can find redemption from the suffering of existence by satiating our own animality. Human beings have become unique and distinct from the rest of nature precisely by their power to set limits to the unhistorical element in which nature breathes, thereby developing and giving free reign to their spiritual nature. Descending to the animal level again means renouncing our own uniqueness and living a life that is false and inauthentic. According to Nietzsche, instead of doing this what we need to do is find the right balance between the historical and unhistorical aspects of our being. See also UM III, 5, where Nietzsche claims that "man is necessary for the redemption of nature from the curse of the life of the animal".

and can thus be described as living a life that is in constant flight from responsibility and maturity; a life that is, in Nietzschean terms, contrary to all new planting, bold experimentation, and free aspiration.

I think this brief analysis allows us to understand somewhat better Nietzsche's cryptic concept of unity and its opposite, the failure of correspondence between inner and outer, content and form. Since the weakness of personality is in a kind of escapism that seeks to avoid active and independent willing, the failure of correspondence Nietzsche is referring to consists, as I have indicated, in a failure to manifest in outward form, that is, by way of action, one's innermost drive to freedom and responsibility. In other words, by the inner content that can fail to find correspondence in an outer form, I take Nietzsche to mean the person's will itself and the energies that compose it. When those energies are manifested in a healthy manner, the outer form of the individual becomes a true expression of that will, and the person can be said to possess a genuine (as opposed to a false or borrowed) personality. Using terms that Nietzsche would later employ in a more self-conscious manner, one could say that this inner aspect of the person is the *will to power*, that spontaneous, aggressive, *form-giving* force⁸⁸ that does not simply want to endure or propagate itself, but, more fundamentally, seeks to expand itself by pouring itself into outward movement; a force that wants to appropriate and exploit other forces in order to express itself more fully and with greater vigor. The strong person is the one who possesses the self-discipline to channel the river of this force effectively;⁸⁹ by contrast,

⁸⁸ I am borrowing Nietzsche's description of the will to power from the *Genealogy*. See GM II, 12.

⁸⁹ Nietzsche explicitly connects weakness of personality with a lack of self-control and self-discipline. See UM II, 4-5.

the weak person seeks to dam this force; he wants to contain it and quiet it down, to pacify or subjugate it into a state of quietism and self-cancellation. Accordingly, if the weak, chaotic personality encourages an inauthentic culture (i.e. cultural nihilism) that is oriented toward making life more comfortable and self-complacent (a culture obsessed with entertainment and conventions), the strong, unified personality must be the engine of genuine culture; its productive activity must constitute and guarantee the wholeness or harmonious unity of both the individual person and the culture in which he operates.

But what is this productive activity? What is the action or act that should be the overarching goal of the individual? Thus far the analysis has been mostly negative: I have tried to draw near to this positive activity of the will by way of Nietzsche's description of what it is not like. This has permitted us to see that the activity or act that manifests a unity between inner and outer must consist in a proper or healthy channeling of the essential energy (or will to power) that lies at the core of the individual, into some outer form that truly corresponds to it or that represents it fully. But this does not tell us how Nietzsche thinks such a channeling happens or even what sort of act is the one in which a form corresponding to the individual's content is brought to life. To flesh this out we need to turn to the last two untimely meditations.

IV.

Before exploring this issue, let me recapitulate and emphasize what I take to be most important findings from the discussion thus far. Nietzsche's main preoccupation in

the first two meditations is to combat the disunity between content and form that is characteristic of modern societies and therefore also of the individuals that inhabit them. These individuals and these societies are weak in the sense that they do not reveal who they are in their outward forms, but remain concealed in everything they do. Their chaotic and fragmented inwardness (an inwardness that seems to search in vain for a form in which to reveal itself) leads thus to the renunciation of their unique personality and individuality, it leads to the loss of their own true selves. To that extent, I think it is warranted to interpret the search for unity that Nietzsche wants to defend as a search for wholeness. The ideal of wholeness is the ideal of restoring the proper unity between content and form that is characteristic of the strong person and of genuine culture (since culture, recall, is the unity of a people: what prevents them from falling apart into outer and inner. In other words, it is the outward expression of their true inner soul or the genuine revelation of who they are). This also means that in becoming whole the person will express his independence and autonomy, that is, he will stop being the plaything of other powers that keep him fragmented and prevent him from revealing his unique inwardness, and will instead take charge of his life by manufacturing a genuine form for his inner content, one that can truly express who he is. We will be able to appreciate this connection more fully once we explore the question of how this unity or wholeness is restored or achieved in the first place. How can individual inwardness find genuine expression in outward activity? It is to this question that I now turn.

In order to delve into this issue, let me pick up another thread from the second meditation that I have not yet discussed. In section 4 of that work, Nietzsche asserts that

the weak personality is unable to take real things seriously, and equates the chaotic, fragmented nature of this personality with insensibility, a condition of emotional atrophy in which existence and the real produce only a slight impression in the person (UM II, 4). This emotional incapacity turns out to be one of the chief reasons why history is dangerous in the hands of weak personalities. The danger, once again, lies in a possible loss of one's sense of self. "The reason," Nietzsche claims, "is that history confuses the feelings and sensibility when these are not strong enough to assess the past by themselves. He who no longer dares to trust himself but involuntarily asks of history 'How ought I to feel about this?' finds that his timidity gradually turns him into an actor and that he is playing a role, usually indeed many roles and therefore playing them badly and superficially" (UM II, 5). The sense of self that Nietzsche is worried may get lost here is intimately bound up with a capacity to be affected by things and to know how to feel about them. The weak person cannot trust his own feelings and this leads him to the nihilistic condition we discussed above; it leads him to capitulate and to surrender his personality to other forces, like those of the state, or religion, or some ideology or other. Such a person learns how to feel about things according to the dictates of these forces and the ideas they espouse regarding what should be one's proper attitudes and reactions. Instead of finding his authentic personality and expressing it outwardly, the person hides behind masks and becomes a role-player in which no genuine inwardness is revealed, but always only an empty shell manufactured by one part or thread of himself that has been beguiled to pledge allegiance to one of these external forces. The outward movement of such a person, his visible acting, is then, as Nietzsche would put it, "not the act and self-

revelation of the totality of the interior but only a feeble or crude attempt on the part of one or other of these threads to pose as being the whole” (UM II, 4).

For Nietzsche, nowhere is this phenomenon of self-renunciation more pronounced than in German culture. He is concerned that soon we will be forced to conclude that the Germans have been ruined by history and are only capable of feeling in abstractions. This conclusion, he thinks,

would destroy at its roots all hope of a future national culture: for any such hope grows out of the belief in the genuineness and immediacy of German feeling, out of the belief in a sound and whole inwardness. What is left to hope for or believe in if the source of hope and belief is muddied, if inwardness has learned to make leaps, dance, to paint itself, to express itself in abstractions and with calculation and gradually to lose itself! (UM II, 4).

The incapacity to awaken genuine and immediate feeling lies at the heart of the problem of modern culture and its sickness. We are not capable of true feeling because we get lost in the web of concepts that we have spun in order to mediate our relation to things.⁹⁰ These concepts deafen our sensibility; they make us numb to life and incapable of genuine wonder. According to Nietzsche, if there is something that truly distinguishes us from the ancient Greeks is precisely this loss of the sense of strangeness and the capacity to wonder. In contrast to the youthful culture of the Greeks, the culture of modern man is gray-haired and elderly. We do not know how to approach things with the curiosity of the

⁹⁰ In another telling passage of the second meditation Nietzsche describes our condition as: “Fragmented and in pieces, dissociated almost mechanically into an inner and outer, sown with concepts as with dragon’s teeth, bringing forth conceptual dragons, suffering from the malady of words and mistrusting any feeling of our own which has not yet been stamped with words” (UM II, 10). The ideal of wholeness turns out to be bound up with a capacity to heal the rift between our feelings and the language we employ to communicate them.

child, nor are we capable of being moved or awed by life (the kind of awe that gives one goose bumps). Instead, we approach things with the clinical, cold, and distant heart of the specialist and the spectator of life.

