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Antagonistic Allies: Bridging the Abyss Between
Nietzsche and Democracy

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the often tumultuous relationship between Friedrich Nietzsche and democracy. Nietzsche has always had an antipathy towards democracy. Nietzsche has claimed that democracy espouses a will to equality which levels the greatest men along with the most average men. For Nietzsche, his *Übermenschen* must emerge from the muddle of mediocrity and similitude in order to set themselves apart from the herd. The herd is more than happy to live in a democratic society since no one will be rendered better or greater than anyone else.

I argue that Nietzsche does not realize democracy's many assets. Liberal democracy could very well be the best political springboard for his *Übermenschen*. For Nietzsche, higher culture emerges in spite of modernity's leveling snare. These great men engage in contests. They create their own rules and values. They say what they like. In a fascist society, these men would never be allowed to do as they please. One benefit of liberal democracy is that we are given the right to dissent. We are given the right to express ourselves. Democracy could facilitate the emergence of the elusive *Übermenschen*. These are men who transcend the average and the ordinary.

In this dissertation I begin by exploring Nietzsche's cultural criticisms. He devotes a great deal of energy condemning modernity and its leveling tendencies. Out

of the cultural morass that is modernity comes this higher culture of which Nietzsche speaks highly. In chapter two, I argue that higher culture must begin with the individual. I will examine what it takes for a man to be able to transcend his mediocre culture. In chapter three, I examine the contemporary political climate and try to determine whether these great individuals could emerge in such a climate. Finally, in chapter four I examine which political system could best help this culture emerge. I argue that liberal democracy is the best environment for these higher men.

Introduction

In this dissertation I would like to bridge the gulf between Friedrich Nietzsche and democracy. Throughout his texts Nietzsche rarely misses an opportunity to excoriate the presence of democracy in modern Europe. It is my claim that Nietzsche has perhaps overlooked democracy's agonistic aspects. The *agon*, or "contest", is a mockery if the competition is unfair or rigged. If the competitor is to have a chance at all at surpassing her rivals, the contest must be free from domination, coercion, and manipulation. Liberal democracy can help to ensure that these many contests proceed optimally. Liberalism is a type of democracy which allows for freedom of thought, expression, and the pursuit of individual goals. Liberal democracy sets rules in place to ensure that citizens are allowed to express themselves and pursue their individual goals without any unnecessary interference from others.

Liberalism is not the only form of democracy with which we are familiar. There is also communitarianism whereby the community upholds certain values agreed to upon by all members of the community. Values which differ from those of the community are strongly discouraged. Democracy could also be viewed from a majoritarian perspective. In such a system, individuals would be free to pursue their goals provided that these goals coincide with the values of the majority. Public opinion sways according to the majority. In a majoritarian democracy, legislators may uphold certain freedoms and protect certain classes of citizens because the majority of the people (voters) feel this should be the case.

Individuals may not be free to pursue their goals if they are not granted a particular freedom or protected in some other way.

I argue that liberal democracy is the best political climate out of which a higher culture can arise because of its focus on individualism. Liberal democracy does not require the unanimously shared values of communitarianism. In a communitarian society, no one can sustain values which depart from the community standards, lest he be ostracized, shamed, or even exiled. In a liberal democracy, there are procedures or rules in place that guarantee that individuals have the capacity to pursue their individual values. Values need not be agreed upon by the majority either. Rules are in place to ensure that no one encroaches upon others in his pursuits. There must be an element of fairness and equal opportunity preceding and accompanying the staging of any contest. Absolute autonomy cannot be permitted. We will have to sacrifice a few liberties so that we can engage in a fair contest. When rules or procedures are enforced, then we are free to do as we will.

Nietzsche's criticisms of democracy and its institutions fall within the scope of his critique of modern European culture. In chapter one I examine the culture of modernity that Nietzsche condemns. This dissertation will begin with Nietzsche's assessment of modern culture and how the latter has collapsed into a state of *decadence*. As an alternative to such *decadence* I focus on Nietzsche's concept of "free spirits". While these free spirits have been born into the same culture as their fellow men, the former have done something to set themselves apart from the latter. The others belong to a category that Nietzsche terms the

“herd”. The herd is a group of people who follow the lead of others. They are less creative types who do not wish to be singled out as different or subversive. I will examine what Nietzsche’s free spirits might do in order to elude what Nietzsche terms *decadence*. Free spirits will have to transcend the realm of modern “good” and “evil” and make their foray into Nietzsche’s seemingly unknowable “higher culture”. Lower culture still must exist for the spirits to emerge. Lower culture will be a kind of negative guide for the free spirits. They may not know what to do to transcend the mundane culture in which they find themselves, but they will know what *not* to do. A lower culture will always be a reminder of what a lack of creativity and self-creation will do to someone.

I will argue in chapter two that this higher culture cannot begin until each person who wishes to be a part of it overcomes the many personal inhibitions and reservations that can hinder his or her creativity, resourcefulness, and imagination. It is in this chapter that I focus primarily on Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence. A great labor must be completed before we can even consider Nietzsche’s cultural politics. We must encounter the personal before the political. There is little use of heralding a higher culture if there are no participants in this higher culture. There are personal crucibles that must be addressed first.

Eternal recurrence is the main crucible which comes to mind. The question that Nietzsche will ask us is whether we are disposed to living our lives as if they recurred eternally. If we answer affirmatively, this implies that we are willing to live the *same* life over and over. The same life means that we cannot add or subtract any moments from our lives. If we subtract even one moment, it will not

be the same life. If we affirm every moment, we affirm not only the joy, but also the misery. Both joy and misery are necessary constituents of who I am individually. If I erase the misery, I will not be the same person. If I am willing to live my life over and over, that means I have accepted every moment that comes my way. The misery is not enough for me to negate my life. This is no easy task.

I will show that even though eternal recurrence may not appeal to those who have suffered numerous tragedies, it is still possible to will it without needing to be self-deceived. It is also my claim that eternal recurrence is a very personal experiment. I will claim that when I will eternal recurrence, I do not will all of history. I claim that I only will the events that I have experienced. Other events spatially or temporally removed from me may have impacted me in ways I will never know. However, unless I have experienced something firsthand, I do not find that I must will that event along with all others in history. Many will find this interpretation to be a misreading of eternal recurrence, but this reading fits with my account in chapter two. Once I have addressed the many issues that surround eternal recurrence, I will return to the subject of higher culture. If one is capable of willing eternal recurrence, one can then ascend to higher humanity. Or, one is at least better prepared to make this ascension.

In chapter three, I leave the personal and begin to examine how this higher culture might impact the world in which we live. Much time is given to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* in this chapter. It is in this book that Nietzsche makes an especially arresting juxtaposition between higher types and lower types. These higher types will be free of a bitter and ugly emotion Nietzsche calls

ressentiment. This angry and often spiritual envy stifles the lower types. They are angry at someone or something for their condition. Lower types are not jealous; they are not in danger of losing someone or something. They are envious because they lack something and are angry at those who have it. After this discussion, I will no longer primarily look at the world through Nietzsche's nineteenth-century Europe as I will do in the first two chapters of this dissertation. I take his concepts and begin to apply them in today's culture. Is there any need to discuss eternal recurrence or *ressentiment* today? I will look at the contemporary world and ascertain whether Nietzsche still has a place in it. I will argue that Nietzsche definitely belongs with us in today's political climate.

Finally, in chapter four, I will argue how Nietzsche's culture can best be realized today. Nietzsche might not be prepared for my answer, but with the help of a few scholars, I will argue that liberal democracy is the best political *milieu* for the emergence of the higher culture Nietzsche so greatly prizes. Some might think that coupling Nietzsche with liberal democracy is a fruitless endeavor. I do not think that Nietzsche has more use as an apolitical thinker. It is my claim that Nietzsche is quite potent as a political thinker. I take a very charitable and generous approach to Nietzsche. However, I do not think that I am taking too many liberties. Applying Nietzsche's politics of culture does not require me to be disingenuous regarding his many controversial writings. Like Walter Kaufmann and Richard Schacht, I not only attempt to spare Nietzsche from proto-Fascist and proto-Nazi accusations. I also try to soften Nietzsche's sometimes belligerent stance for the purpose of applying his philosophy of culture to democracy today.

This is not always an easy task to complete. Yet with the emphasis on multiculturalism, plurality, difference (to name a few relevant political keywords we use today), Nietzsche is quite helpful along with democracy in negotiating this turbulent cultural-political terrain. I will use the scholarship of Richard Schacht, Bernd Magnus, Iris Marion Young, and even Habermas to bolster my arguments. Schacht is a central figure for my claims due to his liberal handling of Nietzsche.

In this dissertation, I will use works of Nietzsche from his middle and late periods. I will reference books such as *Dawn*, *Human, All Too Human*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I have chosen these texts over Nietzsche's unpublished notes since the majority of readers are familiar with the aforementioned texts. In these texts Nietzsche takes democracy to task. While Nietzsche is averse to anything democratic, it is my claim that Nietzsche is somewhat mistaken about what democracy requires. Nietzsche assumes all democracy requires the recognition of sameness among all people. Nietzsche uses the term democracy interchangeably with terms like "sameness" and "leveling". Liberal democracy requires procedural equality, but it does not require the recognition of sameness among all people. We are not all the same. I doubt any political order could function effectively if we were required to view every person as being substantively equal. Using Nietzsche's many criticisms of democracy as a backdrop enables me to argue that Nietzsche and liberal democracy make a rather compelling duet despite their antagonistic underpinnings.

