The Contest of Extremes: An Exploration of the Foundations and the Peak of Nietzsche's Political Philosophy

By Peter Berkowitz

This is the Introduction to Professor Berkowitz's forthcoming book from Harvard University Press.

The dazzling beauty of Nietzsche's magnificent writings may blind the reader to the extreme and explosive character of his opinions. Nietzsche expounded a radical and aristocratic egoism; poured scorn on Platonism, Christianity, modernity, enlightenment, democracy, socialism, and the emancipation of women; denounced the belief in human equality as a calamitous conceit; and ardently championed a rank order of desires, types of human beings, and forms of life.

Nietzsche's standpoint, which he describes as above politics (BT* Preface; A Preface), has implications for politics. Yet the critical political implications of Nietzsche's standpoint are more in evidence than are the constructive. In fact, Nietzsche has little to say about many of the leading themes in the history of political philosophy: the types of regimes and the characteristic citizen corresponding to each; the best regime; the laws or the rule of law; the fair distribution of property and the right arrangement of social institutions. It is tempting, therefore, to conclude that Nietzsche does not practice or contribute to political philosophy, for a primary theme of political philosophy is the city or citizenship and the human being, that is, the relation between the common good and the good of the individual.

Yet Nietzsche's evident opinion that how human beings govern themselves is an illegitimate or marginal topic of philosophy is based upon a certain understanding of the desires and longings of the human soul and the kind of life or specific

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virtues most conducive to satisfying those desires. By starting from an analysis of what human beings desire and what is desirable for a human being, Nietzsche moves on the plane of moral and political philosophy. Nietzsche poses a radical challenge to political philosophy by accepting the starting point of political philosophy — the inescapability or fundamental importance of questions about what is good — while denying that the good is intrinsically connected to any political regime, system of social institutions, or personal attachments. The radical devaluation of political life, and the comprehensive reflection in which that devaluation is ensconced, is a proper and indispensable subject of political philosophy.

A striking feature of Nietzsche’s philosophical explorations, concealed by his reputation as the last of the modern philosophers and the first of the post-moderns, is the coexistence of, and indeed contest within his thought between, characteristically ancient and characteristically modern concerns. As in the inquiries characteristic of ancient political philosophy, the question of human perfection lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s inquiries. At the same time, modern ideas about knowledge, freedom, and mastery pervade and shape his investigations. In his most ambitious works Nietzsche elevates to new heights the characteristically modern aspirations to conquer fortune, to master nature, and to actualize freedom. Yet the dizzying perspective afforded by these new heights is by Nietzsche’s own admission decisively determined by ancient notions of metaphysics and human excellence (UD 1, GS 344, BGE 204). In effect, Nietzsche radicalizes modern principles but on the basis of, and constrained by, traditional moral and intellectual virtues. As Nietzsche expounds a new ethics composed of ancient and modern elements, his thought becomes a battleground for extreme and rival opinions about history, art, morality, religion, virtue, nature, politics, and philosophy. Indeed, this contest of extremes forms Nietzsche’s thought.

The death of God is the great speculation that drives Nietzsche’s contest of extremes. Contrary to the reductivist approach exemplified by Alexander Nehamas’ influential book, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, where the death of God functions as a premise in an argument that “allows Nietzsche to deny that the world is subject to a single overarching interpretation, corresponding to God’s role or intention,” the death of God, I shall argue, describes both the condition of a humanity that worships a God who is no longer vital or believable, but also and more importantly the condition of those who somehow discover and wish to face up to the fact that morality lacks a foundation in nature, divinity, or reason. This, at least, is the view of Nietzsche’s madman who proclaims God’s death and characterizes His murder as the greatest deed yet in his—

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Nehamas’ favored doctrine, perspectivism, the view that every view, including the view called perspectivism, is not even an implication or consequence of the death of God as Nietzsche understands it. For Nietzsche, the death of God — that is, the denial that nature, reason, or revelation provide moral standards for the governance of life, or as Nietzsche puts it a few sections earlier in *The Gay Science*, “The total character of the world... is in all eternity chaos” (GS 109) — is the one true account of the circumstances in which human beings really dwell. Paradoxically, the human condition so understood, at least in Nietzsche’s view, generates specific and severe practical imperatives. And Nietzsche views the clarification of these practical imperatives as his central task. The common tendency today to view questions about knowledge, language, and interpretation as the focus of Nietzsche’s thought drastically shifts the actual center of gravity in his books. By making Nietzsche over into a theorist primarily concerned with questions of how we perceive and know, scholars have lost sight of Nietzsche’s driving preoccupation with the question of how a human being should live. In fact, Nietzsche tended to avoid complicated conceptual or metaphysical analysis, giving pride of place instead to questions about the best life. When Nietzsche does turn to epistemology and metaphysics it is usually with moral intent. For Nietzsche, as I shall argue, the chief question is not how we know but rather what we ought to do in response to the shattering knowledge within our grasp. And Nietzsche, or at least his madman and his Zarathustra know much; from the true but deadly doctrine that morality lacks support in nature, reason, or God, they derive the moral imperative to invent festivals of atonement and sacred games which enable the very best human beings to make themselves gods by commanding the greatest things. But what are the greatest things? What would such a life look like? And what makes self-deification necessary or desirable?

This study clarifies the foundations and spells out the practical implications of Nietzsche’s account of the best life. At the foundations of Nietzsche’s thought there is a pervasive tension between his fundamental assumption that morality is an artifact of the human will and his unyielding conviction that there is a binding rank order among desires, types of human beings, and forms of life. On the basis of this contest of extreme and conflicting views Nietzsche expounds an ethics of self-deification that culminates in a radical exaltation of the human power to both understand and control the world. Speaking very generally, human excellence, for Nietzsche, consists in facing squarely, comprehending accurately, and overcoming the ugly necessity that governs the human condition by bringing that necessity under the will’s dominion.

Human excellence so understood requires a coherent account of the disharmony between human desire and the cosmos in which human beings dwell, an account that explains why human beings are obliged to make them-
selves gods. But Nietzsche's robust conviction that there is an order of rank among souls and an intelligible health characteristic of the soul contravenes his firm opinion that the world lacks a moral order. Nietzsche's view of what it is to be a human being and his conception of the cosmos are like two intimately related antagonists in a play who can never meet on stage because they are portrayed by the same actor. Nietzsche rejects the very idea of natural or rationally intelligible ends yet he also affirms them and cannot do without them; this pervasive tension both binds his thought together and tears it apart. His remarkable attempt to do justice to and overcome the contest of extreme opinions that forms his thought culminates in Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil, both of which envisage virtue without a natural end and promise redemption without God. Unable in good conscience to reject either cluster of opinions, Nietzsche thinks their conflict through to the breaking point and thereby suggests that the distinctions between the just and unjust, noble and shameful, and good and bad are the hallmarks of our humanity and cannot be sustained if their foundation in nature, reason, or revelation is altogether abolished.