This issue of genuine feeling connects with two basic ideas that will allow us to finally understand the nature of the activity and the act that Nietzsche thinks is the seal of wholeness. The first idea is that precisely because we are incapable of being surprised by life and incapable of being shaken by the riddle of existence, we are unable to address the most fundamental question of all: what justifies our being? Or, what is the same thing, how can we give meaning to our existence? Modern man either fails to be summoned by and pay heed to this fundamental question, or mistakenly thinks that the answer is rather obvious: that existence is given meaning by a political event such as the foundation of the Reich, or by winning fame, honor and prizes, or by the accumulation of wealth, or by maximizing pleasure, or the like. Nietzsche seems to believe that because we are not affected by life in the proper way, because we do not possess the capacity for true feeling, we fail to realize that these are not satisfactory answers to that fundamental question. It is very telling that the last three mediations all touch in one way or another on this problem of existence. After decrying the notion of a goal of world history and calling it laughable and presumptuous, Nietzsche writes:

on the other hand, do ask yourself why you, the individual, exist, and if you can get no answer try for once to justify the meaning of your existence as it were *a posteriori* by setting before yourself an aim, a goal, a 'to this end', an exalted and noble 'to this end'. Perish in the pursuit of this and only this – I know of no better aim of life than that of perishing, *animae magnae prodigus* (prodigal of a great soul), in pursuit of the great and the impossible (UM II, 9).

And then, again, in the opening sections of the third meditation, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, we read:

The fact of our existing at all in this here-and-now must be the strongest incentive to us to live according to our own laws and standards: the inexplicable fact that we live precisely today, when we had all infinite time in which to come into existence, that we possess only a shortlived today in which to demonstrate why and to what end we came into existence now and at no other time. We are responsible to ourselves for our own existence; consequently we want to be the true helmsman of this existence and refuse to allow our existence to resemble a mindless act of chance (UM III, 1).

Finally, in the fourth and final meditation, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, Nietzsche claims that “he before whom there stands such a nature as Wagner’s is from time to time compelled to reflect upon himself, upon his own pettiness and frailty, and to ask himself: what would this nature have with you? To what end do *you* really exist?” (UM IV, 7). The issue of the justification of individual existence is thus a crucial axis upon which all these mediations revolve.

Recall that earlier I had said that for Nietzsche the notion of unity and wholeness is linked to the theme of redemption. The notion of genuine feeling is the point of connection of these ideas. When a person possesses the capacity for true feeling, he is so attuned to the mystery of existence and its weight that he cannot dismiss lightly the need to somehow find justification and meaning. In Nietzsche’s account the ideal of wholeness provides the adequate answer and thus redeems the individual from the suffering caused by the weight of existence. To see how, we must turn to the second idea that is related to

the notion of genuine feeling. This consists in the problem of how to reawaken in the individual human being the capacity to be moved by things. Nietzsche believes that we need to educate ourselves once again to feel properly. For that we must engage in a pedagogical reformation aimed at combating the forces of culture that conspire against the reawakening of our sensibility.⁹¹ If modern culture is bent on dampening our emotive faculties in order to transform us as quickly and as effectively as possible into productive laborers that can meet the pseudo needs of society, what we require is to enlist the aid of educators that can help us to find ourselves again and thereby learn what our true needs are. Going by its title, it is obvious that the third meditation deals precisely with this topic. However, the issue is nicely and succinctly put in a passage from the fourth meditation. There Nietzsche writes:

with the decline of language we are the slaves of words; under this constraint no one is any longer capable of revealing himself, of speaking naively, and few are capable of preserving their individuality at all in the face of an education which believes it demonstrates its success, not in going out to meet clear needs and feelings in an educative sense, but in entangling the individual in the net of 'clear concepts' and teaching him to think correctly: as if there were any sense whatever in making of a man a being who thinks and concludes correctly if one has not first succeeded in making of him one who feels rightly (UM IV, 5).

I want to draw attention to two things in this passage. The first is that here Nietzsche reinstates the thought that self-revelation of one's individuality (which is in some sense the aim of wholeness or the purpose behind the unity of content and form we spoke of earlier) is a matter of feeling correctly, something that is made almost impossible by that sickness of language we referred to earlier, namely, that we have spun a web of abstract

⁹¹ In this connection, it is worth pointing out that, in his early career, Nietzsche was preoccupied by the issue of education and devoted five lectures in 1872 to the topic. See, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*.

concepts to mediate our relation to things in the world. Instead of aiding us to reveal our true inwardness, these concepts confuse our feelings and make it harder for us to really know who we are and what we want, thereby impeding us from communicate this knowledge outwardly to rest of the world. The second is that Nietzsche asserts that true education consists in meeting clear (or genuine) needs. This latter issue is significant because the notion of a “true need” is the gateway to an important concept in Nietzsche’s philosophy and one that plays a crucial role in the ideal of wholeness, namely, the concept of “necessity.”

Indeed, what does Nietzsche mean by one’s true needs? I think we are in a position to know what false or pseudo needs look like: they are the sorts of things that we normally tend to confuse with our real needs, namely, things like food, shelter, physical health, pleasure, professional success, public respect, and so on. To be sure, Nietzsche is not suggesting that these things are of no consequence for human life or that they should not be pursued. The point is rather that these things must not be pursued as ends in themselves, that they should not be confused with the real needs of the individual. The latter are the sorts of things that allow the individual to attain wholeness, the things that are required for each of us to be able to channel our creative energy outward into the sort of action that constitutes a revelation of our unique inwardness. Such things may vary depending on our particular situation, but what they have in common is that they are the things necessary to avert the loss of our genuine inwardness. For instance, part of the burden of the second meditation is to show that since modern man is afflicted by an unbridled excess of history, what we truly need is an effective medicine to counter it, we

need a dose of the powers Nietzsche calls unhistorical and suprahistorical (UM II, 10). Similarly, if a future post-modern culture should find itself, say, afflicted by an excess of the unhistorical, then their true needs would be different from ours and the historical power which is a danger to us would be the proper medicine for them.

As I stated above, there is an important connection between the notion of a true need and the concept of necessity. However, it would be a mistake to think that this connection is simply that a true need is what is *necessary* for authentic expression of one's inwardness. The connection is a bit more complex than that and to explore it let me revisit an issue we have repeatedly mentioned, namely, that in our age language is sick and in a state of distress. In an important passage from section 5 of the fourth meditation, Nietzsche elaborates a bit more on this point. The passage occurs in the midst of a discussion about the value and function of modern music. Nietzsche notes:

[Language] is no longer capable of performing that function for the sake of which alone it exists: to enable suffering mankind to come to an understanding with one another over the simplest needs of life. Man can no longer express his needs and distress by means of language, thus he can no longer really communicate at all ... As soon as men seek to come to an understanding with one another, and to unite for a common work, they are seized by the madness of universal concepts, indeed even by the mere sounds of words, and, as a consequence of this incapacity to communicate, everything they do together bears the mark of this lack of mutual understanding, inasmuch as it does not correspond to their real needs but only to the hollowness of those tyrannical words and concepts (UM IV, 5).

According to Nietzsche this state of distress of language is the reason why music has appeared with such force in the life of modern man. Indeed, he insists that it is a mystery that such greatness in music should have appeared in a weak and wretched age such as

our own. The answer to the mystery, however, is that this music is not an accident, but a response to the loss of the capacity for communicating one's true needs; an attempt to redress this deficiency by creating art in which genuine feeling becomes audible again. And this means that it is "necessity that rules here" (*Ibid.*). The series of great artists in modern music – of which Wagner is supposed to be the latest link in the chain, at least for the young Nietzsche –, is a manifestation of the pressing urge or necessity to find a way to communicate one's true needs again. In that sense, the appearance of these artists shows "that true music is a piece of fate and primal law; for it is impossible to derive its appearance at precisely this time *from an empty, meaningless act of chance*" (UM IV, 6; emphasis added). Notice that the notion of necessity is being contrasted here with the concept of chance, accident or arbitrariness.⁹² Necessity is not the opposite of freedom, nor is it compulsion or causal determination. Instead, the notion of necessity captures the pressing urge to oppose the contingency that operates in nature and in which one blindly lives one's life, and to take charge of one's own self, heeding one's true needs, and thereby truly revealing one's own uniqueness or inwardness. As such, the notion of necessity (and indeed, the notion of fate) is intimately bound up with the manifestation of one's true needs, whose realization signals the achievement of wholeness. What I take this to mean is that by becoming whole and manifesting his true needs the person becomes the helmsman of his own life and successfully triumphs over contingency and arbitrariness; it is in that sense that for Nietzsche necessity is freedom and freedom, necessity. Of course, the important point is that the person can fail to become whole; he

⁹² In this connection, recall that the admonition from the third meditation entreats us not "to allow our existence to resemble *a mindless act of chance*" (UM III, 1; emphasis added). See also UM IV, 1 and 5 (I cite the relevant passage from the last reference below), where the notion of necessity is similarly discussed in opposition to the notion of accident, arbitrariness or chance.

can let the world and others be the helmsmen of his existence and, instead of paying heed to the admonition I quoted earlier, allow his life to become *a mindless act of chance* (UM III, 1).