Chapter One

Nietzsche and the Culture of Modernity

I

We do not regard the animals as being moral beings. But do you suppose the animals regard us as human beings? An animal which could speak said "Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free. (D 333)

Nietzsche assumed a very prominent role as an arbiter of modern culture. As a man of the nineteenth century, he surveyed the norms and values of his time to judge the strength and vitality of modern-day Europe. As a classical philologist, Nietzsche also had an intellectual conduit to the ancient cultures of the past, even though he felt confined by the narrow discipline of classical philology. Philology had trained him to simply examine classical texts and cultures. Eventually Nietzsche would overstep the boundaries of this primary academic discipline and defect to philosophy. He had more time to make his foray into philosophy after he resigned from his post at the University of Basel. One of Nietzsche's aims in his poorly received first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, is to explore how cultures lose their creative drive and become, in Nietzsche's words, "decadent". Nietzsche's impressive breadth of knowledge concerning Greek culture enables him to extend his analysis of antiquity to modern culture of his time. The juxtaposition of classical and modern culture becomes Nietzsche's focal point. His attention is not only focused on the distant past. Nietzsche also cares about whether modern culture is derivative of the tragic culture of Greece.

Modernity is not necessarily oblique to this philologist's immediate concerns. Nietzsche sees an intimate connection between antiquity and modernity.

Another aim of *The Birth of Tragedy* is to celebrate tragic culture – the robust Dionysian culture as opposed to the cool-headed Apollonian culture. Nietzsche seeks to resurrect the tragic culture of Greece in modern Europe since, in his view, the latter is woefully anemic culturally and intellectually. The tragic culture is to be revived in the opera of Richard Wagner. Nietzsche has a very self-critical change of heart in the second preface of *The Birth of Tragedy*. But up until then, what does Nietzsche admire about ancient Greece?

Some tragedians such as Aeschylus exemplified the tragic culture of Greece. The leitmotif of his tragedies was that suffering could make one better. No one would wish to be like Prometheus, fettered to a rock with a vulture devouring his liver daily. Yet Prometheus seems heroic in the face of adversity. Tragedians like Euripides nullify the value of suffering. No one would wish to suffer like Medea. After her desertion by Jason, she lets her emotions get the best of her and ends up killing her two sons. Here, suffering has no discernible value. Socrates' rationalism was another blemish on classical culture. Rationalism prevented a person from listening to what their instincts dictated. This Apollonian orientation, according to Nietzsche, could suffocate the creative energy of the Dionysian culture. Instead of surrendering to aesthetic impulses, the Apollonian would more likely savor cool rationality and restraint. The Apollonian does not have to trump the Dionysian.

Nietzsche had hoped to awaken the spirit of the Dionysian in his times, even though he admitted that culture, whether then or now, was a mix of the Apollonian and Dionysian. Nietzsche did not discuss the Apollonian and Dionysian exclusively in the *Birth of Tragedy*. While the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy is the primary focus of the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche continues to celebrate the Dionysian in later works. While Nietzsche does not focus exclusively on this dichotomy in his later writings, there is still some hope that he can revive the Dionysian spirit in his time. This dichotomy appears in other texts such as *Twilight of the Idols*. In a section entitled “What I owe to the Ancients”, Nietzsche recalls his first book and its intended message:

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types – that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the tragic poet. Not in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge...but in order to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity – that joy which included even a joy in destroying. (TI: “What I Owe to the Ancients”: 5)

Regrettably for Nietzsche, the *Birth of Tragedy* was not well-received. Perhaps Nietzsche besmirched his academic reputation by publishing a book considered too outré for academic philology. Richard Wagner’s music was celebrated as a Dionysian force in the *Birth of Tragedy*. Some years later, Nietzsche broke off his friendship with Richard Wagner. With this permanent rift in their relationship, Nietzsche decided that Wagner would not be the harbinger of the new tragic culture. Nietzsche conceded this by the time he published the

1886 preface to the *Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche had also determined that even he could not fully revive the tragic age of Greece in his time.

Despite the professional embarrassment that followed the book's reception, Nietzsche never abandoned the celebratory import of Dionysus. The shadow of Dionysus continued to permeate his writings. Nietzsche took to censuring modern culture, always within the perspective of the tragic Greek culture on his mind. Nietzsche would use the Dionysian to diagnose the rather diseased, devolving modern culture of which he found himself a part. Nietzsche's attention began to focus on the prevailing values and norms of his own culture and how these values and norms were indicative not of a sublime tragic culture, but of a weary and declining culture. Would it be possible for a Dionysus to even partially emerge in Nietzsche's time?

II

Some of Nietzsche's most strident and sophisticated criticisms of modern norms and values are found in the works of his later period: *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche's critique of modern culture does not begin with these volumes, of course. In the books of Nietzsche's middle period, one can begin to see Nietzsche's development of his critique of modern values. The "philosophers of the future" have not yet been conceived, but books like *Dawn* and *Human, All Too Human* allow for such Nietzschean exemplars to emerge in later volumes.

In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche presented the genealogy of good and evil, a genealogy that would reappear in a more refined form in the *Genealogy of Morals*. In section 45, Nietzsche claims that in ancient cultures, those who had power were called “good” while those who were deemed powerless were called “bad”. There was nothing normative about the words “good” and “bad”. These terms were purely descriptive. (HAH 45) Things began to change when communities became larger and more civilized. Evaluative judgments began to circumscribe human behavior. “Good” and “evil” begin to surface in moral dialogues.

Moral norms emerged as a way to preserve the community. In another passage, Nietzsche examines the differences between community and the individual. The individual’s relationship with the community will take center stage in later works. Even now, Nietzsche noticed that morality had its foundation in custom. Acting in accordance with custom and tradition was the way for a person to be considered moral. No individual created his own values since such personal creativity would run counter to tradition and custom. This would leave the person ostracized. To be “evil is to...practice things not sanctioned by custom, to resist tradition, however rational or stupid that tradition may be...” (HAH 96).

It is also in *Human, All Too Human* that Nietzsche’s philosophy of culture begins to bloom. Nietzsche starts to partition the lower types from the higher types in this book. Higher types will be unable to surface ever if they do not arise

from a mediocre culture. Something great, that “free spirit”, cannot come from nothing after all:

He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him. He is the exception, the fettered spirits are the rule; the latter reproach him that his free principles either originate in a desire to shock and offend or eventuate in free actions, that is to say in actions incompatible with sound morals. (HAH 225)

It is important for a free spirit, that higher type, to have a template of cultural mediocrity against which to judge herself. The free spirit is a stark contrast to the mediocre. Mediocrity is a backdrop in which a free spirit does not wish to blend herself. She needs that backdrop to keep the contrast between herself and all the rest. Higher types must never forget the past that has appreciably influenced their lives:

He who has come to a clear understanding of the problem of culture suffers from a feeling similar to that suffered by one who has inherited a fortune dishonestly acquired or by a prince who reigns by virtue of an act of violence on the part of his forbears. (HAH 249)

Suffering from this “cultural past” might stir uneasy emotions, but a higher type presumably cannot disregard her humble beginnings. These higher types do not have a large number of compatriots. Nobility is a laborious goal. “Nobility of mind consists in good-naturedness and absence of distrust, and thus contains precisely that which successful and money-hungry people are so fond of looking down on and laughing at” (HAH 493). So, few wish to shock and mark themselves as nonconforming. Nietzsche valorizes these types also for their

genius. For Nietzsche, a genius is one who “strives with uncommon energy to ...discover a new path which no one knows“ (HAH 231).

The genius is also someone who would “manipulate falsehood, force, the most ruthless self-instruments as his instruments so skillfully he could only be called an evil, demonic being...” (HAH 241). Of course “evil” for Nietzsche is that which has run counter to “good” after the slave revolt in morals. Nietzsche is not inviting nefarious bigots to introduce themselves as those demonic beings. Refusing to pity someone might be seen as an evil gesture. In the same passage, this genius is depicted as a “centaur, half beast, half man, and with angel’s wings attached to his head in addition” (HAH 241). Despite the lurid mythology implied by these words, the genius might actually choose a mild-mannered existence instead of imitating the life of a maenad or satyr. Nevertheless, many can view Nietzsche’s words as signaling battle, blood, and domination. “The frightful energies – those which are called evil – are the cyclopean architects and road-makers of humanity” (HAH 246). Nietzsche does not make anything easy for his readers.

Nietzsche sketches the genius and what sets her apart from others. He claims that “[e]veryone possesses inborn talent, but few possess the degree of inborn and acquired toughness, endurance and energy actually to become a talent [and] to become what he is...”(HAH 263). His insistence that we all become who we are resounds in later books. Becoming who one is suggests that one has certain talents that can be cultivated while others do not possess the same talents. It is not necessarily decided upon birth or by genes who can transcend the

mediocrity of one's culture. No one's pedigree has to permanently damn them to a life less than extraordinary.