The Quarrel Between Ancient and Modern

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ONTemporary scholarship, both inspired by and devoted to Nietzsche, has obscured Nietzsche's bold examination of the character and the requirements of the best life. One particular prejudice that is cultivated by the new orthodoxy must be confronted at once. In this study I shall often use time-honored and old-fashioned words such as truth [Wahrheit], wisdom [Weisheit], soul [Seele], will [Wille], right [Recht], justice [Gerechtigkeit], nature [Natur], rank order [Rangordnung], nobility [Vornehmheit], and philosophy [Philosophie]. The reason is simple: Nietzsche uses these old-fashioned and time-honored words, and not just here and there, but pervasively, vigorously, and unabashedly both in criticism and in the service of his most characteristic convictions and doctrines. Nonetheless, this language will jar and perhaps dismay those who approach Nietzsche on the basis of recent scholarship, and may at first glance appear as a tendentious attempt to bring foreign concepts and partisan moral categories to bear on Nietzsche's thought, a crude effort to impose terms and notions on Nietzsche that he himself sought to overthrow. Such reactions would be an unfortunate but understandable outgrowth of the new view that credits Nietzsche with overcoming morality, breaking free of traditional modes of thought, and founding new forms of life. This pious acceptance of Nietzsche's boldest claims at once selectively takes Nietzsche at his word and surreptitiously puts words in his mouth. The new orthodoxy confuses Nietzsche's intention to overcome morality with its actual overcoming, mistakes the desire to discover or invent new modes and orders of thought for their discovery or invention, and mixes up the ambition to found new forms of life with the establishment of a new order. Propelled by a combination of credulity and enthusiasm, the new orthodoxy equates Nietzsche's wishes and promises with their fulfillment. If, however, one probes beyond the dominant opinion, one sees that Nietzsche's radical intentions are critically shaped and continuously nurtured by traditional
ideas and hopes. Although it extends to the foundations, one does not have to probe deeply to discover manifestations of the traditional dimension of Nietzsche's thought: one need merely turn from popular opinions about Nietzsche to the textured surface of his writings.

This is not to say that Nietzsche's persistent use of traditional moral and philosophical language is without paradox. Although he tenaciously questions the value of truth and insists on "perspective, the basic condition of all life" (BGE Preface), Nietzsche denounces those who turn truth upside down and he repeatedly equates serving or pursuing the truth with the supreme human type. Although he delights in exposing pretensions to knowledge as desire for power, Nietzsche and his Zarathustra affirm that wisdom — knowledge of metaphysics and human nature — is the ground and goal of human excellence. Although he condemns the soul as a pernicious invention of Christian priests and theologians, Nietzsche and his Zarathustra frequently use the term soul without irony or embarrassment to designate what is finest, deepest, and highest in human beings.

Although he criticizes the doctrine of the will as one of the four great errors and mocks both the idea of the free and the unfree will (TI "The Four Great Errors" 7; BGE 21), Nietzsche considered himself a free spirit, regarded freedom and independence, rightly understood, as prerogatives of higher human beings, and his Zarathustra championed a kind of self-determining will that wills itself and becomes its own law. Although he seeks to undermine the metaphysical basis for belief in the notion of right or rights, Nietzsche does not refrain from couching his vision of human excellence in terms of right and rights. Although he argues that morality is an outgrowth or projection of desire and will, Nietzsche also invokes justice as the rarest of virtues, that which governs the service of truth, giving and receiving, and valid legislation. Although he affirms in unequivocal terms that nature is non-moral, chaotic, and senseless, Nietzsche appeals to nature as a moral or ethical standard. Although he asserts that good and evil are created by human beings, Nietzsche routinely proclaims that there is an order of rank among desires, human types, and forms of life, and that the noble soul belongs to the upper echelons of the rank order. And although he unleashes a devastating attack on the prejudices that have ruined philosophy in the past and bedevil it in the present, Nietzsche proudly proclaims himself a knower and philosopher and enthusiastically looks forward to a philosophy of the future.

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Neither one side nor the other in these pairs of extremes is correctly designated by itself as “Nietzschean,” or the core of Nietzsche’s thought. This is not to say that in the contest of extremes that forms Nietzsche’s thought one side does not gain the upper hand. It is, however, to insist upon the centrality of the contest that holds these rival and extreme opinions together and the fundamental assumptions about human beings and the cosmos that generate it.¹⁹

Some will argue that Nietzsche’s reliance upon traditional language stems from a misplaced nostalgia from which he never quite broke free. Others will contend that Nietzsche invokes traditional language ironically, subverting or transfiguring traditional terms and categories in the very process of using them. Still others will insist that although Nietzsche rejects traditional language in favor of something brand new, he is constrained to use it because traditional language has dominated the scene for ages and remains the only game in town. One must of course be alive to Nietzsche’s famous irony and explore what Nietzsche aims to reveal and conceal through its use. To be sure, and like Socrates, Nietzsche uses irony to call into question traditional understandings, but precisely in using irony, the very notion of which presupposes a gap between what one says and what one believes, and hence an intelligible and principled difference between appearance and reality, Nietzsche reveals his dependence on a traditional philosophical distinction. To excuse or to rationalize away the traditional dimension of Nietzsche’s thought risks transfiguring Nietzsche into a miracle worker, gratuitously exempting him from ordinary rules and standards and naively attributing to him extravagant feats that are the philosophical equivalent of spinning straw into gold. I must emphasize that it is out of respect for his achievement as a writer and thinker that I do not approach Nietzsche as if he were able to walk on water or magically transform intractable tensions into redeeming visions. For now I want only to insist that Nietzsche’s use of traditional language is a pervasive feature of his thought the significance of which must be determined if his philosophical explorations are to be understood. Nietzsche sometimes expresses his revolutionary aim as the revaluation of all values. Just as “revaluation” [Umwertung] embraces “value” [Wert], so too Nietzsche’s attempts to conceive a new human type by revaluing all values, preserves crucial elements of the tradition he sets out to overcome.

**Heidegger’s Challenge**

MARTIN HEIDEGGER PROVIDES ALMOST UNRIVALED insight into Nietzsche’s fundamental conceptions — the death of God, the will to power, the eternal return, and nihilism. In his pioneering confrontation with Nietzsche’s thought Heidegger argues that Nietzsche’s philosophy culminates in a vain desire, rooted in the very spiritual corruption that Nietzsche sought to overcome, for a supreme form of mastery. Heidegger, who regarded Nietzsche as primarily a “metaphysical thinker,”²⁰ indeed “the last metaphysician of the West,”²¹ shows that the supreme questions raised by Nietzsche’s philosophy revolve around fundamental metaphysical problems. Yet Heidegger, I think, mischaracterizes the significance of the moral intentions that motivate Nietzsche’s treacherous explorations and misinterprets Nietzsche’s results.
On Heidegger's view, "Nietzsche's philosophy is inverted Platonism." Heidegger understands this inversion as the outcome of the countermovement that Nietzsche launches to Western metaphysics — where metaphysics is understood as the investigation of the basic structure and first principles of the cosmos, that is the effort to think being as a whole. Nietzsche's countermovement, Heidegger argues, necessarily remains, as a countermovement, entangled in metaphysics or "held fast in the essence of that over against which it moves." But whereas Heidegger draws the conclusion that Nietzsche's attempt to overthrow the Platonism that constitutes the Western tradition in philosophy is a task that still awaits completion, I shall suggest that Nietzsche's failure to move beyond metaphysics attests to its inescapability. Whereas Heidegger dreams of breaking free of "that over against which" Nietzsche's philosophy moves — that is the philosophical tradition inaugurated by Plato and completed by Nietzsche — I shall suggest that Nietzsche's inability to realize the highest ambitions of his philosophy requires a reconsideration of "that over against which" his philosophy moves.

Reservations about his conclusions notwithstanding, Heidegger's encounter with Nietzsche represents the high point in Nietzsche interpretation because Heidegger discerned that the high point of Nietzsche's speculations, the peak where his fundamental conceptions collide, is in the effort to reconcile activities and concepts that, according to Heidegger's interpretation of the tradition, have traditionally been held apart: truth and art, knowing and making, necessity and freedom, Being and Becoming. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche attempts to achieve these reconciliations by making human power over the world absolute — but he fails. Nietzsche's failure, Heidegger insists, is tremendously important: it marks a turning point in the history of philosophy in the sense that it brings metaphysics to a close by thinking through its last possibility and revealing that its opposites could not be effectively reconciled. Following Heidegger, I too see Nietzsche as a turning point. Yet, contrary to Heidegger's opinion that Nietzsche's thought represents the consummation and exhaustion of Western metaphysics, I suggest that Nietzsche's failure to overcome the tradition justi-
fies a renewed encounter with the whole history of philosophy from which Nietzsche sought to break free.