I think we can find confirmation of this reading throughout many other passages where the notion of necessity occurs in the *Meditations*. A bit further along section 5 of the fourth meditation, after the segment I just discussed, Nietzsche claims once again that modern man is not visible in what he represents but rather chooses to hide his authentic being behind customs and conventions. He then goes on to assert, “whenever ‘form’ is nowadays demanded, in society and in conversation, in literary expression, in traffic between states, what is involuntarily understood by its pleasing appearance, the antithesis of *the true concept of form as shape necessitated by content*, which has nothing to do with ‘pleasing’ or ‘displeasing’ precisely because *it is necessary and not arbitrary*” (UM IV, 5; emphasis added). Here we find the notion of necessity applied directly to the concepts of content and form that are central to the idea of unity and wholeness. The weak personality who surrenders his will to external forces becomes a form that fails to correspond to its true content; he becomes a sycophant preoccupied with pleasing others with his external demeanor and poise. In doing so, he makes of his existence a play thing of society and history and surrenders himself to the whim of blind arbitrariness. By contrast, the strong person wants to be in control of his life and refuses to let it be dictated by others. In becoming whole, then, he becomes an outer form that truly corresponds to an inner content (and vice versa), and in this way is necessary or, better still, *becomes necessary*.

It is precisely because one can fail to become necessary, that Nietzsche thinks that cultural reformation is the fundamental task of our age. But the forces that work against us are so great that today almost nothing is known of this aim and, indeed, the sense is lacking that here there is a task that needs pursuing. At one point in the third meditation Nietzsche disparagingly asks: “If the philosopher as a rule appears in his age by chance – does the state now really set itself *the task of consciously translating this fortuitousness into necessity* and here too rendering assistance to nature?” (UM III, 8; emphasis added). The answer, of course, is that it does not. According to Nietzsche, the modern state promotes the academic philosopher precisely to impede the ascendancy of the true philosopher, who together with the artist and the saint is the genuine agent of culture (UM III, 5). In his later life, Nietzsche will combine these three figures into an all encompassing figure of the philosopher of the future who becomes the ideal of true strength and nobility, whereas the other two for the most part seem to recede to the level of manifestations of weakness and decadence. But in the early works, each of these figures are unequivocally the real representatives of culture and the engines of wholeness who have become whole themselves and, in so doing, contribute to the wholeness of society at large, that is, they contribute to forge the single living unity in the life of a people that is the true definition of culture. These figures also represent, at a metaphoric level, three different aspects of the act of self-revelation that is the mark of individual wholeness. The philosopher represents the legislative power that becomes manifest in this act of self-revelation: the power that says, “thus it shall be” against the blind (accidental) compulsion of the “thus it is” of reality (UM III, 3, 5-6; UM II, 8; also later, and more

clearly expressed, in BGE, 211); the artist represents the creative and symbolic power of the deed that collects into a comprehensive and simplifying image both what came before and what, through the act itself, will come later in the future, by synthesizing and compelling things that seemed irreconcilable to come together for a higher purpose (UM IV, 4-5; UM II, 6); and, finally, the saint represents the redeeming power of wholeness that is manifested in the manner in which the external deed the person performs becomes part of the chain of greatness that will continue to live past his own physical demise, and through which he can feel identified and unified with all of mankind (UM III, 5; UM II, 2). In the third meditation Nietzsche uses the concept of the “genius” as the placeholder of these three powers. The genius is something that each individual human being possesses and that makes him distinct, it is the productive uniqueness of the person (UM III, 1, 3). In other words, it is what I earlier called, using the language of the later Nietzsche, the inner energy or force of the individual human being, his *will to power*, or his drive or instinct for freedom.

With this notion of the genius we come back to the issue of education and the task of finding ourselves again. Modern man suffers from false needs and is in constant flight from himself. He represents the form of a man who has evaded his genius and has become wholly exterior; he is a bag of clothes without kernel (UM III, 1). Since the problem lies in the fact that he is unknown to himself, the solution is to set him on the road of self-knowledge, so that he can learn his true needs and come to understand that he must not betray his unique inwardness. How can this reorientation be effected? Nietzsche’s answer in the *Mediations* is that this liberation and reorientation of the

individual can happen only through the influence of true educators. These people are the genuine philosophers, artists and saints who, having become whole, command our affection and inspire us to become whole ourselves.⁹³ Through our love for them we learn to listen to the calling of our own genius and engage in the process of self-overcoming that will make us whole. In the *Meditations*, the ancient Greeks, Schopenhauer and Wagner function as models of true educators.

How do these models educate? According to Nietzsche the chief way they do so is by alienating us from the inauthentic selves that, as a matter of course and because of the external forces that surround us, we tend to inhabit (UM III, 6; UM IV, 7).⁹⁴ Through this self-alienation these models instill in us a longing for the genius that stirs within us. In other words, what I take Nietzsche to be saying is that we acquire the desire to take the reins of our will to power, to become free and independent ourselves, by seeing true independence and freedom reflected in the mirror of those great human beings that have become whole. The principal thing these individuals have to teach us is not their particular doctrines, their belief systems, but whether or not they were or are the incarnation of truly independent beings themselves. This is why Nietzsche does not really analyze or explore the philosophical doctrines of Schopenhauer in a book that appears to

⁹³ In section 5 of the third meditation, Nietzsche calls these people *true* men. I take it that this is meant to indicate that in these people content and form truly correspond to one another, that is, that they represent genuine (and not false) personalities in which inwardness is truly revealed. To that extent, they have become an authentic unity and, therefore, whole. In the same section Nietzsche claims that these individuals (the philosophers, artists and saints) lift the rest of us from the stream of sociability in which we live in constant flight from ourselves, that stream of labor and haste that keeps us submerged in an incessant fear of memory and of turning inward (UM III, 5).

⁹⁴ In a characteristic passage Nietzsche claims: "It is hard to create in anyone this condition of intrepid self-knowledge because it is impossible to teach love; for it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also a desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it" (UM III, 6).

be about this philosopher's teachings. What Schopenhauer has to teach us is a way of life that is itself the reflection of achieved wholeness: as Nietzsche puts it, "his greatness lies in having set up before him a picture of life as a whole, in order to interpret it as a whole" (UM III, 3). Although it is not completely clear what Nietzsche understands this picture to have been, it is undeniable that he thought an important part of it consisted in living a life that was independent from state and society and in conflict with the establishment of academic philosophers.⁹⁵ In essence, what Schopenhauer (as well as Wagner and any other great human being) has to teach us is that the genius in us should not fear entering into conflict with his age. Indeed, in a very profound way, becoming independent means becoming a criminal of sorts: the person who seeks to emancipate himself must appear as a law breaker. He is attempting to bring something new into the world and that means destroying or displacing what was there before. The old must perish to make way for the new. But this is an affront to the traditional order of things, and the person who perpetrates this act of independence incurs a guilt that he can only expiate by pursuing greatness, otherwise his freedom is a piece of impudence and presumption (UM II, 1, 3; UM III, 8).