However, this higher type might face a difficult beginning when considering those who live among the swarm of mediocre values. There will always be culture icons and other pin-ups even in the midst of what is middling and stultifying. A person whom the lower types deems great is really someone "whose views are in advance of their time, but only to the extent that he anticipates the commonplace views of the next decade" (HAH 269). This person's "fame usually tends to be much noisier than the fame of the truly great and superior" (HAH 269). One can quickly envision a self-help guru who soars to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list with a dreary handbook for happiness and self-actualization while the veritable scholar's manuscript, still in need of a publisher, accumulates cobwebs. What Nietzsche might consider "higher culture" is often misunderstood, disdainfully labeled as cerebral, subversive, or just plain irrational. Higher culture may breed suspicion and antagonism since the lower types "cannot understand those men who are able to play on more strings than two" (HAH 281). Higher culture is a "many-stringed culture," always "falsely interpreted by the lower" (HAH 281). Higher types would never wilt facing such contempt. They know the foundation from which they sprang:

Is it not on precisely this soil, which you sometimes find so displeasing, the soil of unclear thinking, that many of the most splendid fruits of more ancient cultures grew up? One must have loved religion and art like mother and nurse – otherwise one cannot grow wise. But one must be able to see beyond them, outgrow them;

if one remains under their spell, one does not understand them. (HAH 292)

Higher types have to be familiar with their humble beginnings before they can transcend the mundane and the mediocre. Furthermore, whoever might qualify as a higher type might not know he has the artistic makeup if it is not clear just what intellectual and artistic tools are necessary for raising oneself above the ordinary to become an *Übermensch*. Just what is the *Übermensch* of which Nietzsche speaks? How would we ever know we have one in our presence? The *Übermensch*, or “overman”, is some kind of extraordinary and supra-human being. Is this a *human* being who emerges from a lower culture?

There are precedents for regarding Nietzsche’s statements regarding the *Übermensch* and vilification of traditional morality and modern culture. The “free spirit” could be seen as an earlier incarnation of the *Übermensch*. Prior to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the “free spirit” who creates his own values can be seen in *Daybreak*. Nietzsche claims that there is no “morality with an exclusive monopoly of the moral, and that every morality which affirms itself alone destroys too much valuable strength and is bought too dear” (D 164). Nietzsche declines to accept any morality as the one true morality. If morality is to exist, there would presumably be more than just one type of morality. Nietzsche is neither a communitarian nor an absolutist regarding morality. Morals will be contingent upon the plethora of perspectives that are entailed by any culture, higher or lower. These perspectives, at least for Nietzsche, are not reducible to one overarching view regarding the moral and immoral. Nietzsche’s beliefs about morality could isolate him from his community and condemn him to solitude. He

theorized this situation as taking a distance from the human-all-too-human and maddening crowd. If objections are not raised to the value of morality, the presuppositions of morality remain intact, as does its practice. Submission to a prefabricated morality itself hinders the creation of new values. Morality “makes stupid” (D 19). Nietzsche repeatedly wonders how many people really have questioned the origin of their moral beliefs and prejudices. Why are so many people hesitant to do so? Why are so many beguiled by moral norms and values?

III

Nietzsche could answer such questions in *The Genealogy of Morals*. In this work, Nietzsche applies a genealogical method to trace the development of morals. In the preface, he asks under what conditions did man derive these judgments (GM P:5)? If morals are binding, which they appear to be for most, then one must arrive at a knowledge of the very nature of morality to offer a critique of the values that morality produces. Nietzsche’s aim is to demonstrate that moral values are contingent. If certain people are to counteract the values of their culture, or in other words, to reevaluate values, then a genealogy is needed to show that the accepted moral values are not eternal truths predetermined by a god or by a deified nature.

Nietzsche is recalling his previous assessment that he made of ancient culture in *Human, All Too Human*, yet goes further here. According to Nietzsche, long ago there were two groups of people – the masters and the slaves, or the “good” and the “bad” respectively. “Good” and “bad” were descriptive and not prescriptive terms in ancient times. If one were good, that meant one was noble,

beautiful, and highborn. The designation of “bad” meant that one was “ignoble”, base, and ugly (GM I:4). The bad were rather unhappy with their lot, so they sought to revolt and invert the values of good and bad. According to Nietzsche, this “slave revolt in morals” occurred when *ressentiment* became creative and produced new values, or least inverted the old values (GM I:10). *Ressentiment* is repressed envy, an envy which can be both destructive and hostile when projected onto other people who happen to be different. *Ressentiment* produces in its sufferers a spirit of revenge. “While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside’, what is ‘different’, what is ‘not itself’; and this No is its creative deed” (GM I:10).

The weak and ignoble were fortunate enough to have a hostile external world; such a world was all the more conducive to their creativity since others were to be blamed for their condition. The ignoble were envious of the noble living conditions of the noble and well-born. The ignoble sought to avenge their miserable lot by inverting the values of good and bad. What was bad became “good”, and what was good became not bad, but “evil”. A show of superiority, of strength, or of nobility became “evil”. These new values were no longer descriptive, but prescriptive. Slave morality bred men to be a certain way all the time. Expectations developed. Men became more responsible, reliable, and calculable. Men had to develop a memory so that they could remember to be more responsible, reliable, and calculable. If morality were to become more uniform, men had to remember what was expected of them (GM II:2). Men had

responsibilities and commitments, and they had to promise that they would honor these responsibilities and commitments. One had to remember to keep his promises.

Another way to analyze what makes morality binding, according to Nietzsche, was to trace the history of the creditor/debtor relationship back to its amoral beginnings. Nietzsche argues that “the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origin in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts]” (GM II:4). Originally, if a debtor could not pay back his creditor, he was guilty of defaulting and deserved to be punished for his failings. This creditor/debtor relationship can be enlarged and then applied to criminal and moral wrongdoing. A person is angry over such wrongdoing and wants the “debtor” to repay his debt in some way. According to Nietzsche “this anger [at some harm or injury] is held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit” (GM II:4).

Such a relationship is further enlarged when the community adopts the role of creditor. Each man owes his community in some way and he is found guilty if he falls short of his duties as a citizen:

The community, the disappointed creditor, will repayment it can, one may depend on that. The direct harm caused by the culprit is here a minor matter; quite apart from this, the lawbreaker is above all a ‘breaker’, a breaker of his contract and his word *with the whole* in respect to all the benefits and comforts of communal life of which he has hitherto had a share. The lawbreaker is a debtor who has not merely failed to make good the advantages and advance payments bestowed upon him but has actually attacked his creditor: therefore he is not only deprived henceforth of all these advantages and benefits, as is fair – he is also reminded *what these benefits are really*

worth (GM II:9).

Moral lapses are strongly discouraged. If a transgressor feels guilty, it must be because he has a “bad conscience”, another byproduct of slave morality (GM II:14). The transgressor has let down his community and is beholden to the community. He feels guilty for his sins. His conscience makes him feel guilty. A man has to feel guilty concerning his wrongdoing so he will feel too bad to ever commit the same offense again. The guilt is instilled into his memory.

The creditor/debtor relationship then expands even further. Slave morality eventually gives birth to the Judeo-Christian tradition, a tradition that emphasizes the meek, the humble, and the slavish, at least for Nietzsche. This tradition has been institutionalized in culture. Its values are pervasive. It is a tradition that is still the basis of modern-day values, even if the values are secularized. The Judeo-Christian tradition was for Nietzsche the unfortunate foundation of values in his time. With this tradition, the creditor/debtor relationship becomes spiritualized where God is the creditor and man the debtor (GM II:20). Such a feeling of indebtedness to God can never be assuaged. Man is forever incapable of fully appeasing God. We are indebted to God and this debt can never be repaid. God is disappointed in man for many reasons, and the concomitant guilt is immense. Perhaps this is why we are suffering. Men are guilty of *something*, guilty before the eyes of God. We suffer for our sins. As Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science*, “the resolve to make the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad” (GS 130).

The power of traditional morality is reinforced by the ascetic ideal. In the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims that many people will turn to the ascetic ideal, a form of psychological self-flagellation, to protect themselves from further suffering (GM III:13). The ascetic ideal is another derivation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The instincts of a person have never been lost, yet this person continues to struggle against these supposedly “evil” instincts. The ascetic ideal requires a person to suppress their instincts since it is believed by most that the instincts cause great suffering. An ascetic priest would certainly claim this is so. Instincts are too primordial, too uncivilized to be good.

Ascetic priests, in Nietzsche’s words, are “slanderers of nature” (GS 294). These ascetic priests will implore their congregation to deny their most basic instincts. According to ascetic priests, these instincts are vile. Nietzsche declares instincts to be natural inclinations, not moral abominations. If the instincts are natural, why should we feel behooved to suppress them? The ascetic ideal prevents us from affirming these instincts. The ascetic ideal turns away from affirmation and joy; it turns toward sickness and degeneration. The denial of instincts presumably erases the joy and affirmation from our lives since, in the process of this erasure, we struggle too hard to destroy what comes naturally to us. For Nietzsche, one must be sick if he is ashamed of his natural inclinations. Natural inclinations are not taught. Very often someone is taught to repress certain visceral desires because these desires supposedly distract someone from pursuing the goods of her culture. Perhaps her natural inclinations do make a

sharp detour from what others say is “good”. A herd animal is taught to feel shame for succumbing to instincts instead of religious dogma.

Affirming our instincts would not mean that we were living in a brutish, Hobbesian state of nature. Instincts are not the cause of our suffering. But we do suffer. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there must be a metaphysical cause for suffering. In this view, suffering could not be meaningless in a moral world.

Nietzsche points out that

...something was lacking, that man was surrounded by a fearful void – he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning...but his problem was not suffering itself, but that there was no answer to his crying question, ‘Why do I suffer?’ (GM III:28).