One reason, I think, that Heidegger goes astray is that he pays too little attention to the movement of Nietzsche's thought. Although he was a great reader, Heidegger was also a great misreader.26 By insisting that Nietzsche's fundamental question is a metaphysical question, Heidegger projected a restrictive framework of his own making onto Nietzsche's thought, which, although it revealed much also obscured plenty. With staggering irony, Heidegger's manipulation, exploitation, and selective use of Nietzsche's writings exemplifies the technological frame of mind that Heidegger himself deplored, purported to wish to overcome, and claimed to find in its most advanced form in Nietzsche's thought.27

If one places Nietzsche's unpublished notes out of which Heidegger made so much in perspective, and respects the context in which Nietzsche expounds his thoughts by turning to a consideration of Nietzsche's books, one will see the opportunity that Heidegger lost sight of and which his writings on Nietzsche buried. The opportunity consists in a non-traditional and skeptical encounter with the tradition. For the traditional notions and virtues that enliven Nietzsche's thought not only make possible the exhibition of the defects of his fundamental doctrines and highest aspirations; the crucial role of these traditional notions and virtues in Nietzsche's philosophical explorations also gives rise to the demand that they be given another hearing. This startling if tentative vindication of the tradition by one who set out to overcome it is perhaps a fitting outcome for a thinker who prefers to the courage of conviction the courage for an attack on one's convictions.

The Importance of Nietzsche's Books

Numerous hard-won insights into Nietzsche's thought have been deformed owing to the defective procedure by which they were obtained. Heidegger has contributed decisively to making legitimate an odd and indefensible practice that dominates efforts to reconstruct or expound Nietzsche's thought.28 The common practice, cutting across a wealth of opinions about Nietzsche, is to lift Nietzsche's ideas, arguments, and philosophical explorations out of the context from which they derive the sense and significance Nietzsche gave them. In particular, Nietzsche's well-known statements about perspectivism, creativity, will, and reason have suffered at the hands of scholars and advocates a fate similar to that of a lion wrested from his natural habitat, hauled thousands of miles and displayed for show in a cramped zoo cage where forced confinement silences its roar, dims its eyes, and breaks its spirit. While there may be good reasons for wrenching some of Nietzsche's ideas from their context and forcing them into new homes, what could justify passing off as the original these caged and broken speculations?

The standard practice involves making arguments about what Nietzsche intended or thought based on picking and choosing, mixing and matching, and cutting and pasting words, phrases, and ideas drawn from wherever they can be found in Nietzsche's Collected Works.29 Wildly diverse materials, often with lit-
tle or no mention of the argumentative or dramatic context from which they are taken, are marshalled to construct or reconstruct doctrines that are then attributed to Nietzsche. One sees the height of this perverse practice in the crude treatment to which *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is routinely subjected. Even some of those who emphasize the literary character of Nietzsche’s works do not hesitate to ascribe to Nietzsche isolated remarks and actions made by Nietzsche’s literary creation Zarathustra.30

What accounts for the strange manner in which many scholars rummage through Nietzsche’s writings for useful material is, I think, a peculiar idea about how to read books in general and Nietzsche’s books in particular. The common method is based on the assumption that Nietzsche’s books are not unified works, that they do not present sustained philosophical views, that their parts do not derive their fundamental significance from their place in the whole. Judging by general practice, the consensus is that Nietzsche’s books are potpourris of stimulating insights mixed in with clunkers, embarrassments, unfortunate fulminations, and irrelevant judgments. The dominant view holds that the decisive unit of meaning in Nietzsche’s writings is at one extreme a posthumously published, multi-volume entity called *The Collected Works* and at the other extreme the brilliant, self-contained aphorism.

In practice, these two extreme opinions amount to the same thing: they equally license scholars to become advocates, picking and choosing from Nietzsche’s writings as they please, using what they find congenial, stimulating, or expedient, passing by in silence what they find mistaken or disadvantageous, and passing off the result as if it were faithful to Nietzsche’s thought.

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his books to his readers' wills. But is that the whole story? For to the extent that we establish that Nietzsche thought that all reading is writing we prove that some opinions, for example, Nietzsche's opinion that all reading is writing, may be read rather than rewritten.\textsuperscript{31}

Although sophisticated authors may pay lip service to the idea that their interpretation is one among many, in practice those who champion the perspectival, willful, and aesthetic side of Nietzsche's thought nonetheless purport to accomplish in the interpretation of Nietzsche what their interpretation of Nietzsche implies can never be accomplished, namely to grasp the basic or defining characteristics of Nietzsche's thought.\textsuperscript{32} I am in sympathy with the quest to comprehend the fundamental features of Nietzsche's thought, in part, as I noted in the Preface, because this comprehension is what Nietzsche explicitly wished for from his readers. My point is that scholars who attribute to Nietzsche, and themselves endorse, perspectival, constructivist, or aesthetic notions of understanding often claim, in quite traditional fashion, to understand what is basic or fundamental in Nietzsche's thought and give every appearance of wishing for their own writings to be read rather than rewritten. Thus their practice betrays their principle, undercutting the key presupposition — the idea that all interpretation is willful remaking of the world — that justifies disregarding the integrity of Nietzsche's books. And something similar can be said about Nietzsche: his extreme theoretical speculations about the willfulness of interpretation notwithstanding, Nietzsche explicitly wrote, as the Prefaces to his books abundantly attest, in the hopes that some few readers would understand his meaning. To be sure, the speculation and the hope conflict. But which must yield? Are Nietzsche's hopes that his writings would be understood undercut by his extreme speculations about language, interpretation, and knowledge? Or rather, must we understand Nietzsche's extreme speculations in light of his firm conviction that his writings as well as those of others were intelligible?

My view is that the extraordinary unity of conviction, purpose, and execution that marks Nietzsche's thought\textsuperscript{33} only comes to light by recognizing the integrity of Nietzsche's books.\textsuperscript{34} There is strong \textit{prima facie} evidence that this is how Nietzsche wished to be understood. First, the fact that Nietzsche chose to write and publish books at all, and then books with prefaces, titles, chapter headings, distinctive emphases, styles, and subjects gives rise to the presumption that the form of his presentation is meaningful.\textsuperscript{35} Second, most of Nietzsche's books contain Prefaces or Prologues in which Nietzsche discusses the specific intention informing the work at hand. Third, in \textit{Ecce Homo}, his last book, Nietzsche surveys his life's work, and in so doing treats his books as distinct units of thought with differing and intelligible aims. Fourth, and more provisionally, attention to the structure, argument, and intention in Nietzsche's books yields rich rewards.\textsuperscript{36} In the end, of course, the proof of the opinion that the key to Nietzsche's thought lies in his book is in the reading.\textsuperscript{37}
A Path in Nietzsche's Thought

Here are many paths in Nietzsche's thought. The one I trace goes to the foundations and the peak of his reflections on the best life. Like any other, my account runs the risk of "aspect-blindness." But awareness of the risk lessens the odds of losing one's way. Indeed, I aim to show that it is precisely the virtue of an examination of Nietzsche's efforts to clarify the character of the best life that it can bring into focus a wide range of his opinions and writings and shed light on the underlying continuities of his thought.