Here, then, is the answer to the question of what sort of act is the one that bears the seal of wholeness. The act is one through which the person places himself in the chain of greatness, that is, the chain of creativity and culture in which nature is increasingly

⁹⁵ In an important passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche spells out more clearly what he understands the totalizing vision of Schopenhauer to have been. He characterizes it as "a maliciously ingenious attempt to adduce in favor of a nihilistic total depreciation of life precisely the counter-instances, the great self-affirmations of the 'will to life,' life's forms of exuberance. He has interpreted *art*, heroism, genius, beauty, great sympathy, knowledge, the will to truth, and tragedy, in turn, as consequences of 'negation,' or of the "will's" need to negate" (TI, 'Skirmishes', 21).

being perfected.⁹⁶ Indeed, the self-alienation that Nietzsche claims results from the influence of true educators is simply the starting point of the road that leads to the realization of wholeness. This alienation only serves to awaken the person from his inauthentic slumber and to point him in the right direction: towards culture and its fundamental aim which is the procreation of genius (or the perpetual renewal of greatness in the chain of ever ascending humanity) (UM III, 3). Nietzsche calls this awakening the first consecration to culture. Its distinctive feature is a hatred (born of love for one's true educators) of one's narrowness of spirit and of all the things that keep one's uniqueness imprisoned, and, in this hatred, a feeling of shame without distress, and a longing to become whole. This first consecration leads to a second one,⁹⁷ which Nietzsche describes in the following terms:

the individual has to employ his own wrestling and longing as the alphabet by means of which he can now read off the aspirations of mankind as a whole. But he may not halt even here; from this stage he has to climb up to a yet higher one; culture demands of him, not only an inward experience, not only an assessment of the outward world that streams all around him, but finally and above all an act, that is to say *a struggle on behalf of culture* and hostility towards those influences, habits laws, institutions in which he fails to recognize his goal: which is the production of the genius (UM III, 6; emphasis added).

The goal, then, that will make the individual whole is a cultural struggle on behalf of the genius. It is crucial not to misunderstand this as a sacrifice of the individual person for the betterment of a few great individuals or as the command that he devote all his efforts

⁹⁶ In this connection, see UM III, 1, where Nietzsche asserts that “culture is liberation ... it is the perfecting of nature when it deflects her cruel and merciless assaults and turns them to good” and also UM III, 3, where he describes the goal thus: “to acquire power so as to aid the evolution of the *physis* (nature) and to be for a while the corrector of its follies and ineptitudes.” I cite this latter passage more fully below.

⁹⁷ In the fourth mediation Nietzsche speaks of the two acts of purification or consecration that Wagner had to perform to become whole: first, to liberate himself, and then to liberate art. See UM IV, 6.

to the production of greatness in others.⁹⁸ The production of the genius that Nietzsche claims is the goal of wholeness is always first and foremost the realization of that genius in each and every one of us.⁹⁹ Nietzsche makes this clear throughout many passages in the third meditation. Take for instance the following section where Nietzsche speaks of one of Schopenhauer's great lessons for us:

he teaches us to distinguish between those things that really promote human happiness and those that only appear to do so: how neither riches nor honours nor erudition can lift the individual out of the profound depression he feels at the valuelessness of his existence, and how the striving after these valued things acquires meaning only through an exalted and transfiguring overall goal: to acquire power so as to aid the evolution of the *physis* and to be for a while the corrector of its follies and ineptitudes. *At first only for yourself, to be sure; but through yourself in the end for everyone* (UM III, 3; emphasis added).

Or, then again, in section 5, where he refers to the circle of duties that the person who has been educated by the example of great men will adopt as his own:

⁹⁸ This is the way, for instance, that Thomas Hurka understands it. He thinks that Nietzsche is a perfectionist in the sense that he advocates a maximax principle that requires all agents to maximize the perfection of the most exceptional agents. See, Hurka (2007).

⁹⁹ In his essay on *Schopenhauer as Educator*, James Conant also correctly argues that Nietzsche's focus on the genius is not meant to be exclusive and that the term stands for the productive uniqueness that each human being harbors within himself (Conant, 2000: 224-225). However, his own interpretation fails to connect the development of the genius in oneself with the project of unifying one's content and one's form and is, thus, silent with respect to the ideal of wholeness that lies at the heart of the concept of the genius. Indeed, for Conant, Nietzsche does not prescribe any content to the ideal he is recommending (that of attaining one's higher self or of becoming who one is) (Conant, 2000: 216-217). On my interpretation, by contrast, there is a specific content to the ideal: one can only work at the production of the genius in oneself by means of a struggle on behalf of culture, that is, by devoting one's efforts to the promotion of that realm that sustains one's genius in the first place and makes it possible, the realm of culture in which freedom is preserved and guaranteed for all. To be sure, the form that the struggle is supposed to take is not something Nietzsche prescribes, since it will vary depending on the person's talents and the milieu in which he lives: some will struggle on behalf of culture by promoting great music in which genuine feeling is made audible again, others by pursuing political conquests and reforms that seek to free and unify all nations, others by transvaluing values, and the like. Still, as will become clearer in what follows, even with respect to the form of the act itself there is some prescriptive content to Nietzsche's view, since he suggests that the struggle consists in combating the oppositions and divisions that keep society and the individuals who inhabit them fragmented. The struggle, then, is a struggle for wholeness in the world.

these new duties are not the duties of a solitary; on the contrary, they set one in the midst of a mighty community held together, not by external forms and regulations, but by a fundamental idea. It is the fundamental idea of *culture*, insofar as it sets for each one of us but one task: *to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature* (UM III, 5).

The fundamental goal of each individual is to manifest his own personal freedom, to give true form to his inner being and uniqueness. Nietzsche seems to think that he can do so only by placing himself in the circle of genuine culture, in which he works together with other individuals in the promotion of the perfection of freedom and individual expression in himself and in all. In doing so, he contributes to the communal goal of forming cultural institutions in which he and others will be protected from the forces that threaten to destroy or misappropriate each person's drive to freedom. As Nietzsche puts it, "these individuals have to complete their work – that is the sense of their staying together; and all who participate in the institution have, through continual purification and mutual support, *to help to prepare within themselves* and around them for the birth of the genius and the ripening of his work" (UM III, 6; emphasis added). In that sense, the birth of the genius in one's own self or in others coincides with the birth of true freedom, with the manifestation of a genuine as opposed to a false, borrowed or weak personality.

This is the sense in which the Wagner of the fourth meditation became free and whole. In that work, Nietzsche tells the story of Wagner's liberation from the forces that were threatening to misappropriate his inner drive to freedom. For instance, he had to free himself from the desire for fame and power that governed the art of his time by becoming

a critic of effectist art;¹⁰⁰ he also had to become a social revolutionary to revive the folk and their mythical medium of expression and release them from the clutches of a society that uses art to enslave artists, makes art into a luxury and promotes an entertainment industry that keeps people content and properly narcotized; and then later Wagner had to also overcome this revolutionary tempestuousness itself in order to learn to become more impersonal and to transform his desire for power into pure artistic creativity (UM IV, 8). The liberation of his own genius allows Wagner to liberate art itself, and thereby contribute to the liberation of all us by promoting a culture that is genuine, that teaches people right feeling again, and inspires them to become promoters of culture themselves (i.e. geniuses). For Nietzsche, an important part of what it means to liberate art in this way, or for that matter, to struggle on behalf of culture in general, is to combat the dividing forces of society, to unify the elements that keep culture fragmented. Thus, if language has been divorced from true feeling, then someone like Wagner, who wants to fight for culture, must unite again true music (the medium of expression of genuine feeling) with language. The seal of wholeness, then, is an act that attempts to master the chaotic wilderness of forces that is our world; an act that brings together into unity things that appear to be set irreconcilably asunder (UM IV, 5).¹⁰¹ For this reason Nietzsche

¹⁰⁰ By effectist art, Nietzsche seems to mean art that seeks to simply entertain the public through an impressive and flashing display of forms, colors and appearances (in a word, of effects) that can keep spectators suitably dazzled and distracted. A substantial part of Nietzsche's criticism of modern art is directed at the fact that this art is meant only as a pastime, and not as an educational tool or as a stimulant for life and action.