According to Nietzsche, the answer religious morality provided rested on the association of suffering with guilt and on the subsequent internalization of guilt, from which individuals must seek redemption. Nietzsche says in *Twilight of the Idols* that “the value of life cannot be estimated” (TI, “The Problem of Socrates:2). Judgments concerning the value of life do not empower the individual. They are just symptoms of an a declining life. Nature is not immoral or moral. Nature is just there. No God is punishing us for original sin or for acting according to our instincts. Nietzsche would like others to agree with this assessment. But few can bear the idea that suffering is meaningless. Slave morality seeks meaning in suffering whether it is great or small. After all, there must be a reason for everything. Relief may reside in the principle of sufficient reason. Furthermore, it relieves many to think that there must be a metaphysical answer as to why they suffer. These believers are unable to accept their suffering

as a natural and possibly meaningless process. They are also unable to accept their current social status. No one wants to be in the class of the weak and the envious, but those in the class of the strong and the proud may have their troubles too. The latter have found a way to overcome the limitations that life can present. The love of fate, *amor fati*, something Nietzsche so joyously celebrates, appears to be absent from a person who “wages war against what is ugly” (GS 276).

If Nietzsche is right in his genealogy, then morals certainly have an unhealthy origin. In modern culture, these morals persist. Modern Europeans are inextricably fettered by these moral values. At least most modern Europeans are snared. People still fight their instincts. Nietzsche says in *The Antichrist* that “I call an animal, a species, or an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it prefers, what is disadvantageous for it” (A 6). Instincts are of little value in a civilized and modern culture, or so its citizens think. Nietzsche believes that these “corrupt” values have not promoted excellence. They have promoted mediocrity, weakness, and degeneration. It appears that few people have the strength and audacity to overcome morality and overcome themselves. Nietzsche traced the origin of morality with a genealogy, yet his task is not complete. Can these morals be overcome? Can new values be created? How is one to transcend mediocrity? The “herd” is a group of average people who follow other people’s values instead of creating their own. The “herd” follows other conceptions of good and evil instead of transcending good and evil. How is one to transcend the “herd” which Nietzsche criticizes? Nietzsche calls the mediocre ones the “herd” since unlike the free spirits who follow their own instincts, the

herd follow each other without ever questioning the direction in which they are headed.

IV

The herd is always an burden for Nietzsche. The stability and permanence of the herd can never be underestimated. The herd simply will not disappear, nor will its membership decline significantly. More or less, people are born into the herd and distancing oneself from its values is onerous if not impossible. Why is this the case, according to Nietzsche? No current member of the herd has the imagination to think of life without its comfortable norms. Morality is deeply and indelibly acculturated into the individual. Few in the herd have the self-possession that is ostensibly needed to annul these supervening moral norms and create their own values. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche indicts morality for training “the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function” (GS 116). A man of the herd is programmed to think himself only of value with reference to the herd, not apart from it. If value is ascribed only by invoking moral precepts, and if respect is bestowed because one is an exemplar according to his cultural tradition, then who would want to stand alone?

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes his “prelude to a philosophy of the future.” as he indicates in the book’s subtitle. Nietzsche offers a thumbnail sketch of what these philosophers of the future (or the present) might be like: “Every superior human being will instinctively aspire after a secret citadel where

he is set free from the crowd, the many, the majority, where, as its exception, he may forget the rule of ‘man’” (BGE 26). Superior human beings in the Nietzschean sense would resist the leveling impulse of morality (BGE 44). These are human beings who want no part of the herd. They do not need to be trained in how to impart meaning to their lives by someone else. The superior human being has to affirm her life; no else will do it for her. She can always follow another person’s pedestrian formula for success, but her life and its values could never be exclusively hers. Many of us will learn from our parents and teachers without ever once questioning their doctrines. This may work well for some, but Nietzsche does not see this path as conducive to the creation of a superior human being.

Nietzsche claims that there are some people who do not need others to supervise them. According to Nietzsche, some people simply have it in them to be greater than others. This does not mean that superior human beings are entitled to completely transcend the parameters of their culture in the sense that superior human beings are not above the law. A superior human being can cast off the yolk of her mediocre culture, but if she wishes to live among the herd, some compromises will have to be made. Valuing lawlessness or violence would leave such a human being more sequestered than Zarathustra ever was. I argue that the creation of new values need not entail the planning of a master race and the enslavement of weaker, slavish types. In chapter three, I will argue, along with Richard Schacht that the creation of values is an intermittent process that is

coupled with moments of mediocrity, even for the superior human being.

Creative types must pay their income taxes too.

Nietzsche underscores the importance of creativity because, in a culture that tends towards equality, higher and lower types mingle together. This mingling might be awkward. Not everyone can paint a masterpiece or be a virtuoso at the piano. Not everyone has the literary imagination to write a novel or a play. Some will be the artists, and some will be the artisans. For Nietzsche, a superior human being's creative proclivities should not be sacrificed so that lower men are accounted for equally. In today's world, not every journalist or columnist will be talented enough to write for the *New York Times*. Yet this is just what herd morality does. Nietzsche claims that sovereign religions are the reason why "higher" men are subsumed into the lower (BGE 62). Those in the herd safeguard their belief in God since it is only an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God who can ensure that all human beings, despite their differences, can be rendered equal from his supernatural standpoint (BGE 219).

With this steadfast Judeo-Christian interpretation, only the herd-like man is "permissible" (BGE 199). Yet this is not an interpretation that Nietzschean "free spirits" would likely accept. Free spirits, pariahs from the herd, are a frightening prospect because of their willful disregard for cultural norms. Any human being who extricates herself from the herd is a danger to the very foundation of her culture. Her self-created values are inimical to the sustaining of the culture since she may write off typically shared norms like moderation, pity, and equality. She keeps a "pathos of distance" between herself and the herd since

her law-giving posture predictably disconnects her from the rest (BGE 257). Nietzsche states that all moralities, however many there are, must “bow before an order of rank” (BGE 221). This does not mean that no system of morality is useful for the individual who transcends the herd. Some moralities may be better than others. Herd values are on a far lower rung. For those who rise above the rest, whatever their morality enjoins is for them a higher morality than anything that springs from the herd.

The number of superior human beings will surely be small in proportion to the majority. All others remain part of the always maddening crowd, part of the dreadful herd dependent on values which were created for them. These ready-to-wear values include “free will”. According to Nietzsche, human beings are under the impression that they possess a will which allows them to choose their actions autonomously, whether in the style of Kant or that of a God-fearing Christian. Autonomy entails responsibility and punishment. This is a fiction for Nietzsche. He claims that there are only strong wills and weak will (BGE 21). Nietzsche adds that “independence is for the few; it is a privilege of the strong” (BGE 29). Instead of being free to choose one’s actions, the weak ones are actually conscripted into morality for fear of censure or other punitive measures. The weak simply live according to their mythological values, believing themselves to be exercising moral self-determination when they are dutifully genuflecting in front of some type of unchallenged moral authority.

It seems rather surprising that any “free spirit” could emerge from the herd culture unscathed and healthy. As Daniel Conway has observed, Nietzsche

and his disciples would have been “enframed by modernity”.¹ Even the free spirits cannot completely escape from the values of modernity. We would be enframed to such a stifling point that modernity would be the blight from which we could never fully escape.

The more sickliness becomes among men –
and we cannot deny its normality – the higher
should be the honor accorded to the rare cases
of great power of soul and body, man’s
lucky hits; the more we should protect the well-
constituted from the worst kind of air, the air of
the sickroom (GM III:14).

Nietzsche adds elsewhere that that “the power of moral prejudices has penetrated deep into the most spiritual world, which is apparently the coldest and most free of suppositions – and, as goes without saying, has there acted in a harmful, inhibiting, blinding, distorting fashion (BGE 23). Worse yet, these enduring moral prejudices are just interpretations, or rather “misinterpretations of phenomena” (TI “Improvers of Mankind”:I).

These stodgy interpretations are viewed by the herd as *the* truth, which of course would proscribe other articulated interpretations. Such misinterpretations narrow other perspectives of morality (BGE 188). Nietzsche is suspicious of epistemic and moral cartels because he claims they refuse to recognize other perspectives as being valid. Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” involves:

only a perspective seeing, only a perspective knowing; and
the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes,
different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete
will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be...[and] to eliminate
the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were

¹ Daniel Conway. “The Politics of Decadence”, from *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1999) Vol. XXXVII, Supplement, p. 24.

capable of this – what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (GM III:12).

The free spirits recognize that moral norms are simply interpretations that they do not accept. Moral norms of the herd, as free spirits might interpret it, are not conducive to greatness, artistry, and creativity. Herd morality is something which must be overcome, overcome by each individual person. Nietzsche echoes the sentiment of his beloved Zarathustra who so compellingly said that “in order to create, one must also destroy” (Z I:15). Nietzsche is not abolishing morality; he is lambasting herd-morality. Other moralities, the aforementioned “higher moralities” are possible (BGE 202). Nietzsche’s perspectival approach to morality allows him to be reticent on the possibility of these other higher moralities.

This is not to say that any particular morality or kind of morality can be unquestionably judged as higher. For Nietzsche, some are better than others but even the higher moralities’ presuppositions must be questioned. As a result, there is always the threat that perspectivism could collapse into relativism. In this view, without any objective criteria against which we could judge perspectives, there would be no conceivable way of ascertaining which perspective is right or even better. Nietzsche however does not see relativism as a *doppelgänger* of perspectivism. I will delve into this discussion later on in the chapter. We will see how Nietzsche enlightens us as to how some perspectives can be judged better than others. In this way, relativism will merely seem like an immature and crude process of valuation.