Part I, "Nietzsche's Histories," deals with Nietzsche's three major attempts, spanning his career, to derive lessons about art, morality, and religion from ancient history. In Chapter 1 I argue that Nietzsche's prescriptions for the right use of history in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* are determined by the requirements of human excellence. I emphasize that Nietzsche's prescriptions for the right use of history openly rest upon a bold claim to metaphysical knowledge and a definite view, at once descriptive and normative, of human nature. In the remaining three chapters of Part I, I show that the metaphysical knowledge and the view of human nature, along with the prescriptions for the use of history, decisively shape the manner in which Nietzsche writes his histories. That is, in harmony with the task that he assigns the "genuine historian" in *Uses and Disadvantages*, Nietzsche, in his own histories, subordinates the acquisition of exact historical knowledge to the poetic or mythic presentation of historical figures and events so as to display the enduring truth about human excellence and depravity. In the subsequent chapters of Part I, I argue that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche analyses the origins of ancient Greek tragedy to vindicate the ethics of art; in *On the Genealogy of Morals* he examines the ancient origins of moral prejudices to give an account of the ethics of morality; and that in *The Antichrist* he exposes the origins of organized Christianity and praises the moral intentions governing Buddhism, Jesus, and the Hindu Law of Manu to distinguish good and bad religions and to throw light on the ethics of religion. I conclude that in each of his histories Nietzsche transforms history into poetry to defend wisdom, to distinguish nobility from baseness, and to establish the love of truth as a resplendent vice and noble faith.

Nietzsche's histories resolutely point to but do not fully articulate the character of human excellence, "the supreme type of all beings" (EH III, on Z, 6). There are among Nietzsche's books two major attempts to articulate the character of the supreme type. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents the superman as the highest type. *Beyond Good and Evil* puts forward the "philosopher of the future" as the peak of human excellence. The obvious question, ignored right and left, is whether the superman and the philosopher of the future are distinct and rival types or whether they boil down to one and the same type. Are Zarathustra's superman and the philosopher of the future in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when all is said and done, two or one? The answer of course depends upon an analysis of each figure which in turn depends upon study of the book of which each is a protagonist.

Part II, "The Superman," focuses on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the work
Nietzsche considered to be his most profound and far-sighted. Chapter 5 deals with the Prologue and examines the constellation of desires and beliefs that propel Zarathustra in his inept, ill-conceived, and abortive attempt to proclaim in the marketplace his wisdom about the death of God and the advent of the superman. Chapter 6 focuses on Part I of Zarathustra and explores the severe consequences for political life stemming from the revaluation of virtue, the state, romantic love, and friendship required by Zarathustra's new ethics of creativity. Chapter 7 revolves around Zarathustra's terrifying discovery in Parts II and III of Zarathustra, that human excellence, understood in terms of the ethics of the creative self, requires absolute mastery or what amounts to the same thing, self-deification. I argue that it is the very spirit of revenge that he sought to overcome that compels Zarathustra to invent and to succumb to the delusive doctrine of the eternal return, an interpretation of the cosmos by which Zarathustra attempts to secure absolute mastery by making his will a law unto itself. Chapter 8 deals with Part IV of Zarathustra and examines the heavy price Zarathustra pays for having abandoned his wisdom, but also calls attention to the new sobriety he has won. In spite of his bizarre and humiliating dealings with his self-proclaimed followers, the spiritually and physically deformed "higher men," Zarathustra in the end prudently retreats from the impossibly high goals he had set for the superman. In conclusion, I suggest that the great achievement of Thus Spoke Zarathustra is to show how and why Zarathustra must fail in his efforts to become a self-made god. Indeed, in my view, a major portion of Nietzsche's enduring legacy is vouchsafed in Zarathustra's speeches for they chronicle the disintegration of judgment, the loss of dignity, the estrangement from human ties, the denigration of politics, and the victimization by an insatiable pride that result, regardless of the nobility of the fundamental intention, when the will is assigned the ruling position in the soul.

Part III, "Free Spirits and Philosophers of the Future," deals with Beyond Good and Evil, a work that Nietzsche characterizes as a fundamental criticism of modernity that at the same time points to a kind of excellence "that is as little modern as possible" (EH III, on BGE, 2). I argue that Nietzsche's attack on the prejudices of great philosophers of the past in Part I of Beyond Good and Evil has the positive result of illuminating the prejudices or convictions that Nietzsche believes free spirits like himself, who love truth and seek knowledge, must cherish and defend. Then I explore Nietzsche's view, forcefully presented.
in Part 2, "The Free Spirit," and elaborated throughout, that freedom is a right and a duty rooted in a combination of metaphysical knowledge and courage. Next I show how Nietzsche’s oblique discussions of the philosopher of the future, culminating in Part 6, reveal that the perfection of the free spirit’s freedom culminates in the extraordinary moral imperative, which Nietzsche does little to clarify or vindicate, to sanctify and legislate necessity and to create values. Finally, I sketch the character of Nietzsche’s return in the final Parts of Beyond Good and Evil from the dizzying heights of the philosopher of the future where knowing culminates in creating, commanding, and legislating, to the more modest equation of philosophy with the noble man’s self-knowledge.

Nietzsche’s philosopher of the future shares the aspiration and goal of Zarathustra’s superman. As in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche teaches in Beyond Good and Evil that human excellence requires absolute freedom that is based on absolute knowledge and realized in absolute mastery. And as in Part IV of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, where the highest aims of the superman are left quietly behind, there is a discreet but visible retreat in the final Parts of Beyond Good and Evil from the grandest aspirations of the philosopher of the future. The crucial difference is that whereas Thus Spoke Zarathustra throws light on the reasons why the quest to achieve the superman’s goal must be rejected, Beyond Good and Evil leaves the reasons for tempering the ambitions of the philosopher of the future shrouded in shadows and silence.

From the perspective of Nietzsche’s free-spirited skepticism that honors “every little question mark” over “special words and favorite doctrines” (BGE 25), one must conclude that in one sense Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a more profound and far-sighted book than Beyond Good and Evil, because while both show how knowledge of metaphysics and human nature gives rise to the moral imperative to achieve supreme mastery, Zarathustra’s speeches and deeds better reveal that the goal of making oneself a god is undesirable and unattainable. Yet from the perspective of the same free-spirited skepticism, but in a different respect, it is Beyond Good and Evil which is superior, for Beyond Good and Evil more richly exemplifies the kind of questioning characteristic of the free spirit for whom honesty is a virtue (BGE 227, 230), the desire for truth is a ruling passion (BGE 1), and knowledge of existence requires outstanding courage (BGE 1, 23, 39). The exemplification of this free-spirited questioning is another key part of Nietzsche’s enduring legacy.

**A Point of Departure**

**N**IETZSCHE’S REPUTATION AS THE PHILOSOPHER OF creativity, willing, and power is not undeserved, yet it has worked to occlude the fundamental structure of his thought. For Nietzsche emphatically distinguishes good from bad exercises of creativity, willing, and power. Good art in Nietzsche’s thought depends upon excellence in philosophy.39 And, in Nietzsche’s view, the highest kind of art or making must be based upon the most impressive form of philosophy or knowledge. The account of the highest human activity that Nietzsche offers in Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil can be understood in terms of a formula: right making based upon right knowing.40
Generally speaking, Nietzsche is, as postmodern interpretations suggest, a teacher of self-making or self-creation. Yet postmodern interpreters and “neo-Nietzschean” theorists overlook the foundations of Nietzsche’s imperative to self-making and underestimate the severity of Nietzsche’s ethics of the creative self.41 For Nietzsche, there is a rank order of creative activities according to which the ultimate form of making is self-making and the ultimate form of self-making is nothing less than making oneself a god. What postmodern interpreters disregard is that Nietzsche is compelled to figure out the form of life suitable to a self-made god, one who engages in right making based on right knowing, by what he calls the intellectual conscience. In other words, it is what he has been driven to discover about the human condition by his love of truth, or what he sometimes calls his gay science, that impels Nietzsche to reach the fantastic conclusion that the good for human beings consists in the act of self-deification.