¹⁰¹ In this respect, my account conflicts with that of Huskinson. Although, she correctly attributes the task of uniting opposites to wholeness, for her this is principally a psychic project consisting in attempting to harmonize the relation between the rational and irrational aspects of the personality (Huskinson claims that for Nietzsche the former elements are metaphorically represented by the figure of Apollo and the latter by that of Dionysus). According to Huskinson, this unification (perhaps paradoxically) is not really a uniting of these forces, but consists rather in their being balanced out or harmonized with one another, yet in a way that keeps the conflict between them alive (Huskinson, 2004: 3; 24-27; 29-31). In my view, it is unclear from Huskinson's account what this balancing act entails exactly or what the negotiation between the

claims that “Wagner’s music as a whole is an image of the world as it was understood by the great Ephesian philosopher [Heraclitus]: a harmony produced by conflict, the unity of justice and enmity” (UM IV, 9). The suggestion, then, is that to be in the business of assessing and then combating the oppositions that prevail in society is a significant part of what it means to become whole, to become a guarantor of freedom and culture.

But this analysis raises an issue that many people sympathetic to Nietzsche’s philosophy find unpalatable and embarrassing, namely, his anti-egalitarianism. It is evident that most of us will not become artists, philosophers and saints; at least not if that means becoming a Wagner, or a Schopenhauer, or a Nietzsche. If becoming whole means expressing one’s genius in this way, if it means succeeding at becoming icons of culture, then it seems most of us are condemned to remain mere fragments of men. We may struggle to liberate ourselves and attempt to become whole by pursuing the goal of promoting the genius in ourselves and in all, but since most of us will not be capable of revolutionizing music, literature, philosophy or the like, in the way Nietzsche’s paradigmatic examples of wholeness did, we also appear to be incapable of laying any claim to wholeness. Is there any hope for us? Many things Nietzsche says appear to deny us such hope. The fourth meditation, for example, begins in the following terms:

opposing forces seeking to unify is like, given that they can never really unify. Nevertheless, be that as it may, the important point is that on my interpretation the opposing forces do not reside primarily in the individual, but first and foremost in the world. Moreover, these forces do not necessarily divide neatly into rational and irrational powers. They can consist of all sorts of things: like the historical, unhistorical and suprahistorical faculties, as we saw in the second meditation; or, as in the case under consideration, music and language; or, as we will see later, reason, the senses, feeling and the will. In my judgment, what all these different oppositions have in common is that their continued presence constitutes a danger and an obstacle to the task of forming a living unity of content and form, that is, to the task of individual and societal wholeness. This is why, for Nietzsche, the person who wants to become whole and seeks thereby to make his society whole, will have to combat these oppositions and reconcile those forces that threaten to perpetuate conditions of fragmentation and division.

for an event to possess greatness two things must come together: greatness in spirit of those who accomplish it and greatness of spirit in those who experience it ... this is why even the individual deed of a man great in himself lacks greatness if it is brief and without resonance or effect; for at the moment he performed it he must have been in error as to its necessity at precisely that time: he failed to take correct aim and chance became master over him – whereas to be great and to possess a clear grasp of necessity have always belonged strictly together (UM IV, 1).

This passage seems to suggest that being great is a matter of producing acts that do resonate into the future, the sorts of deeds that someone like Wagner accomplished and that have transformative effects in the culture at large. Only the performance of these kinds of acts seems to guarantee that one can lay claim to the redemptive power of wholeness. Wagner and his deeds are necessary because they are responses to the real needs of society and this means that Wagner can find redemption from the suffering of individual existence by entering into the community of greatness. He and his deeds will continue to exist in the chain of culture that lies outside of time and the endless flow of becoming, and that is the engine of all the future fruitfulness of human creativity. For the rest of us who may be incapable of performing such acts, or who may fail to have a clear grasp of necessity, the redemptive feeling of belonging to the circle of genuine culture seems to be forever banned; we will remain mere fragments despite all our struggles.

Yet, there are other things that Nietzsche says that seem to restore our hope. In section 6 of the third meditation, he asserts that “the young person should be taught to regard himself as a failed work of nature but at the same time as a witness to the grandiose and marvelous intentions of this artist: nature has done badly, he should say to

himself; but I will honour its great intentions by serving it so that one day it may do better. By coming to this resolve he places himself within the circle of *culture*” (UM III, 6). This makes it sound as if what matters for wholeness is not so much whether one succeeds at becoming a philosopher, artist or saint, but rather whether one resolves to become such people and to help others do so as well. After all, as Nietzsche himself puts it, “anyone who believes in culture is thereby saying: ‘I see above me something higher and more human than I am; let everyone help me to attain it, as I will help everyone who knows and suffers as I do’” (*Ibid.*). To strive to attain the higher self each of us harbors within himself is to embrace a task that guarantees the wholeness of ourselves and also the ecumenical culture on whose behalf one is struggling. Even if one should perish without reaching the goal itself, one has perished in pursuit of the great; and that makes one already great and certainly not the weak or inauthentic person that those who evade their genius are said to be. Even the passage from the fourth meditation I quoted above seems to hint at the fact that one can be a great human being even if one’s deeds themselves fail to be great. In that passage Nietzsche appears to suggest that there is a greatness that resides in simply being able to value and experience the creative acts of geniuses (of philosophers, artists and saints). In that sense, it may be possible to interpret his injunction to place oneself within the circle of culture as the resolve to join a community of appreciation, thereby becoming whole and great ourselves. Having said this, however, I think it is crucial to emphasize that this appreciation must be more than mere contemplation or admiration of greatness. Indeed, mere admiration that is not a noble aspiration to actually become a genius oneself and struggle on behalf of culture by performing the sorts of acts that attempt to reconcile and unite the forces that keep culture

fragmented, would probably strike Nietzsche as being too passive in nature. Freedom must be actualized in an activity that is more than an experiencing or witnessing of greatness. Such experience after all is just the starting point of the individual's journey to become whole: the geniuses whose work we admire awaken in us, as I argued above, the longing to become whole ourselves. But this first consecration to culture must lead to the second one which is the resolve to fight on behalf of culture itself. What seems to matter, as I have said, is this resolve, even if in the end one fails to bring the act itself to completion.

In my judgment, overall the evidence on this issue is ambiguous. Nonetheless, I personally find that it is more in consonance with Nietzsche's overall view, to conclude that what truly matters for wholeness is to strive after the goal of culture and not whether one is able to perform the sorts of deeds attributable to a Wagner or a Nietzsche. In that respect, wholeness is an ideal that falls within the reach of every human being that chooses to become independent and refuses to remain a mere fragment and an accident of nature. Through his striving on behalf of culture and its goal (the procreation of genius), such a person becomes necessary himself even if his external deeds do not, and he can participate in the sort of consolation and redemption that Nietzsche claims is guaranteed through wholeness: he becomes part of the single line of ascending humanity in which the great fighters of culture live contemporaneously with each other in an eternal spiritual dialogue of greatness and creativity. These people are united not so much by their great

accomplishments – though they may be many –, as by their commitment to genuine culture and their mutual struggle on its behalf.

V.

It is now time to examine how the two principal interpretations of wholeness fair when balanced against the preceding analysis of this ideal. Of the two, I think that the “naturalist” interpretation is the furthest removed from Nietzsche’s description of the injunction to become whole, at least as it is articulated in the *Meditations*. Indeed, the fatalistic aspect that lies at the heart of this camp’s account of wholeness puts it unsavorily close to the sort of weakness of the will that Nietzsche decried throughout his writings, and that is in fact the exact opposite of the correspondence between content and form that is the hallmark of wholeness. To think of ourselves as beings that belong to a causal web that thoroughly determines the trajectory of our lives is to surrender our personality to the whim of external forces that are for the most part completely impersonal. Far from allowing us to realize the ideal of wholeness, this kind of fatalistic attitude is merely another way to evade our genius and to descend to the level of the mere animal or, worst still, to that of the automata (UM III, 4).