Nietzsche is calling for a “revaluation of all values under whose novel pressure and hammer a conscience would be steeled...” (BGE 203). Free spirits do not necessarily have to retreat into the friendless solitude of the mountains like Zarathustra in order to engage in such a project. Free spirits could still live on the same street as their herd-like counterparts; they may simply decline to adhere to all of the latter’s values. The traits the free spirits might exhibit would be remarkably different from those of the faint-hearted herd. Free spirits, alone or among fellow creators, make the rewarding attempt to craft a higher culture. Many scholars, such as Richard Schacht and Walter Kaufmann, have attempted to spare Nietzsche from the misappropriation by Nazis and other miscellaneous fascists. I feel my task is the same. I do not believe that Nietzsche is advocating a violent overthrow of moral norms so these “higher men” can overpower and subjugate the weak. I would not even expect a bloodless coup by the free spirits since their numbers are ostensibly small. Further, Nietzsche points out in *The Gay Science* that harming others is a sign that one lacks power and is fraught with *ressentiment* – the spirit of revenge (GS 13). The “master race” of Aryans would not be any stronger or healthier than the wretched slaves from the *Genealogy*. Nor do I think that Nietzsche is recommending a return to the barbaric master race as seen in the *Genealogy*. The “master race” may charm white supremacists and neo-Nazis who conflate the ancient masters with Aryan purity. I maintain that this is not all what Nietzsche envisioned. Instead he speaks of an “ascent” and not a regression to barbarism (TI Skirmishes of an Untimely Man:48). Those who turn

their attention away from the herd can be seen as menacing primarily because they are defying their given culture, not because they seek to erect a thousand-year *Reich*.

With this, I would like to briefly examine Nietzsche's alleged ties to Nazism and Anti-Semitism. In these two passages, the first comes from a Nazi propaganda magazine. The second quotation comes from *Beyond Good and Evil*. While I see no similarity between these two quotations, a cursory reading of Nietzsche's passage can lead to the misuse and misappropriation of what he has said:

With his poison, the Jew destroys
The sluggish blood of weaker peoples
So that a diagnosis arises
Of swift Degeneration
With us, however, the cases is different
The blood is pure; we are healthy!²

A species arises, a type becomes fixed
and strong, through protracted struggle against
essentially unfavorable conditions (BGE 260).

While these epigraphs were written years apart and by different people, has one sentiment influenced the other? In *Beyond Good and Evil*, was Nietzsche advocating a racial hygiene which would later become institutional in the *Third Reich*? Nietzsche clearly thought certain people by nature were greater and stronger than others. Were the people, the fabled *Übermenschen*, fitter than others? Were they purer than others? Is Nietzsche's philosophy a prototype of the "racial science" which would emerge violently with Nazi Germany? Is Nietzsche an intellectual forefather of racial prejudice? Racial hygiene, beginning in the late

² Found in *Der Stürmer*, from Robert Procter's book *Racial Hygiene* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA) p.162.

19th century, was championed by countless physicians and scientists in Germany to advance the racial purity of the Aryan race. How racial purity was to be preserved by the Nazis can be unmistakably ascertained by looking at laws forbidding abortion or birth control for Aryan women, forcing sterilization of certain undesirable, impure women, requiring mass euthanasia of feeble-minded and mentally ill patients.

I argue that Nietzsche in no way was advocating a racial hygiene in any of his texts. However, Nietzsche's writings can inadvertently cast him as a deceased mouthpiece for Nazis and other assorted Fascists and supremacists who do not realize that "around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing, thanks to the constantly false, that is to say shallow interpretation of every word he speaks, every step he takes, every sign of life he gives" (BGE 40). I will examine in depth the last two chapters of *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Human, All Too Human* to see where this stronger species can arise out of a weaker species. Such racial, biological, and medical language has been misappropriated historically. While Nietzsche, like many philosophers, has been abused and misappropriated, a Nazi's lack of literary sense or Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche's fanatical and laughably small Aryan colony in Paraguay are not reasons to accuse Nietzsche of latent racism and anti-Semitism. However, I will argue that Nietzsche does indeed have racial aspirations, but that these aspirations do not lead a few million to the gas chambers or to Madagascar.³ If there is a charge for which we can

³ One possible solution to the "Jewish Question" was to ship all of the Jews out of Europe and send them to Madagascar. Even though many Jewish lives would be spared, their presence would have disappeared throughout Europe and the Third Reich could go on as planned. See Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*.

indict Nietzsche, it would be Eurocentrism, not racial hygiene. Racial hygiene was the product of German nationalism. Lampert notes that Nietzsche attempts to promulgate a “pan-Europeanism” that has nothing to do with racial hygiene.⁴

The pernicious thought of racial hygiene surfaced in 1895. Alfred Ploetz had coined the term *Rassenhygiene* for the purpose of studying how one’s race allegedly influenced physical and mental health.⁵ The emergence of racial hygiene as a legitimate science was due to the Teutonic fear that the white Aryan race was quickly becoming degenerate because of the mixing with other races who were less pure. Misfits and miscreants were multiplying. This trend was alarming because the Aryans considered themselves to be the superior race, but their superiority was being challenged by increased breeding with other races. Miscegenation could swiftly destroy the “human germ plasm”.⁶ Oddly enough, Aryans were not peerless. Ploetz did class Jews as also racially superior.⁷ His intentions were not first-class. Ploetz considered European Jewry to be a virtual facsimile of the Aryan race. European Jews practically were Aryans, so there was no need to omit them from the elite list of races. Ploetz was most likely speaking of Ashkenazi Jews who tend to have lighter skin than their Sephardic counterparts. Early on, Ploetz felt that Anti-Semitism was a futile prejudice. There were no pure races anymore because of mixing.⁸ Ploetz did not believe that mixing was necessarily detrimental, provided the top-tier races mixed together

⁴ Laurence Lampert. “Peoples and Fatherlands’: Nietzsche’s Philosophical Politics”, from *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1999) Vol. XXXVII, Supplement, p.44.

⁵ Procter, op. cit., p.14.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.19.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.20.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.21.

and not with second or third tier races. The mixing of superior races could actually enhance fitness. For Nietzsche, fitness was cultural. For Ploetz, fitness was biological, racial, and evolutionary. In this case, Ploetz and Nietzsche do not belong on the same pedestal. The best qualities and variations would be inherited by the offspring. These beliefs still are troubling, and the zealous bigotry of the Nazi party further radicalized the scientific community's quest for racial sweetness and light.

The concerns that racial hygiene fostered, at least until the 1920s, had more to do with the declining birthrate of the Aryans thought to constitute racially superior families. Aryans had to protect posterity from the dirty gene pools of inferior types. These worries are hardly innocuous, but they were not nearly as noxious as the ones which began to percolate in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, culminating in state-sponsored extermination of people the Nazis declared to be racially impure. Racial scientists were always apprehensive, but now the disquiet was from the apparent de-nordification of Europe.⁹ Jews were not permitted to breathe easily for long. They soon lost their near-equal status with the Aryan population and were subsumed into the category of the polluted races. In the 1930s, the confluence of racism, prejudice, paranoia, misbegotten cultural attitudes and angry young men that would become the National Socialism party appropriated racial hygiene for their political agenda. The Nazi party sought to implement measures which promoted "applied biology".¹⁰ We know what happened after that.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.69.

So where does Nietzsche fit into all of this? In his writings there is a bifurcation between lower and higher cultures. He scoffs at the decadence of those who are part of the herd, precluding their ascension to that higher plane where only a few destroyers and creators of values tread. For Nietzsche, nothing appears completely forbidden. Could his musings have been the benchmark of Nazi values? It is difficult for anyone to familiarize herself with the “overman” since Nietzsche does not adequately illustrate what kind of person this would be. Could the Nazis seamlessly include Nietzsche in their political platform by propounding the thesis that Aryan culture was the higher culture? Could we ever hold such Nazi beliefs to be erroneous if there are no overriding truths to be found in Nietzsche? Alexander Nehamas fears that Nietzsche could be valorizing an evil hero or a “Hitler”, provided such a person followed the Nietzschean program of self-overcoming and reevaluating all values.¹¹ There would appear to be no firm epistemological and ethical points of view for Nietzsche. Could we even condemn such a person? How could we be sure that Nazi postures were not noble? Furthermore, Nietzsche’s diction entails racial and biological terms that were not foreign to the very scientists and physicians whose perverse ideologies underpinned the Nazi and proto-Nazi consortium.

While Nietzsche cannot be spared from misinterpretation, I maintain that there is no need to prosecute Nietzsche *in absentia*. Nietzsche is unequivocally an elitist. This does not mean that he is a racist. He had great plans for Europe. These plans included the separation, or “pathos of distance”, between the higher

¹¹ Alexander Nehamas. “Nietzsche and ‘Hitler’”, from *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1999) Vol. XXXVII, Supplement, p.9.

types and lower types (BGE 257). I do believe that Nietzsche was an equal opportunity elitist. Anyone, not just blond-hair blue-eyed Aryans, could transcend the herd and its life-denying values. Perhaps even women could transcend the herd. It is imperative to look at several of Nietzsche's passages in an attempt to soften the blow his words might have on those who need a rough and ready spokesman for their political campaign.

Nietzsche's iconoclastic beliefs regarding race, culture, nobility, and the future of Europe can be seen even in his middle period in *Human All Too Human*. In section 439, he claims that "a higher culture can come into existence only where there are two castes in society: that of the workers and that of the idle" (HAH 439). One section later, he points out that "that in which men and women of the nobility excel others and which gives them an undoubted right to be rated higher consists in two arts ever more enhanced through inheritance: the art of commanding and the art of proud obedience" (HAH 440). While nothing here is excruciatingly worrisome, there are obviously elitist watermarks in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche is not a classist even though he uses a word like "caste". "Differences in good fortune and happiness are not the essential element when it comes to the production of a higher culture" (HAH 439). Even the proletariat has a chance. The lower culture espouses values which are hostile to life, at least through a Nietzschean lens. Hence we have those "unfavorable conditions" for the strong species. However, the species is not a specific one. In no passage can one detect proto-Nazi sympathies. Nietzsche does not procure any specs of a "higher culture", nor does he state just what kind of person gains membership to

this culture. Aryans and Jews alike just might be the higher culture's denizens. With no apparent fixed or well-defined entities in Nietzsche, higher culture could entail many people; there would be no singularity in superiority.