A brief glance at Nietzsche’s Gay Science can provide a useful introduction to fundamental elements of the ethics of self-deification. In Section 2, “The Intellectual Conscience,” Nietzsche laments that “the great majority of people” — including “the most gifted men and the noblest women” — do not seek to rest their faith and judgments on reason (GS 2). Virtues, Nietzsche implies, are worthless if they are not supported by knowledge. “[H]igher human beings” are distinguished by the intensity of their desire for certainty. Hatred of reason is better than unquestioning faith inasmuch as it reflects a skepticism or reasoned doubt about the competence of human reason; that is, hatred of reason is vindicated as an exercise and achievement of reason. Reminiscent of Socrates’ assertion that philosophy begins in wonder,43 questioning, on Nietzsche’s account the key manifestation of the intellectual conscience, is grounded in the perception or experience of the “marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence.” Nietzsche finds those who lack the inclination to question contemptible. He admits that there is folly in this, but explains that the folly lies not in his exalted estimation of the intellectual conscience, but rather in the conviction that all human beings feel its sting. For a lively intellectual conscience is rare and the identifying mark of a higher human being.44

What would a higher human being amply endowed with an intellectual conscience know? How would such a person live? Section 125 of The Gay Science, “The Madman,” presents Nietzsche’s famous parable of the death of God. Nietzsche’s madman, a seeker after God, is distinguished not only by what he seeks but also by what he knows. As a result of his searches, the madman knows that God is dead, that human beings have killed him, that God’s death by murder is a catastrophe for the human spirit, and that the destruction of what was holiest and mightiest calls forth severe new obligations and fantastic opportunities. In language rich with Christian and theological overtones, Nietzsche’s madman speculates that human beings who know that God is dead require comfort for their crime, need water to cleanse their blood-spattered spirits, and must invent festivals of atonement and sacred games to redeem their lives. For Nietzsche’s madman, the proper and only worthy response to the death of God involves neither the negation of religious yearning nor the
squelching of the impulse to transcendence. On the contrary. Relieved of older obligations to imitate or to worship God, Nietzsche's madman discovers a new obligation for human beings: to appear worthy of having murdered God, the madman thinks, human beings must themselves "become gods." By ascribing to human beings the power to kill God and the capacity to become a god, the madman's vision represents a profound break with traditional Christianity. At the same time, the madman carries on the Christian tradition by relying upon Christian language and categories for the articulation of his new aspiration and by affirming the difference between sacred and profane by making self-deification the worthiest human task. It is almost as if the obligation to become a god were for Nietzsche's madman the supreme act of piety. Yet even if his madmen, yearning for "all that was holiest and mightiest," knowing that God was dead and drawing the ethical consequences of this "tremendous event," were the supreme embodiment of piety, the question would remain as to Nietzsche's own evaluation of piety. What could piety mean for Nietzsche in view of his ruthless questioning of cherished pieties?

As it happens, Nietzsche tells us. Speaking in the first person plural in Section 344 entitled, "How we, too, are still Pious," Nietzsche proclaims the faith and the moral intention that govern his philosophical investigations, his gay science:

it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests — that even we seekers after knowledge [Wir Erkennenden] today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine. (GS 344)

Nietzsche thus rejects the favorite words and special doctrines of Christianity and Plato because of the fundamental faith that binds him to Christianity and Plato. Although Nietzsche does proceed to raise the possibility of losing what he shares with Christianity and Plato — this faith in the divinity of truth — this loss remains, at least in the Gay Science, a possibility. And a possibility, moreover, that one is compelled to entertain by the internal demands imposed by faith in, or service to, the truth.

Nietzsche's gay science is rooted in an ethics of knowing and a faith in the sanctity of truth. What then of willing, making, and creating? In Section 335 entitled, "Long live physics!", Nietzsche presents the intellectual conscience as the judge of the moral conscience, or the form of conscience that is recognized by conventional morality. In its restlessness and severity the intellectual conscience reveals that conventional morality rests upon hypocrisy and self-deception. Prizing knowledge above authority or tradition, the intellectual conscience undercuts the authority of conventional moral judgments by revealing that conventional morality rests upon hypocrisy and self-deception. What is left after the painful self-discovery that conventional morality lacks authoritative or lofty foundations, according to Nietzsche, is understanding the imperative to undertake self-creation. The opinion that conventional morality is groundless is one of the grounds of
Nietzsche's ethics of creativity.

To truly engage in self-creation requires knowledge so as to avoid mistaking the effect of some cause, that is, a conditioned or reflexive response, for a freely chosen deed. Indeed, for Nietzsche, "the creation of our own new tables of what is good" rests upon the most ruthless forms of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. Equating self-creation with making new laws for oneself, Nietzsche view this new lawgiving as dependent upon knowledge of the old laws that still bind human beings, especially the laws of physics, for conventional morality is not the only form of necessity that deprives human beings of freedom. Thus, to become self-creators we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists in order to be able to be creators in this sense — while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on ignorance of physics or were constructed so as to contradict it. Therefore: long live physics! And even more so that which compels us to turn to physics — our honesty! (GS 335)

Since creativity depends upon what is "lawful and necessary in the world," making depends upon knowing and right making depends upon right knowing.

What exactly would those who, like Nietzsche, are governed by honesty, see when they turn to physics to discover what is "lawful and necessary in the world" (GS 335)? One possibility is introduced by Nietzsche in the penultimate Section of the first edition of The Gay Science, Section 341, "The Greatest Weight," which Nietzsche himself regarded as containing "the basic idea of Zarathustra" (EH III, on Z, 1). Nietzsche asks the reader to imagine a demon who reveals that every life is condemned to infinite and exact repetition of all of its moments. Nor is this merely a thought about human life: "The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" This account of existence, which on first hearing, Nietzsche states, appears to be a crushing curse, is on closer inspection, he suggests, a divine thought. For the thought of eternal necessity somehow gives rise to a kind of test for determining the worth of one’s life:

If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (GS 341)

How does the fervent craving for eternal necessity confer eternal significance upon self, life, and existence? It would seem that satisfaction of the desire for eternal, unchanging necessity would have the opposite effect. Unless, somehow, the idea of eternal necessity were itself a freely chosen work of the will projected or stamped upon existence,47 a work of the will that renders existence beautiful or desirable (GS 276). This then — the form of making that beautifies the world by eternalizing necessity — might even be the highest example of
right making based on right knowing. But what human being could hope to exercise so godlike a power? Such a question perhaps gives a clue as to why the ultimate Section of The Gay Science, which contains almost verbatim the opening of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, is entitled “Incipit tragœdia,” the tragedy begins.

At this point the welcome objection may be raised that I have betrayed my own strictures by forming an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought from a few passages culled from one of Nietzsche’s books supported by an opportunistic appeal to Nietzsche’s notebooks. Indeed! I have not shown that right making based on right knowing is the highest aspiration of The Gay Science, much less the dominant ambition in Nietzsche’s thought. At best I have assembled some suggestive evidence that favors such an opinion and justifies further examination. The task of vindicating the opinion that right making based on right knowing describes the highest aspiration of Nietzsche’s supreme type belongs to the detailed discussions of Nietzsche’s books in the Chapters that follow.