Although the aesthetic interpretation fairs a bit better because it correctly attributes the achievement of wholeness to the free agency of the person, it nonetheless also falls short of the full scope and meaning of this ideal. The main problem is that for the aesthetic camp wholeness consists merely in the psychic integration of the various

aspects that compose the personality. To be sure, there are things Nietzsche says in the *Meditations* that warrant this reading. In section 2 of the third meditation, he asserts that the true educator is one whose task is “to mould the whole man into a living solar and planetary system and to understand its higher laws of motion” (UM III, 2). This makes it sound as if wholeness were only a matter of refashioning the psyche of the person into a harmonious system that is governed by a central dominating force. For the aesthetic camp, this means that the person is supposed to blend the various aspects of his soul into a coherent narrative of his past and present life, weaving a pattern in which nothing can be removed without making the whole psychic structure collapse. Although this interpretative act is an expression of the person’s active willing, there is still an element here that I think would strike Nietzsche as being too passive. The activity of interpreting one’s life is purely retrospective and intellectual in nature: it is like the act of reading a literary text. And while intellectual creativity of this sort may be important for Nietzsche, it is clear that he thinks that what matters most for wholeness is the activity of manifesting one’s freedom in the external world by becoming a champion of culture and its goals. Indeed, the thing that integrates the person psychologically is the pursuit of the lofty task of developing the genius within him and without him, the task of struggling on behalf of genuine culture. For that he needs to develop whatever talent he possesses that will contribute to this task. Such a talent, whether in the realm of literature, music, philosophy, politics, religion, or what have you, becomes the living center of this person’s life and governs every other aspect of his being *so that he can work together with others in the promotion of culture, that is, in the perfection of nature and freedom.* The point, then, is that whatever psychic integration resides in the ideal of wholeness, it is

only derivative and not the essence of the ideal. It results from placing oneself in the circle of culture which is the real aim of wholeness. In striving to do that, one constructs a soul governed by a living center that harmonizes all the various aspects of one's personality.¹⁰²

This is also the reason why the aesthetic camp fails to incorporate the future as an important aspect of the ideal of wholeness. For Nehamas, the future is a danger to wholeness because the actions a person may perform in the future could enter into conflict with the interpretation he has constructed for himself, and in this way threaten the harmonious integration of his personality (Nehamas, 1985: 185). But for Nietzsche, far from being a danger to the man of wholeness, the future is the place where all his hopes and aspirations lie. In a section entitled Redemption, Zarathustra says: "I walk amongst men as the fragments of the future: that future which I contemplate. And it is all my poetization and aspiration to compose and collect into unity what is fragment and riddle and fearful chance" (Z II, Redemption). The future is the target and objective of the man of wholeness, it also the place where he finds redemption from the absurdity of individual existence. This person has faith in himself and believes that his energies will survive into the future, past his own physical demise, because he has placed himself within the circle of culture in which life and creativity are perpetually renewed and

¹⁰² My account is also at odds with Huskinson's in this point. For her, the unifying principle of the psychic opposites that comprise the personality of the individual is the will to power itself, which she interprets as the power of adaptation by means of which the capacity for creation in the person is increased (partly through the drive to unify opposites itself). For Huskinson the will to power is the force that originates the psyche's fragmentation into opposites and is also responsible for its reunification (Huskinson, 2004: 32-33; 151). On my reading, by contrast, the will to power itself (or the internal energy of the individual) must be directed toward the higher goal of culture; it is this goal that propels the individual to unite the opposites that seem irreconcilable and that, on my reading, exist first and foremost in the social world the person inhabits and only derivatively (as a reflection of those social forces) also in his own self.

guaranteed. And even if he fails to accomplish great deeds that will become necessary for everything that is and that is yet to come, this person has nonetheless become necessary himself by placing himself in this chain of universal culture, and he can find consolation in the feeling of unity he experiences with all human beings that belong to it.

Finally, let me conclude by considering a difficulty for this interpretation of wholeness that I have provided. The problem is that my account relies very heavily on the *Meditations*, which is a work that is located in Nietzsche's early period. It is commonplace in the literature on Nietzsche to assume that there are significant philosophical changes that occurred during the three main productive periods of Nietzsche's life. In particular, a prevalent view is that Nietzsche's position on truth and on other important metaphysical and epistemological issues underwent radical revisions starting with the texts of the middle period.¹⁰³ In this period, so the story goes, Nietzsche embraced the scientific paradigm that was on the rise during his lifetime and he adopted a completely materialistic outlook in all of his theorizing. From this perspective, the worry is that my account is blind to those important changes and, indeed, abounds with notions and figures that Nietzsche later abandoned or disowned, like the belief that Schopenhauer and Wagner were incarnations of greatness, or the belief in mystic notions of unity, or the notion that art and artistic creativity can justify one's existence, or, for that matter, the view that the will moves things and that human beings have some kind of free will, and so on. Even if my account is correct about the early Nietzsche, it is probably not applicable to whatever ideal of wholeness he retained in his later life. The kind of account

¹⁰³ See Clark (1990).

that would be applicable for that later Nietzsche is more likely one that follows the “naturalist” path I laid out earlier or some version of it.

Since this worry rests on a particular view of Nietzsche’s overall philosophical trajectory, to dispel it completely I would have to take direct issue with that picture, and show either that Nietzsche did not really alter his views as radically as it is alleged, or that, even if he did, the particular metaphysical and epistemological doctrines that he revised do not affect the overall picture of wholeness that I have outlined. Obviously, I cannot pursue either of these strategies in the space of this essay. However, I think I can go a long way toward assuaging this worry if I am able to show that the passage on Goethe from *Twilight of the Idols*, that is taken to be representative of the later Nietzsche’s view on wholeness, can be read in the light of my analysis of this ideal. Here is the passage in its entirety:

Goethe – not a German event, but a European one: a magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century by a return to nature, by an *ascent* to the naturalness of the Renaissance – a kind of self-overcoming on the part of that century. He bore its strongest instincts within himself: the sensibility, the idolatry of nature, the anti-historic, the idealistic, the unreal and revolutionary (—the latter being merely a form of the unreal). He sought help from history, natural science, antiquity, and also Spinoza, but, above all, from practical activity; he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it; he was not fainthearted but took as much as possible upon himself, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was *totality*; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will (—preached with the most abhorrent scholasticism by *Kant*, the antipode of Goethe); he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself. In the middle of an age with an unreal outlook, Goethe was a convinced realist: he said Yes to everything that was related to him in this respect – and he had no greater experience than that *ens realissimum* [most real being] called Napoleon. Goethe conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skillful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of

being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength, because he knows how to use to his advantage even that from which the average nature would perish; the man for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden, unless it be *weakness*, whether called vice or virtue. Such a spirit who has *become free* stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—*he does not negate anymore*. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysus* (TI, ‘Skirmishes,’ 49).

I trust that the reader who has followed me up to this point will read this passage and find that it resonates strongly with the themes I have been sounding throughout my analysis. First of all, notice that Goethe is said to have been a European event and not a German one. Part of what makes him great is that he was not concerned with the petty narrow interests of a nation, but rather had his eye on more global endeavors and as such was part of an ecumenical society and culture.¹⁰⁴ Second, a distinctive feature of Goethe’s striving is that he struggled to unite the aspects of his century that seemed to be set irreconcilably asunder: the oppositions between reason and the senses, between feeling and will, and so on. This, as we saw, was an important aspect of Wagner’s wholeness in the fourth meditation: he too fought the dividing forces of society that kept culture fragmented. Notice also that Goethe’s wholeness is a matter of self-discipline and self-control as it was for the Nietzsche of the *Meditations*. But, finally, Goethe stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trustful fatalism that consists in believing that the particular is loathsome and that all is redeemed in the whole. For Risse, as I indicated earlier, this means that Goethe thinks of himself as someone who belongs to a chain of causal determinants that relieve him from notions of responsibility or guilt. But we now have available an interpretation that fits this passage more comfortably and makes better sense

¹⁰⁴ In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche claims that nationalism is “the most *anticultural* sickness and unreason there is” (EH, ‘The Case of Wagner’, 2).

of what Nietzsche is asserting here. Goethe's fatalism consists in the fact that he understands himself as a piece of fate or destiny, in the same sense in which Nietzsche claimed in the fourth meditation that true music is a piece of fate and primal law (UM IV, 6). Like this music, Goethe refuses to be an accident of nature, a meaningless act of chance. Instead, he has faith in himself, and he trusts that by taking charge of his life and defeating contingency he has become (or he will become) necessary, one more law for the future and for all that is yet to come. And he has done this by placing himself in the higher circle of universal culture. This is why for him, the individual as such is loathsome, what truly counts and what gives meaning to individual existence is the suprapersonal goal of culture: the procreation of genius in us and in everyone else.