Nietzsche also discusses the mixing of the races and the deep-seated Anti-Semitism of many Germans in *Human, All Too Human*. Nietzsche was no nationalist. We shall find out soon who the "Good European" is, but he or she is certainly the result of cross-pollination. It is doubtful we ever would have heard or seen him belting out "Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles!" in any Nazi propaganda film. In a section entitled "European man the abolition of nations", Nietzsche claims that:

Trade and industry, the post and the book-trade, the possession in common of all higher culture, rapid changing of home and scene, the nomadic life now lived by all who do not own land - these circumstances are necessarily bringing with them a weakening and finally an abolition of nations, at least the European: so that as a consequence of continual crossing a mixed race, that of the European man, must come into being out of them. (HAH 475).

Nietzsche supports this mixing of European races. Together, and not apart, a mixed European race that contains the best elements of those races which were mixed, would produce the "Good European". This does not mean that Nietzsche would have assented to Alfred Ploetz's racial science. Nietzsche was not advocating the triumph of the Aryan race over all others. Nietzsche would have been better served if he had not used words like "race" so loosely. Instead, I feel he should have said that the admixture of the highest cultures of Europe, including Jewish culture, would shape the hearty cultural makeup of the "Good European". To further the claim that Nietzsche was averse to nationalism, he

points out that the goal of the Good European is “at present being worked against, by the separation of nations through the production of national hostilities” (HAH 475). He called such nationalism “artificial” and felt it was a “temporary countercurrent”. Furthermore, “one should not be afraid to proclaim oneself simply a *good* European and actively work for the amalgamation of nations...” (HAH 475). The European Union is definitely not Nietzsche’s work in practice. After all, France and Germany often appear to have the final word on European affairs. Europe cannot elude this Franco-Germanic sway. The mixture races, cultures, and peoples has not been a success yet. And England wants to separate too.

Also in this passage, anti-Semites must pardon Nietzsche for not feeling the same way about Jews as they do. Another problem with national states is that they cannot escape their anti-Semitic proclivities:

The entire problem with the Jews exists only within national states, inasmuch as it is here that their energy and higher intelligence, their capital in will and spirit accumulated from generation to generation in a long school of suffering, must come to preponderate to a degree calculated to arouse envy and hatred, so that in almost every nation - and the more so the more nationalist a posture the nation is again adopting - there is gaining ground the literary indecency of leading Jews to the slaughter as scapegoats for every possible public or private misfortune. (HAH 475).

This passage is tragically prescient. While in later works Nietzsche vilified all that was derivative of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the perseverance and grit of the Jewish people, not their religion by itself was something Nietzsche truly admired. Nietzsche adds that “[for] the production of the strongest possible European mixed race, the Jew will be just as usable and desirable as an ingredient

of it as any other national residue” (HAH 475).

Nietzsche continues this conversation in “Peoples and Fatherlands” from *Beyond Good and Evil*. In this book from his later period, Nietzsche is even more explicit regarding his hopes for the future of Europe. The “Good European” is not an amorphous persona that plays a small part in Nietzsche’s identity politics. The “Good European” has arrived. Now, the contingent just needs to be enlarged. Nietzsche says that the good Europeans still “have our hours when we permit ourselves a warm-hearted patriotism, a lapse and regression into old loves and narrowness” (BGE 241). There are still those “hours of national ebullition, of patriotic palpitations and floods of various outmoded feelings” (BGE 241). Without the lower culture, the higher culture could not have existed and because of this, we good Europeans still have tinctures of the lower culture in us. These feelings last for just a few hours during the Olympics when a fellow countryman wins a gold medal. We might wave the flag of our country and sing its anthem, but the feeling fades as quickly as it came. These few hours do not translate into a thousand years.

Nietzsche also continues his praise of Jews in section 250. It is in Nietzsche’s opinion that Europe actually owes the Jews:

the grand style in morality, the dreadful and majesty of infinite demands, infinite significances, the whole romanticism and sublimity or moral questionabilities...and the most attractive, insidious and choicest part of those iridescences and seductions to life with whose afterglow the sky of our European culture, its evening sky, is now aflame... (BGE 250).

Nietzsche did not consider Jews to be a European people, but he still venerated

them for their contributions to Europe.¹² Jews are the “strongest, toughest and purest race at present living in Europe; they know how to prevail even under the worse conditions (BGE 251). Nietzsche further states that Jews have the acumen to take over Europe and could easily do so, but they are not planning on doing so (BGE 251). Not everything about Jewish culture appealed to Nietzsche. Keith Ansell-Pearson claims that Nietzsche was no anti-Semite, but instead shared a common Gentile belief that Jews were better off if they assimilated into Europe instead of remaining on the periphery.¹³

Some might think that wanting Jews to assimilate instead of asserting their unique identity among Christians reeks of anti-Semitism. Assimilation does entail the partial if not complete erasure of one's identity in order to blend in with the rest. This could be viewed as racism since one type of people are being encouraged to merge within the culture so their identifying characteristics have been forgotten and destroyed. However, the desire for the assimilation of Jews as opposed to the desire for expulsion, deportation, or extermination of Jews seems far more harmless. Nietzsche wanted the best of the Jewish population to mix with the best of the European population. Nietzsche believes that Jews actually want to assimilate so they could be “finally settled, permitted, respected somewhere and to put an end to the nomadic life, to the ‘Wandering Jew’” (BGE 251). There were many Jews who desperately wanted to assimilate, even though persecution may have influenced a large number of these people. Even with assimilation, some Jewish elements, whatever they are, would remain part of the

¹² Lampert, op. cit., p.53.

¹³ Keith Ansell-Pearson. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge, MA) p.100.

vibrant culture of the "Good European". Furthermore, instead of expelling Jews, it would “perhaps be a good idea to eject the Anti-Semitic ranters from the country” (BGE 251). Due to numerous expulsions, pogroms, perpetual distrust and discrimination by Gentiles, and mass ghettos, it was hard for Jews not to stand out in the crowd. For Nietzsche, Jews should be allowed to assimilate since their contribution to the race of good Europeans would be invaluable. There was no shortage of Assimilationist Jews all across Europe. Their counterparts, the Zionists, did not wish to be “good Europeans”. They wanted a Jewish state of their own.

Combining the Jews with the best and brightest of Europe is Nietzsche’s brainchild which, I might add, fails to mention anything about racial hygiene. Nietzsche discusses nobility in the last chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Again, his choice of words could have been better, but his point, at least to me seems clear:

[S]ociety should *not* exist for the sake of society but only as the foundation and scaffolding upon which a select species of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and in general to a higher *existence*: like those sun-seeking climbing plants of Java - they are named *sipo matador* - which clasp an oak tree with their tendrils so long and often that at last, high above it but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness (BGE 258).

Some people do indeed belong to the lower culture, a culture from they can never be extricated because of their weaknesses. Whether these weaknesses are due to mental illness, indolence, jingoism, *decadence*, religious fervor, or even *ressentiment* does not imply that these people need to be exterminated.

Nietzsche's perennially fragile health could have eventually made him the "useless eater" that the Nazi doctors would have euthanized to ease their minds.

Before his death, before his eleven years of incurable madness, Nietzsche seemed to know where Europe was headed:

Thanks to the morbid estrangement which the lunacy of nationality has produced and continues to produce between the peoples of Europe, thanks likewise to the shortsighted and hasty-handed politicians who are with its aid on top today and have not the slightest notion to what extent the politics of disintegration they pursue must necessarily be only an interlude - thanks to all this, and to much else that is altogether unmentionable today, the most unambiguous signs are now being overlooked, or arbitrarily and lyingly misinterpreted, which declare that *Europe wants to become one*. (BGE 256).

This "interlude" would be bloody, grisly, and brutal, encompassing two world wars. The *Third Reich* was not Europe becoming one. It was Germany trying to conquer all of Europe. Nietzsche's words seemingly presage the arrival of Adolph Hitler, Rudolph Hess, Heinrich Himmler, and Joseph Goebbels to name a few. Nietzsche's language has often made readers suspicious of his intellectual motives. Is the lower culture unhygienic or racially impure? Is the lower culture genetically ill? Is the lower culture a pollutant? Should there be a euthanasia and sterilization law for those who belong to the lower culture? My answer is a resounding "no" and I do think Nietzsche would agree. Higher culture will have a hard time emerging without a lower culture. Higher men still had traces of the herd in them anyway. Proponents of racial hygiene would never believe that a lower culture was necessary for the higher culture. Those who were racially pure or close enough to it (since all people were mixed) would have been better off not

ever having mingled with the lower, contaminated types. This is not what Nietzsche argued for. Nietzsche asserts that “[m]an himself has to take in hand the rule of man over the earth, it is his ‘omniscience’ that has to watch over the destiny of culture with a sharp eye to the future” (HAH 245). “Man” need not enslave, torture, and liquefy a people to accomplish this task. I think his “Good Europeans” do indeed have a slightly German taste. Nietzsche could never forsake Goethe. But, the “Good European” also had a slightly Jewish, English, and French taste too. Nietzsche’s aversion to philosophical transparency in many cases casts him as a spokesman for what he found to be noxious and pernicious.