Let me then end this introduction by anticipating my conclusion: A peculiar combination of convictions impels Nietzsche to identify self-deification as a human being’s supreme perfection. But study of a range of Nietzsche’s books indicates that for human beings such perfection is not attainable. The imperative to make oneself a god is rooted in Nietzsche’s teaching that in fact and by right will is the ruling element in the soul. Yet if the will rules over reason there are neither facts nor rights, only projections and creations of the strongest or most efficacious wills. As I shall argue, this conundrum ultimately proves fatal to Nietzsche’s highest ambition; consequently, he does not succeed in establishing the will’s sovereignty. Yet what is a defeat in one sense is a triumph in another. For Nietzsche’s failed effort reveals that the attempt to transcend altogether the human by making one’s will a supreme law requires the principled denial of the distinction between political liberty and legal slavery, the ruthless denigration of political life, and in the end the merciless reduction of history, nature, and human beings to artifacts of strong wills. Nietzsche’s writings display how and to what a terrifying extent the coronation of the will withers the humane sensibilities, instills an indiscriminate contempt for authority, limitation and form, and generates impossibly high and inevitably destructive standards for ethics and politics. The pathos of Nietzsche’s exaltation of the will is that it subverts the rank order among desires, souls, and forms of life that he cherishes, and causes him to betray the intellectual conscience to which he professes allegiance and which in the first place dictated the will’s exaltation. Yet in displaying the truth about this betrayal, above all in Zarathustra’s self-betrayal, Nietzsche vindicates the intellectual conscience.

The extreme and explosive consequences of Nietzsche’s thought will compel humane thinkers to question his assumptions, doubt his claims, and challenge his conclusions. A different kind of thinker, obliged by the very skepticism that Nietzsche often incomparably exemplified, a free-spirited skepticism that treats nothing as too sacred to be questioned, doubted, or challenged (not even Nietzsche’s opinions), will strive to test and contest Nietzsche’s thought. Finally, it is not the morality of the humane thinker but the reasoned skepticism of the free spirit that is decisive in requiring a reconsideration of
Nietzsche’s achievement. For reason turns out to be the not-so-secret power behind the throne on which Nietzsche sets the will. Nietzsche’s efforts to exalt the will in the end bolster the claims of reason, because for Nietzsche it is reason, not will, that crowns the will, reason, not will, that clarifies the “superroyal tasks” of the supreme type, and reason, not will, that displays the confusion, the poverty, and the degradation stemming from the will’s reign.

I do not take this conclusion to be at odds with the spirit of Nietzsche’s thought. For I have been persuaded by Nietzsche’s cautionary words directed to “philosophers and friends of knowledge,” of whom he considers himself one, “that no philosopher so far has been proved right, and that there might be a more laudable truthfulness in every little question mark that you place after your special words and favorite doctrines (and occasionally after yourselves) than in all the solemn gestures and trumps before accusers and law courts” (BGE 25). Would it not be a fitting tribute to thought such as Nietzsche’s to place a question mark or two after his special words and favorite doctrines? Of course, to place those question marks where they belong one must first accurately identify Nietzsche’s special words and favorite doctrines.

Many roads converge in Nietzsche’s thought; divergent paths lead out. Whatever the origin, whatever the stops along the way, whatever the destination, one will have squandered a golden opportunity if one passes by Nietzsche’s thought without observing the love of truth, the courage, and the yearning for the good that animate Nietzsche’s magisterial effort to live an examined life by giving an account of the best life. 

ENDNOTES

*Note on Citations

Works in English translation are cited by abbreviation and section number. In a few instances I have made minor adjustments in the translations. Where it is necessary to refer to the German original, I cite by volume and page number the standard critical edition edited by Colli and Montinari. Abbreviations are as follow:

A The Antichrist, in PN
BGE Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufmann
BKSA Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe, eds. Colli and Montinari
BT The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Walter kaufmann
EH Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann
GM On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale
GS The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann
KSA Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe, eds. Colli and Montinari
L Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Christopher Middleton
NCW Nietzsche Contra Wagner, trans. Walter Kaufmann
PCP The Philosopher as Cultural Physician, in PT
PHT Philosophy in Hard Times, in PT
PN The Portable Nietzsche, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann
TI Twilight of the Idols, in PN
UD On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life, in UM

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1A blindness Nietzsche cannot be said to have shared: “I have cast my book [Human, all-too-Human] for the “few,” and even then without impatience; the indescribable strangeness and dangerousness of my thoughts are such that a long time must pass before there are ears to hear them — and certainly not before 1901” (letter to M. von Mylius, 12 May 1887, in L, p. 266). For Nietzsche’s views on the esotericism proper to philosophy see BGE 30. In “The Greek State,” Nietzsche holds that Plato’s account of the perfect state is essentially correct and that his understanding of the relation between the state and the genius or the highest type is esoterically presented (KSA, pp. 776, 777).


3Ibid., p. 1.

4Martin Heidegger argues that the metaphysical position that the world is chaos remained “absolutely determinative” for Nietzsche. See Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 93. I would qualify Heidegger’s remark by omitting the “absolutely” because of the constant battle in Nietzsche’s thought between the view that the world is chaos and the view that the world exhibits a rank order of desires, human types, and forms of life.

5Nehamas denies that perspectivism entails a substantive and partisan moral doctrine. Yet if no view of the world is binding on everyone, then views such as the Platonic, Christian, and Kantian which make universal claims are wrong views. Hence, perspectivism takes definite sides on questions of morality. Indeed, perspectivism is not, as Nehamas characterizes it, opposed to, but rather a form of dogmatism. Ibid., p. 72.

6Eric Blondel criticizes the tendency to reduce Nietzsche’s philosophy to strategies for evacuating texts of meaning, in part because this reductivism obscures Nietzsche’s basic practical ambition to evaluate reality and redeem life. See Blondel, Nietzsche: The Body and Culture, trans. Seán Hand (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 9-11, 53, 75. Blondel rightly argues that Nietzsche is a moralist from beginning to end, but wrongly sees culture at the center of Nietzsche’s moral vision. See Blondel, pp. 64, 65.

7William Connolly does view the death of God in moral terms. For Connolly, the death of God serves Nietzsche as “as an interpretation of the modern condition.” See Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 7. Connolly holds that the death of God gives rise to the imperative to abandon the effort to see the world in terms of definitive standards and authoritative convictions, and points toward an ethic or sensibility that aims at questioning, contesting, and problematizing beliefs and practices, particularly one’s own. Yet precisely where Nietzsche’s ethics needs most to be questioned vigorously Connolly affirms unequivocally. That is, Connolly treats the death of God as true, the unproblematic basis for a philosophy of the future. Connolly thus confuses a charitable interpretation of Nietzsche’s teaching with an uncritical embrace of an interpretation that he himself finds congenial or useful. This is unfortunate for it encourages the conclusion that what Connolly favors is not exactly respect for difference and appreciation of ambiguity but rather agreement that dwelling upon difference and celebrating ambiguity are good for human beings. See Connolly, pp. 7-15, and 137-197.

8In his remarkable study of nineteenth century German thought, Karl Löwith emphasized that while one can find in Nietzsche’s thought whatever one wishes, the contradictions in which Nietzsche’s thought abounds reflect a fundamental unity: “Nietzsche’s actual thought is a thought system, at the beginning of which stands the death of God, in its midst the ensuing nihilism, and at its end the self-surmounting of nihilism in eternal recurrence.” See Karl Löwith, From Hegel to Nietzsche, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 192, 193.

Similarly, Leo Strauss’ reflections on Nietzsche emphasize the fundamental and unresolved tensions that form Nietzsche’s thought. See Leo Strauss, “Note on the Plan of

Mark Warren wrongly asserts that “Nietzsche’s refusal to use metaphysical categories of agency, such as “will,” “self,” “soul,” or “subject,” distinguishes his approach from his predecessors in the German tradition from Kant through Schopenhauer.” See Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 9, 10. In fact, as I document in the paragraphs that follow and show throughout this study, Nietzsche uses “metaphysical categories” freely and often. Of course Nietzsche also severely criticizes metaphysical language and demands its repudiation. What Warren overlooks is precisely what demands explanation: namely, the more fundamental considerations that drive Nietzsche to both repudiate and to embrace traditional metaphysical notions.