My interpretation not only makes better sense of this important passage, it also sheds some light on other puzzling passages in *Twilight* that tend to be used – in my view unwarrantedly – in support of the “naturalist” interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. Take for instance Nietzsche's claim that “one is necessary, one is a piece of destiny, one belongs to the whole, one *is* the whole” (TI, ‘Errors’, 8); or his insistence that “the single human being is a piece of *fatum* [destiny] from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be” (TI, ‘Morality’, 6). Contrary to what some commentators suggest, these statements are not expressions of Nietzsche's belief in causal determinism. They belong rather to the cluster of ideas that he deploys in the service of his practical philosophy and, in particular, of his ideal of individual wholeness. The same is true of another characteristic passage that reads: “The single one, the ‘individual,’ as hitherto understood by the people and the philosopher alike, is an

error after all: he is nothing by himself, no atom, no ‘link in the chain,’ nothing merely inherited from former times—he is the whole single line of humanity up to himself” (TI, ‘Skirmishes’, 33). In all these statements, Nietzsche is hammering his conviction that the individual human being is unique and indispensable for genuine culture and thereby for the future of humanity as a whole. He is not a monad nor is he the product of the chain of causal determinism that stretches all the way past his birth. Instead each individual human being is all of humanity: he represents either its ascending or its descending line. If he does the latter, then he is lost to himself and to all of us. He becomes an inauthentic person that is the plaything of time and the endless stream of becoming. But, if on the contrary he represents the ascending line of life, then he is a great human being, a piece of destiny and a spirit that governs the world by placing himself within the community of greatness that redeems him from the suffering and the absurdity of his individual existence. Nietzsche’s hope for all of us is that we will be fortunate enough to find true educators that can liberate our spirit, and set us on the path of that supreme autognosis by means of which we can discipline ourselves and join the circle of ascending life he calls genuine culture.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The results of the preceding three essays not only vindicate the piecemeal methodology they employ, but also open avenues for further investigation and set us on the right path to a better understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche's philosophy.

I think that, for the most part, the secondary literature on Nietzsche has failed to engage him directly. Focus on his philosophy has been motivated and mediated by other concerns such as those of rescuing Nietzsche from the clutches of movements one may find deeply problematic (like Nazism, or egoism, or even postmodernism); or making him palatable and relevant to contemporary analytic discourse; or building a coherent and systematic picture of his thought as a whole around some central metaphysical or epistemological principle he is alleged to have held. It is not that these goals are unimportant or that they should not be pursued. My point is rather that if we approach Nietzsche's philosophy from these angles, if we remain bent on making him satisfy our own concerns, we run the risk of misunderstanding his thought and thereby miss the very goals we set out to attain. Nietzsche will be able to speak to us and answer our own concerns only if we meet him on his own turf. We need to look once more at Nietzsche's philosophy with eyes unclouded by the hustle and bustle of the secondary literature. This means that our efforts should be spent in understanding Nietzsche's own worries and the

way he framed and tackled the issues that concerned him. In my judgment, doing so requires adopting humbler projects than those that are traditionally pursued. The questions that guide our interpretative endeavors should be narrower and more localized. Instead of trying to figure out Nietzsche's overall metaphysics and epistemology of value, or attempting to systematize his philosophy under some overarching principle, or the like, we should ask questions of the following sort: what does Nietzsche mean by the unconditional will to truth? Or what distinguishes for him the genuine philosopher from the mere scholar? Or what is the ascetic ideal and why is science its latest incarnation? Or what lies behind the notion of the Dionysian and the cluster of symbols and ideas that surround it? In my view, pursuing humbler projects of this sort is a precondition for engaging in more ambitious and comprehensive studies of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. In this dissertation I have tried to embark on that kind of piecemeal labor focusing on three specific ideals that seem to dominate Nietzsche's practical philosophy. The results I have achieved, and that I hope will lead us to reassess more traditional readings, should aid in the more ambitious and global tasks I have mentioned. I leave it to the reader to assess my success on this score.

Let me now say some things about what I take to be the main lessons of these three studies. I think that perhaps the principal lesson is that Nietzsche should be considered first and foremost a philosopher of freedom. Underwriting all of these practical ideals is Nietzsche's preoccupation with the fostering of individual activity and creativity, and the avoidance of its opposite, the passivity of the will – the will to nothingness. Indeed, these ideals seem to be three different ways of speaking of the same

phenomenon: the achievement of maturity in the exercise of one's creative activity, of one's freedom. For Nietzsche there seem to be two fundamental values or normative standpoints a human being can inhabit: he can be in the business of undermining freedom and creativity both for himself and for others, or he can promote and champion this fundamental life bestowing force. More often than not, the person who does the former does not know what he is doing. He is simply the plaything of powers greater than himself or he may honestly believe, like some ascetic priests probably do, that he is doing good when in fact, from Nietzsche's standpoint, he is promoting values that are detrimental for life and for freedom. However, it is also possible to consciously renounce one's freedom; and one of Nietzsche's complaints about his age was that, despite the fact that it was an informed age, it still knelt to Christianity and to values that it knew to be oppressive. Still, freedom is always possible for the person who chooses to stop evading the responsibility to be his own self, honestly endeavors to know himself (his true needs), and seeks independence from the forces that keep him imprisoned.

It is important that for Nietzsche this type of freedom is a social and political phenomenon. It should not be confused with the faculty that is the focus of a lot of contemporary theorizing in the philosophy of action, namely, the capacity to be autonomous (i.e. to be the causes of our own behavior). Indeed, as I indicated in the first chapter, it seems that Nietzsche presupposes that we are autonomous in that sense; that we are capable of control of our actions and, thus, more than an arena for causal events to which we cannot contribute. For him, the problem is that this capacity can be and, indeed, for the most part, has been misemployed or co-opted by other forces. In exhorting us to

realize the ideals of Sovereignty, of Wholeness and of Becoming Who One Is, Nietzsche is urging us to regain control of our capacity to be the causes of our actions, to liberate this faculty from the subdued state of immaturity in which it is kept.

This does not mean that Nietzsche was an advocate of unbridled individualism and egoism. To the contrary, as we learned in chapter three, genuine individual freedom, as Nietzsche understood it, is actualized and exercised in the pursuit of goals that are suprapersonal and ecumenical. The full and healthy expression of one's individuality occurs when one reaches beyond the narrow and petty confines of one's individual existence, consecrating oneself to the promotion of genuine culture in which ascending life and creativity are continually renewed and guaranteed for all. This pursuit also harbors the only true possibility of redemption from the suffering and absurdity of existence. Contrary to his teacher Schopenhauer, Nietzsche believed that redemption did not lie in the suspension of individual willing, but in its opposite, in a more emphatic resolve to foster the procreation of freedom for oneself and for all.

Since, as I have indicated, this type of freedom seems to rest on the possibility of autonomy in the technical sense (i.e. our capacity to be causes of our own behavior), from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of action, one may wonder whether Nietzsche's understanding of autonomy was compatibilist or incompatibilist. The story Nietzsche tells in the *Genealogy* about the emergence of sovereignty appears at first glance to be more amenable to a compatibilist perspective. As we saw in chapter two, Nietzsche attributes the creation of the bad conscience to the operations of the instinct for

freedom that lies at the core of the primitive human beast. The reversal of this instinct, its discharge upon its possessor, brings to life the sort of self-conception that eventually will issue in the possibility of guiding one's behavior autonomously and morally (i.e., in accordance to one's own understanding of oneself and what one is doing). Prior to this reversal, the instinct for freedom was causally responsible for the bodily movements of the human creature: it allowed movement to issue from the body of its possessor, presumably by recruiting desires, dispositions, beliefs, and so on. But this is no more than a capacity to insert one's body into the causal stream (to be a vessel for movement), and the creature that behaves in this way is not yet capable of enjoying that supreme privilege of responsibility that is the hallmark of sovereignty and that, according to Nietzsche, makes moral behavior possible for the first time. Sovereignty requires the internal discharge of the instinct for freedom. The same instinct that injected one's body into the causal stream of events will now permit one's own self to insert itself into it, by enlisting one's self-conceptions. It is via those self-conceptions (or practical identities) that one will now count as participating whole-heartedly in one's acts.