Nietzsche does not offer a precise algorithm for transcending the good and evil of one’s culture. He neglects this task because creativity and artistry are personal matters not circumscribed by societal constructs. His perspectivism seemingly would not permit him to make such prescriptions either. When we create values, these values most likely are self-regarding. Nietzsche argues that “my judgment is *my* judgment; another cannot easily acquire a right to it...[for] one has to get rid of the bad taste of wanting to be in agreement with many” (BGE 43). Perhaps we may be agreement with a few. Yet even if two free spirits dare to counteract the will of the herd, they may not do so in the same fashion. Zarathustra adamantly declares that “[t]his is my way: where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way’...for the way does not exist!” (Z III:11). A noble man may be a determiner of value judgments, but he determines only *his* values and no one else’s (BGE 260). The free spirit also captures the Dionysian

spirit when nature celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man” (BT 1).

The order of rank, the pathos of distance, and other elitist ideas that Nietzsche has on his philosophical plate can easily arouse apprehension, if not intense loathing, in the reader. In Nietzsche, inequities between people seem natural and innate. I may be sentenced to a long life languishing in the herd because I am not creative and bold enough to transcend cultural normativity and create values of my own. I may not even be aware that I am languishing if I overlook Nietzsche’s writings. But since I have read Nietzsche voraciously, I would like to think that I could ascend to the tier of the free spirits.

Is the herd that inferior? How many people could easily relinquish their abiding values? Perhaps Nietzsche misdiagnosed modernity. Are modern norms life-denying? Are present-day values life-denying? Do they contribute to the degeneration of man? Is it trite to think that all men and women are created equal? Is it trite to think that everyone should have equal opportunities to certain things like a college education? Nietzsche’s dismay at modern moral norms is worrisome because of his repeated insistence that this glut of norms retards the progress of the law-giving free spirit. On my interpretation, Nietzsche is not advocating a fierce moral upheaval and lawlessness that could culminate in tyranny and genocide. Yet, it is not always clear what means a person is to secure to ascend to a possible, higher morality. It is not always clear just what he is suggesting we simply *do*. Nietzsche would only perpetuate our moral tradition if he clearly enjoined us to do certain things to break away from the herd. His

perspectival approach would not conceivably produce general evaluative claims. He leaves the creation of values as an open-ended project. All that seems evident is that Nietzsche is championing an elitist culture which would display its small but steely members. Are these objections insurmountable?

Problems reading or interpreting Nietzsche are quite prevalent. But the ideas of other German philosophers have not been immune from serious misreadings. Kant and Hegel were misappropriated by the Nazis too. Like many philosophers, he leaves many questions in his wake. He is not the only misogynist and/or elitist to wreak intellectual havoc with his pen. Yet Nietzsche deserves our attention, in spite of his elitist proclivities. Maybe the *Übermenschen* are never to be fully reunited with the spirit of Dionysus. Not every Nietzschean idea has prospered even among the philosophical intelligentsia. Some Nietzschean ideas should not even be considered. Viewing women solely as breeders of the “good Europeans” might be one of them. Yet Nietzsche had the audacity to challenge prevailing moral norms which is something many philosophers failed to do. Kant and Mill do not jettison moral norms; they make cosmetic adjustments to already existing ones. Nietzsche brazenly dares us to confront and reevaluate our own values. He opens the door for enlarged creativity and self-invention, even if his directions are muddled. He widens the perspective of morality. He is not right all of the time. Some of his judgments are misguided. Yet his role as philosopher of culture and modernity is priceless, from my perspective of course. We may not always like what he says, but he has the audacity to say it. Nietzsche’s “higher culture” may still be an enigmatic idea. Modernity must largely be overcome by

the superior human being if she is to transcend the herd. Nietzsche has determined what has gone wrong with culture. He has given us a few intimations as to how we can avoid falling into the snare of mediocrity as our herd-like brethren have. Avoiding these many pitfalls that the herd offer must begin with each individual person. No culture of great men and women can exist without these men and women first helping themselves individually. The personal must come before the political. This is an issue I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Personal: Nietzsche on Eternal Recurrence and the *Übermensch*

How deeply human beings suffer determines their order of rank...profound suffering ennobles; it separates... (BGE 270).

Yes, at the bottom of my soul I feel grateful to all my misery and bouts of sickness and everything about me that is imperfect, because this sort of thing leaves me with a hundred backdoors through which I can escape from enduring habits (GS 295).

I

Those were the reflective words of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche hardly had perfect health. His vision was defective. During one year, he recorded over 140 days of migraine headaches. Rifts formed between Nietzsche and many of his friends such as Richard Wagner, Lou Salome, and Paul Ree. Nietzsche remained unmarried for his entire life. An outsider could assume that Nietzsche's life was not brimming with sweetness and light. One might think that Nietzsche would be a gloriously miserable creature. He is presumed to have had syphilis. He was in love with a woman named Cosima, who also happened to be the wife of his erstwhile friend Richard Wagner. Nietzsche had a sister who, with her anti-Semitic husband, tried to erect an Aryan colony (racially hygienic of course) in South America called "New Germania". Nietzsche showed a wealth of promise as a young philologist only to retire at a young age since he also had a multitude of infirmities. None of his books ever sold that well during his lifetime. Such misfortunes might compel the average person to teem with maudlin sentiments.

Nietzsche was often in a good, convivial mood. How could he be so spirited when his life seemed tragic-comedic at best? Why would he never consider his life to be a Sisyphean existence? Did Nietzsche actually follow his own advice?

Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science* “*Amor Fati* [love of fate]: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all, and on the whole; some day I wish to only be a Yes-sayer” (GS 276). To what does Nietzsche say “Yes”? How could one love his or her fate when life seems interminable and wretched?

Nietzsche is not the only person on this earth to suffer. People of all faiths have suffered and still suffer. Men and women suffer. Adults and children suffer. There is neither a quorum nor a quota on suffering. Every year Jews around the world observe *Yom Hashoah* which commemorates the roughly six million Jews who were killed during the Holocaust. Millions suffered under Stalin. Nietzsche’s lot is still better than most. Yet I would not have wanted his life. He is not averse to suffering. One might think that he is being disingenuous. Perhaps he is lying to himself. After facing much calamity in his life, how could he have possibly been so accepting and cheerful? He has chronic pain which he calls “dog” because this pain shows such fidelity to its host (GS 312). Why so joyous in the midst of suffering? It is in this chapter that I’d like to explore Nietzsche’s philosophy of culture at a very personal level, a level which entails his teaching of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche’s philosophy of culture ends with the public and the political, but must first begin with the private and the personal. A person with a

surplus of herd-like qualities will be ill-equipped to take part in a higher culture. I must first seek out these “higher types”. I will also call upon scholars such as Bernd Magnus, Alexander Nehamas, Richard Schacht, and others to aid me in my efforts.

Nietzsche is often accused of trying to fashion a master race out of the weaker, slavish types. Such attitudes appealed to the Nazi party, the would-be progenitors of a master race. In the post-World War II society, Nietzsche had become a “Chandala” he eloquently described in *Twilight of the Idols*, a person untouchable to demure academics. Walter Kaufmann in the middle twentieth century had reintroduced Nietzsche to academia. Kaufmann’s Nietzsche was a much kinder one than previously thought.¹⁴ Yet even after Kaufmann, many academics were not amenable to Nietzsche. Alasdair MacIntyre claimed that the “*Übermenschen*...belong in the philosophical bestiary rather than in serious discussion.”¹⁵ The *Übermensch* is an oblique concern in this chapter, so I will not address MacIntyre’s trenchant yet mistaken dismissal of Nietzsche. I will however, attempt to dissect Nietzsche’s response to suffering in light of what he calls “the teaching of the eternal recurrence “(*die Wiederkunftslehre*). It is in *The Gay Science* and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Nietzsche valorizes this “doctrine” of eternal recurrence. Whether in the form of a riddle or in clear prose, the crucible which Nietzsche lays before his readers is that life is something which one must want to live again and again, and that includes all of the joy and all of the misery that might come with life. In other words, if you had to live this

¹⁴ See Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3rd ed. (Vintage Books: NY).

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press: IN) p. 22.

life over and over without any changes made to it, would you? A person who says “No!” ostensibly would have to restructure and revise his life so that it would be bearable to live once more and innumerable times more. For Nietzsche, this cannot be done. No additions or subtractions from a person’s life are acceptable. If suffering does not waylay Nietzsche, it might be because despite his infirmities and imperfections, he could live the same life again and again without any deletions. Are his claims full of hot air? It is my task in this chapter to clarify what eternal recurrence is and what its ramifications are, if there are any. I will argue that eternal recurrence is a hypothetical thought-experiment, and not a cosmological thesis. If eternal recurrence were a cosmological thesis, there would be no way for us to *want* to live our lives once more and innumerable times more. We would have no choice in the matter. The world really would recur eternally with or without our consent. As a thought experiment, the world does not actually recur eternally. But if the world did recur eternally, would you be disposed to living your life over and over? Would you want nothing more than to live your life over and over without subtracting or adding any moment to your life?

One might at first blush wonder how a prisoner in a gulag could affirm his life over and over. Why should a prisoner in a gulag affirm his life over and over? It could have been a life filled with loving parents, siblings, and children. Yet the interstices between his life and death were fraught with grief and misery in the desolate terrain of Siberia. Every moment (*Augenblick*) of one’s life would have to be affirmed. Even if eternal recurrence is just a metaphor and not a cosmological principle, how could a person even hypothetically wish to live this

life of ephemeral love and abiding loss over and over without change? Why would a person wish to live this life over and over? If life contains too many horrors, would we not be better off enduring it just once instead of innumerable times more?