In contrast, Bernard Yack provides an enlightening analysis of Nietzsche’s dependence on a dichotomy between human freedom and natural necessity that Yack argues Nietzsche inherited from post-Kantian philosophy. See Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 310-365. But Yack overextends his interesting argument. He rightly observes Nietzsche’s entanglement with Kantian notions, but exaggerates its significance because he fails to see that Nietzsche’s thought is also dependent on opinions about the moral and intellectual virtues more typical of ancient philosophy than of Kant.

Karl Löwith does instructively call attention to Nietzsche’s dependence on notions drawn from ancient philosophy. See Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, pp. 188-200, 323.

See, for example, BT ASC 1; BT 7; UD 6; GS 344; BGE Preface, 44, 48, 62; A 8, 51; EH IV 3.

See, for example, BT 7, 18; GS 377; WS 86; Z Prologue; Z II “The Child with the Mirror.”

See, for example, UD 4, p. 78; GS 382; Z Preface 4, Z I “On the New Idol,” Z II “The Dancing Song”; BGE 22, 30, 32, 45, 265, 287; GM III 14; 19, 20; A Preface, 37; EH I 8; letter to Carl Fuchs (18 July 1888) in BKSA VIII, pp. 358, 359.

See, for example, Z I “On the Three Metamorphoses,” “On the Way of the Creator,” and Z II “Upon the Blessed Isles” and “On Redemption”; BGE 29, 44. See also Z Preface 4, Z I “On the New Idol.”

See, for example, GS 382; BGE 11, 261, 265; GM III 14. Consider also Z I “On the Three Metamorphoses.”

See, for example, UDHL 6; BGE 265; GM II 11; TI “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 48. Consider also Z I “On the Adder Bite”; Z II “On Scholars.”

See, for example, BT 7, 8; BGE 220, 265; A 57.

See, for example, BGE 6, 30, 213, 219, 265, 287.

See, for example, GS Preface 2; 344; BGE; GM Preface 1, 2; A 7.

This understanding of the contest of extremes in Nietzsche’s thought is in harmony with Charles Taylor’s argument that many of the achievements that modernity most prizes have their roots in and are sustained by premodern categories of thought. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

*Heidegger, Nietzsche*, vol. 1, pp. 3-11.

*Heidegger, Nietzsche*, vol. 3, p. 8; also 187-192.

*Heidegger, Nietzsche*, vol. 1, pp. 188.

*Heidegger, Nietzsche*, vol. 2, pp. 184-197.


Jacques Derrida argues that Heidegger, like Nietzsche, remains trapped within the domain of metaphysical language. Like Heidegger, Derrida grasps for a world beyond metaphysics. On the assumption that the repudiation of metaphysics is good because the world it describes is false, Derrida argues that it is no surprise that the repudiation of metaphysics must rely upon metaphysical language for metaphysical language has been for so long the only game in town. This observation, however cuts both ways. If the very effort to repudiate a thing reaffirms the

26 Eric Blondel also stresses both the greatness of Heidegger's interpretation and its arbitrary truncating of Nietzsche's thought. See Blondel, in Nietzsche: The Body and Culture, p. 5.


29 Nehamas, in his efforts to show that the main problem that Nietzsche grapples with is how to combat dogmatic interpretations of life without himself advancing a dogmatic interpretation, uses such a method while claiming to read carefully. Nehamas does not, however, use "carefully" in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, as denoting painstaking attention or precision: "We shall have to read a number of apparently unrelated passages and interpret them carefully (that is to say, creatively) in order to show that they are relevant to our concerns." See Nehamas, Nietzsche: Life as Literature, p. 47). Indeed, Nehamas' creative redefinition of carefulness as creativity provides license to overlook the obvious, and to deprecate what Nietzsche actually said in favor of what one desires to have him say.

Consider one example, by no means exceptional but crucial to Nehamas' overall argument. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche's problem was how to present a view as true for oneself and how one should live, but not necessarily as true for others and how they should live. Noting that in addition to the aphorism Nietzsche employs the style of the scholarly treatise, the essay, the poem, the polemical pamphlet, and the autobiography, Nehamas makes the creative suggestion that Nietzsche adopts a stylistic pluralism to vindicate his perspectivism, to indicate that his views are his own, good for him but not true for everybody. Accordingly, Nehamas takes as the title for his first chapter ("The most Multifarious Art of Style") a phrase from a sentence in Ecce Homo. Nehamas argues that

Nietzsche himself was always aware of this feature of his writing [his stylistic pluralism] and wrote about it using a crucial trope to which we shall have to return: "I have many stylistic possibilities - the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man" (EH, III, 4) (Nehamas, p. 19).

In Nehamas' view, the content of Nietzsche's thought dictates his style or art of many styles. Stylistic pluralism is a rhetorical strategy Nietzsche uses to convey a theoretical truth, to suggest that there is no single, neutral language in which his views, or any others, can ever be presented. His constant stylistic presence shows that theories are as various and idiosyncratic as the writing in which they are embodied. (p. 37)

Yet, contrary to Nehamas, it is very unlikely that Nietzsche understood his use of many styles as an effort to vindicate the theory of perspectivism. This is for the simple reason that Nietzsche explicitly offers a quite different explanation for his style of many styles. And, interestingly enough, he offers that quite different explanation in the very paragraph from which Nehamas quotes to provide the title for his chapter on Nietzsche's style. A fuller citation from Ecce Homo is revealing:

This is also the point for a general remark about my art of style. To communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs - that is the meaning of every style; and considering that the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case, I have many stylistic possibilities, the
most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man [emphasis added]. Good is any style that really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures — all the laws about long periods are concerned with the art of gestures. Here my instinct is infallible. (EH III 4)

Placing in context the sentence that Nehamas quotes affords a striking perspective, sharply at odds with the one Nehamas argues for, on the reasons for Nietzsche's variety of styles. The part of the passage that Nehamas omits makes clear that the problem for Nietzsche is not as Nehamas asserts (invoking for support a passage from *The Will to Power*) that there are no facts only interpretations (p. 20), but rather that of communicating accurately the facts about his inward states. For Nietzsche the question is not, as Nehamas would have it, one of the perspectival character of all knowing, but rather how to make an accurate image of his inner experience available to others. For Nietzsche, the aim in deploying a variety of styles is not grand and general, as if to contribute to the construction from his own experience and thoughts of a literary character in his works, but rather quite specific, to reveal the precise quality and genuine variety of his actual inner life. In sum, it is only by transforming carefulness into creativity that Nehamas can claim fidelity to Nietzsche's meaning while making Nietzsche teach nearly the opposite of what he says.

For example, Gilles Deleuze asserts, against those who understand the eternal return as the return of "a particular arrangement of things," that "On two occasions in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche explicitly denies that the eternal return is a circle which makes the same return." See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. xi. Yet Nietzsche does not speak in *Zarathustra*. It is not Nietzsche but characters within *Zarathustra* — characters with their own complicated motives who are speaking at specific junctures in an elaborate narrative — who deny that the eternal return is a circle. Moreover, the denials are accompanied by affirmations. For example, Zarathustra calls himself "the advocate of the circle" (Z III "The Convalescent" 1). If one may treat any utterance by a character in *Zarathustra* as a teaching of Nietzsche's, then one can make Nietzsche teach anything one wishes.