This account is obviously naturalistic in the sense that it offers a kind of evolutionary story about the origin of autonomy and moral responsibility out of natural and historical events. As such it seems to fit more properly within a compatibilist orientation. But things are a bit murkier than one may expect. The instinct for freedom that is one of the principal actors in these transformations is a manifestation of the will to power which Nietzsche describes in the *Genealogy* as a *spontaneous* force. This makes it sound as if the instinct is at bottom indeterministic in nature and, as such, could perhaps

serve as the basis for an incompatibilist account of human agency. In my view, Nietzsche's discussion of autonomy and responsibility is sufficiently ambiguous on this score to be recruited by either camp. In the end, I believe it is a matter of indifference whether one wants to align Nietzsche to an incompatibilist or to a compatibilist conception of human agency.

However, I think that the ambiguity regarding Nietzsche's position on this issue is not accidental. In a deep sense and in a way that is very much consonant with the overall tenor of his philosophy, Nietzsche was truly beyond this debate, and trying to place him within the bounds of these categories does violence to his thought. In the first place, I think that this kind of preoccupation with the truth about our status as agents would have struck Nietzsche as being too ascetic: it is the sort of sterile questioning that he so often decried as the mark of decadence and weakness proper of those scholars who search after truth for the sake of truth itself, and not for the sake of creativity and life or to use truth as a plastic power with which to engender the future. But, secondly, this issue is at bottom a metaphysical problem and to solve it one would need to peek into the nature of reality in a way that I think Nietzsche thought ultimately impossible. This dissertation is mostly mute with respect to Nietzsche's metaphysical beliefs and I cannot defend this claim here. Nonetheless, I believe that for Nietzsche metaphysical questions are fundamentally opaque: either the world is indeterminate regarding issues such as those underwriting the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism, or we will simply never know. I suspect that one of the main lessons Nietzsche drew from his numerous excursions into the pioneering science of his age and from reading Lange's *History of Materialism*, was

that it is *in principle* impossible to find the final ground of reality. For him there is no promissory note when it comes to the project of unveiling nature completely: we will always encounter another veil behind all our unveilings of nature (in principle, we will never hit rock bottom).

But let us leave this matter aside and let me return to the value Nietzsche places on freedom. The three ideals that were the subject of this study contain some of the most important elements of this fundamental value. But there are still other aspects of Nietzsche's understanding of freedom that need to be explored and that can be the subject of future investigations. Some of these have been suggested by the results of my analysis, as in the case of Nietzsche's distinction between a skepticism of strength and a skepticism of weakness, or his suggestion that some form of self-deception is required to become free. But there are others as well, like Nietzsche's notion of a free spirit, his concept of the Overman, and the relation of the thought of Eternal Recurrence to freedom. Constructing a complete picture of Nietzsche's thought on this subject requires pursuing these parts of the puzzle as well.

Discovering that Nietzsche's main preoccupation was freedom, in my view, also provides an invaluable compass with which to approach the rest of his philosophy. To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that the concept of freedom that I have unveiled in this dissertation should be used as an exegetical principle in the way others have used naturalist precepts, or the ontological category of the will to power, or the metaphor of the world as a text, or some other standard of interpretation. I remain convinced that the

correct approach to Nietzsche's philosophy should be piecemeal and tackle narrow topics on their own terms. Still, in this case, pursuing this kind of approach has revealed that there is a point of commonality and an underlying concern behind the issues that Nietzsche wrote about, at least in the practical side of his philosophy. Given this result, I think we would do well to keep a vigilant eye when exploring other aspects of his thought, as they are probably implicated with Nietzsche's project of fostering the conditions under which human freedom can flourish and grow. Take, for example, the problem of Nihilism. For the most part, this concept is usually understood to signify the meaninglessness of existence. But, as understood by Nietzsche, this characterization is only partly true. More fundamental than the meaninglessness of existence, is the notion of a renunciation of the will and of active willing. Nihilism is the opposite of freedom; it stands for a will that seeks its own cancelation and destruction. Because genuine freedom is the only thing that can really give meaning to our existence, Nihilism also leads derivatively to the meaninglessness of existence. For Nietzsche, true freedom consists in the proper use of one's energies, a use that guarantees that those energies will not get lost in the oblivion of death to which we are all condemned. To evade freedom, to live life in constant flight from responsibility, is to curtail the only possibility we have of giving meaning to our lives.

In this same way, I think we gain the correct insight into the importance and significance of the concept of Genealogy in Nietzsche's philosophy when we keep in mind the centrality of freedom. Genealogy is not so much about revealing the erroneous beliefs we hold to be true and the way we came to hold them; nor is it about showing the

spurious origins of our moral values. Instead, I believe that for Nietzsche the value of Genealogy resides in its role as a tool for self-knowledge. To be free we must know ourselves, otherwise we risk remaining caught up in values that unbeknownst to us keep us enslaved. In this connection, it is worth remembering that the preface to the *Genealogy* begins with the observation that we are unknown to ourselves. The task of exploring the origins of our moral values not only reawakens hidden possibilities for normative creation and keeps our concepts malleable; it also reveals the elements and the forces that may still be at work and lurking in the shadow of those concepts we use in our everyday moral trafficking and philosophizing. This is crucial for the healthy exercise of our freedom in what is perhaps its most important capacity: that of creating the values that are to govern our lives and those of future humanity; a task reserved for the genuine philosopher who, more than a mere diagnostician and seeker of truth, according to Nietzsche, is fundamentally a law-giver.

In this regard, I think Nietzsche's thought is still current and can make important contributions to contemporary philosophy, especially to its analytic branch which for the most part proceeds ahistorically. Even if the particular account Nietzsche offers in the *Genealogy* is incorrect, it is still valuable insofar as it teaches us to ask questions about our moral concepts and to be more cautious about the motivations that may be impelling us to define them in the way we do and to frame the problems that drive our moral investigations and debates. Similarly, the conception of philosophy as fundamentally a commanding discipline that sets the goals and values we are to follow, offers a different and provocative perspective on our discipline. A lot of philosophical work in moral

psychology today exhibits the ever increasing tendency to answer normative questions statistically, or to vindicate philosophical models and opinions by empirically investigating the “folk morality” of ordinary life. Nietzsche would have found this tendency deplorable and degrading of the noble role of the philosopher. For him, philosophy should not let the way ordinary people think, judge and behave morally dictate the creation of values (indeed, Nietzsche would have claimed that this method stagnates creativity since its goal is that of averaging values down to the level of the customary morality of the common man). On the contrary, it is the philosopher himself who should ordain the future moral struggles of humanity and set us on the right path to renovate and transform our values. Some may find this posture arrogant and absurd. It is certainly not my intention to take Nietzsche’s side on this issue. But I think that, even if we reject it in the end, there is nonetheless value in this perspective insofar as it awakens unusual possibilities and sets before us a different image of philosophy that can help us positively rethink the goals of all our moral theorizing.

Finally, I think that Nietzsche’s thought is also relevant as a means for cultural criticism and reformation. Our society today, as it was in Nietzsche’s time, is still a society preoccupied with empty forms and appearances; a society that is obsessed with entertainment, comfort and ease. To that extent, as Nietzsche would put it, our planet continues to be an ascetic planet inhabited by creatures that seem bent on promoting a nihilistic culture that ossifies the creative forces of life. Nietzsche offers us a deep and powerful criticism of that blind focus on happiness that governs our time and impels us to waste our lives in the vain search for riches, honors and pleasures. With the aid of his

philosophy we can tighten the spiritual bow of our age (to use one of Nietzsche's favorite metaphors) and learn to strive for something higher, so that – who knows? – perhaps one day we may find ourselves reaching newer and mightier goals that can guarantee a loftier and more meaningful future for all.

Bibliography

For Nietzsche's works I use the following abbreviations for the texts in English translation:

UM for *The Untimely Meditations*
HAH for *Human All Too Human*
GS for *The Gay Science*
Z for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
BGE for *Beyond Good and Evil*
GM for *On the Genealogy of Morals*
TI for *Twilight of the Idols*
A for *The Antichrist*
EH for *Ecce Homo*.

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