While one could advance any number of interpretations of Nietzsche's thought, Nehamas claims to identify Nietzsche's intention and finds good reasons for believing that a "single view," perspectivism, connects and accounts for the key paradoxes in Nietzsche's thought. See Nehamas, pp. 1, 19, 105. Tracy Strong appears to have transcended the laws of perspectivism to discover that "Perspectivism . . . is at the center of Nietzsche's understanding of our presence in the world and of its availability to us." See Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 304. It looks as if Mark Warren's contention that Nietzsche's "most pressing problems" lie in the historically, politically, culturally, and linguistically bound character of subjectivity is less a subjectively conditioned opinion than an observation about an objective feature of Nietzsche's thought. See Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, p. 2. Jean Granier seems to have moved beyond interpretation to the knowledge that "one of the principal themes in Nietzschean thought" is the primacy of interpretation. See Jean Granier, "Nietzsche's Conception of Chaos," in *The New Nietzsche*, p. 135. And so on.

Nietzsche himself affirms the continuity and unity of his thought in BT ASC and GM Preface 2, 8.

Among the pioneering efforts to examine one of Nietzsche's books as a whole is Leo Strauss' "Notes on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). In the last decade a number of studies have taken Nietzsche's books seriously. Foremost among these is Laurence Lampert's *Nietzsche's Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). There is also a helpful collection of essay length studies of individual books, *Reading Nietzsche*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Nehamas both denies and asserts a fundamental distinction between Nietzsche's published and unpublished writings. In his Introduction, Nehamas denies that there is any good way to
establish the priority of Nietzsche’s published works over his unpublished notes. Indeed, Nehamas justifies generous recourse to the notes contained in The Will to Power on the basis of the interpreter’s utility and convenience: “The importance of each text depends on the specific contribution that text makes to our construction of a coherent and understandable whole.” Nehamas, pp. 9, 10. On the other hand, in the middle of his book when he wishes to discredit the cosmological interpretation of the eternal return, Nehamas infers from the fact that Nietzsche did not publish his proofs of the eternal return that he probably found them useless. See Nehamas, pp. 142, 143. Nehamas’ evaluation of the authority of the unpublished writings seems to shift with the shifting needs of his interpretation.

Derrida argues that “[t]he hypothesis of a rigorous, sure, and subtle form is naturally more fertile.” See Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmakon,” in Disseminations, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.67. And so it is. It remains an open question whether slow and careful reading, on “the hypothesis of a rigorous, sure and subtle form,” results in the discovery of a secret, deeper organization than the one inscribed by the author, or the secret, deeper organization the author inscribed.

There is no reason to forego study of Nietzsche’s unpublished writings. Although I shall refer to passages from Nietzsche’s notebooks in the process of interpreting his books, I shall avoid invoking a statement from outside the book at hand as a basic premise or missing step in an argument intended to vindicate a particular interpretation of Nietzsche’s meaning in the work under study. For a good discussion of the problematic status of the posthumously published collection of writings from Nietzsche’s notebooks called The Will to Power see Bernd Magnus, “The Use and Abuse of The Will to Power,” in Reading Nietzsche, pp. 218-236.

In a fascinating new book, Stanley Rosen comments on this fragment: “Nietzsche’s relatively early statement (1872/73) on the relation between philosophy and art continues to hold true throughout his mature thought and writings . . . This [statement] is Nietzsche’s Platonism.” See Rosen, The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 174. I agree with Rosen’s assessment and I would add that in his later writings, Nietzsche envisages a supreme type who unites in his own person the work of the philosopher and that of the artist.

In his sympathetic reconstruction of Nietzsche’s thought, Leslie Paul Thiele asserts that “Nietzsche’s aim was theoretically and practically to incorporate the philosopher, artist, and saint into one person.” See Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 163. No contradiction arises from seeing the saint in the image of a supreme type who unites knowing and making inasmuch as the saint, as Thiele himself observes, is understood by Nietzsche as the highest ranking kind of artist. See Thiele, p. 155.


Charles Taylor develops the argument that even the most radical criticisms of morality, particularly the “neo-Nietzschean” criticisms that assume or seek to show that morality is ultimately based on fiat or power, are themselves of necessity issued from “moral orientations” that take a stand on what is right and good. See Taylor, Sources of the Self, pp. 98-103. My account of Nietzsche suggests that what Taylor claims is true of the neo-Nietzschean theorizing is true of Nietzsche’s philosophical explorations.

On the back of the original edition of The Gay Science Nietzsche wrote:

This book marks the conclusion of a series of writings by FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free spirit.

To this series belong:
Although I do not give these books the attention they deserve, Nietzsche's remark about the common goal that unites them, taken in conjunction with the brief discussion of The Gay Science that follows, suggests that these books point to the constellation of problems inhering in Nietzsche's efforts to articulate the character of the supreme type.

For a thoughtful discussion of the enduring philosophical significance of The Gay Science see Richard Schacht, “Nietzsche's Gay Science, Or, How to Naturalize Cheerfully,” in Reading Nietzsche, pp. 68-86.

43 Theaetetus 155d. Nietzsche's account of the intellectual conscience also recalls the opening remark of Aristotle's metaphysics: “All men by nature desire to know.” Aristotle, Metaphysics 980a.

44 In his final writings, Nietzsche describes the philosophical life he lived in characteristically ethical terms that evoke the intellectual conscience:

Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains — seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality. . . . How much truth does a spirit endure, how much truth does it dare? More and more that became for me the real measure of value. Error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is cowardice...Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, follows from courage, from hardness against oneself, from cleanliness in relation to oneself. . . . Nitimur in vetitum [We strive for the forbidden]: in this sign my philosophy will triumph one day, for what one has forbidden so far as a matter of principle has always been — truth alone (EH Preface 3).

45 The aspiration to become a god is scarcely an isolated occurrence in German literature. For example, Goethe's Faust yearns to know the innermost secrets of the world (Part I: 382, 383), wonders whether he is a god (Part I: 439), is mockingly called a “superman” [Übermenschen] by the Spirit he summons (Part I: 490), and associates his passion for eternal truth and his sharing in God's creativity with the idea that he was created in God's image (Part I: 614-622).

46 Because of his intense concern with the ultimate structure of the cosmos Nietzsche's own term “antimetaphysician” is preferable to Richard Rorty's characterization of Nietzsche as one of modernity's "paradigm nonmetaphysicians." See Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 98. It is hardly, as Rorty argues, that Nietzsche has no opinion about the ultimate structure of the cosmos or that Nietzsche thinks his opinions lack moral and political significance. Rather, Nietzsche is opposed to metaphysicians of the past precisely because they misunderstood the true character of the cosmos.

47 Nietzsche himself suggests such an understanding in a notebook fragment, WP 617. I follow Heidegger in seeing great importance in this fragment. See, for example, Heidegger, Nietzsche, vol. 1, pp.19-20; vol. 2, pp 201-204; vol. 3, pp. 156-158, 212-215, 245-246. I shall lay great stress on the act of falsification to which Nietzsche's note calls attention but which Heidegger sometimes overlooks. For difficulties inhering in Heidegger's use of WP 617 see note 2 on p. 257 in the “Analysis” by David Farrell Krell in Nietzsche, vol. 2. Generally speaking, I shall suggest that WP 617 — which links the supreme will to power and the eternal return in the attempt “to impose upon becoming the character of being,” and indicates that the success of this attempt depends upon a “twofold falsification” — articulates the character of Zarathustra's reconciliation with eternity and sheds light on the failure of Zarathustra's quest to make himself a god. But I must emphasize that I do not rely on this notebook fragment as a premise to my study, but rather introduce it as a gloss on results gained by analysis of the text of Zarathustra. Here too I part ways with Heidegger who insists that we could never understand the doctrine of eternal return but for Nietzsche's unpublished writings. See Heidegger, Nietzsche, vol. 2, pp. 15, 141.

46 THE HARVARD REVIEW OF PHILOSOPHY SPRING 1994