II

To begin, I must first underscore that it is not the case that Nietzsche thought his personal tribulations and endless calamities were part of God's divine plan, so Leibniz's *Theodicy* and its pre-established harmony do not explain suffering. Saint Augustine hardly offers a sufficient explanation for why there is suffering in this world. His claim that we are being tested to prove whether we are good Christians would make any Nietzschean nauseous rather quickly. For Nietzsche, there is no supernatural explanation or meaning for suffering. Nietzsche discovered this long before Albert Camus. Camus of course presented us all with the narrative of the mythical Sisyphus and his rock which he had to roll up a hill and watch it fall down for an eternity. Sisyphus suffered a great deal, but if *he* could redeem his suffering (which he did), could Nietzsche do the same? Nietzsche discovered that there was no supernatural meaning for suffering long before Sartre did.

While existence was endlessly "absurd" for existentialists, Nietzsche did not even trouble himself to describe his existence; he was more interested in coping, not describing. Nietzsche's own sufferings emit an afterglow because suffering does not allow him to get too comfortable and ensconced in life. The

afterglow comes from Nietzsche's admission that there is no architectonic of suffering. There is no overarching reason why we as human beings suffer. We cannot look for a supernatural and/or divine wellspring of suffering. There is no such thing to be found. Suffering happens to us all. There are always variations of suffering, but no one has immunity to the presence of suffering.

Nietzsche does offer some advice on how to deal with life when it wallows in the troughs instead of the crest. Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy of Morals* that the human being, the sickest yet most interesting animal, has always sought a meaning for why he suffers, as if such a soul-searching odyssey will obtain an explanation. In the third essay of the book, Nietzsche attacks "ascetic ideals", ideals which include:

...freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, from tasks, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, the leap, and flight of ideas; good air, thin, clean, open, dry, like the air of the heights through which all animal being becomes more spiritual and acquires wings; repose in the cellar region; all dogs nicely chained up; no barking of hostility and shaggy-haired rancor; no gnawing worm of injured ambition; undemanding and obedient intestines, busy as windmills but distant; the heart remote, beyond, heavy with future, posthumous – all in all, they think of the ascetic ideal as the cheerful asceticism of an animal become fledged and divine, floating in life rather than in repose (GM III:8).

Nietzsche claims in the "Second Essay" that morality had sprung out of the tradition of creditor and debtor. The debtor was "guilty" if unable to repay a loan from his creditor. These initial transactions were mundane and worldly. This monetary relationship becomes spiritualized after the "slave revolt" in morals (GM II:4) and the creditor/debtor relationship has a whole new meaning.

Nietzsche adds that “it was in this sphere of legal obligations that the moral conceptual word 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) Human beings become ascetic in the religious sense because they believe they are permanently indebted to God. This is an insidious debt that that can never be repaid, at least not in this life. This overwhelming debt to God gives birth to concepts like the “bad conscience” and “promise-keeping”. Such things can make us suffer. Human beings have had a bad conscience because they can never fully please and placate God. Human beings have a bad conscience because they have certain drives and instincts that must be repressed in order to be civilized.

Man has had all too long an ‘evil eye’ for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his ‘bad conscience’. An attempt at the reverse would in itself be possible – but who is strong enough for it? – that 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 all ideals hitherto, which are one and hostile to life and ideals that slander the world. (GM II:24).

Daniel Conway observes that “[i]n order to resist or reverse the advance of decadence, that is, a people or a culture would need to rid itself of its besetting bad conscience.”¹⁶ This is not a simple labor since the bad conscience has been deeply acculturated into the individual. Bad consciences impel people to feel guilty for having such impulses. We have become animals who do not forget. Not

¹⁶ Daniel Conway, “The Birth of the Soul: Towards a Psychology of Decadence”, from *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, p. 57.

being able to forget allows us to make promises that we must keep. We will not forget the promises that we make to God to discharge every task that is given to us. Ascetic priests have us believe that there is a reason for our suffering. This is a cause a man “must seek in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in some piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*” (GM III:20).

Nietzsche admits that we all suffer. Some of us live under repressive regimes, some of us live in perpetual war zones, some of us suffer from morbid obesity, and some of us suffer from high anxiety. The litany of suffering is endless. According to Nietzsche, we do not suffer because we owe God. This “bad conscience” appears to have precluded our ability to deal with suffering from a secular standpoint. We do not suffer because Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit and thereby tainted all of humanity. We do not suffer because we are the scions of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is no divine punisher who sees to it that we suffer continuously to teach us some kind of lesson. The purpose of the genealogy is to discover why we gravitate towards the same set of values and to trace the origin of these values. Simply put, there were some very unhappy “slaves” who at one time finally projected their enmity onto the noble caste. Nietzsche is not adopting a pessimistic attitude towards suffering. Accepting that life cannot always be sweetness and light does not entail also feeling that the other line always moves faster or that when it rains, it simply pours. Nietzsche is adopting more of a pragmatic attitude towards suffering. However, I will argue, as others have before me, that at times Nietzsche is a bit naïve and unsympathetic to suffering that is so extensive, demoralizing, and

daunting that one would not will every single moment of one's life without any revisions.¹⁷ If I suffered a fate similar to that of Job or that poor girl Niobe, perhaps I would not wish to live every moment over and over if given the chance. How could I and why should I live every moment over and over? Yet many of us are surprisingly resilient even in the midst of tragedy and we can cope quite well when fortunes turns to misfortune.

I must emphasize though that for Nietzsche, pity for those who suffer is not the answer. Self-pity certainly is not a fine tool for coping either. Pity is something that the people of the Judeo-Christian tradition do exceptionally well. Nietzsche calls Christianity the “religion of pity”, and out of a religion of pity emerges the “religion of comfortableness”, since happiness and unhappiness are “sisters and even twins” (GS 338). For Nietzsche, all that pity does is perpetuate if not encourage the weakness of others. The religion of pity sanctions the agonies and torments that we all face because we are convinced that life cannot be any better. We cannot overcome these agonies and torments. For Nietzsche, we cannot permit ourselves to glower over our adverse situations or give others the license to glower because we have been dealt an unfavorable hand. Nietzsche points out that:

...[T]hey wish to help and have no thought of the personal necessity of distress, although terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders are necessary for me and you as their opposites. It never occurs to them that, to put it mystically, the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell (GS 338).

¹⁷ My thanks to Ofelia Schutte and her essay on this very topic, “Willing Backwards: Nietzsche on Time, Pain, Joy, and Memory”.

We would all prefer to go straight to heaven without ever having to perambulate just once through hell. Yet a life free of “terror” and “deprivation” is impossible. It is Nietzsche’s claim that we *need* the personal horror to ever be able to comprehend joy and affirmation. We will not learn a thing from complacency. Furthermore, we all have enemies, many of whom wish to see us suffer. Suffering might make someone stronger, especially if her life seems more misbegotten than others. According to Nietzsche, suffering “ennobles”. Nietzsche is of course self-referential here. The more profound your suffering, the more noble you are. As noted many times before, few would have wanted to be Friedrich Nietzsche. He did not suffer as much as others. But the average person who suffers nothing more than a few bounced checks and a couple of botched romances would still choose her life over Nietzsche’s.

There will still be a few episodes in every person’s life that she would want to delete completely. Maybe someone will not experience “profound” suffering, but her life could still come asunder quite easily. All it takes is one unfavorable event to change the complexion of a person’s life. Others around me might desire to mar my near-perfect existence. Nietzsche says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that “...whenever you have an enemy, do not requite him good for evil: for that would make him ashamed, [b]ut prove that he has done something good for you” (Z I:19). It is my claim that the quality of the response to suffering is an important factor in determining whether a person could will eternal recurrence. The focus of eternal recurrence is on how human beings respond to suffering, despite its magnitude. Nietzsche states in the *Gay Science* that he wants

to “teach them what is understood by so few today, least of all by these preachers of pity: to share not suffering but to share joy” (GS 338). A minority of us will be more privileged than others whereby our suffering might be alleviated through counseling, trips to the spa, and the use of pharmaceuticals. Famine, cholera, political oppression, illiteracy, and homelessness may not be familiar afflictions to many of us, but we all have our problems. Wealthy people can develop cancer too. We cannot escape suffering, but can we make suffering positive. How can we affirm life in the presence of sorrow? How can we derive happiness from despair? What if I am like the dour man in Shakespeare’s sonnet who:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate...¹⁸

Suffering may be unavoidable, but must I wallow in self-pity? Shakespeare’s dour man realizes at the end of fourteen lines that he would “scorn to change my state with kings”. Can we do the same? Could we be part of a higher culture if we were to mope and languish in bed all day? If life were so insufferable, does this mean that living it once is too much to bear? If it were, we could not will eternal recurrence. But could we come to the realization that our lives could be affirmed in spite of the miseries and disasters? How can we spawn a higher culture if we cannot even celebrate our personal and private triumphs? Before we begin to worry about culture and higher humanity, we must find a way to affirm our lives and “share not suffering but share joy” I will argue that one must will eternal

¹⁸ Shakespeare, “Sonnet 29”, from *The Collected Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 4th ed., (Harper Collins: Chicago), p.1622.

recurrence before one to attain higher humanity. I will not argue that one must be an *Übermensch* to be part of higher humanity.

III

Nietzsche's principal discussion of eternal recurrence appears in the narrative of the mysterious and at times, histrionic prophet Zarathustra in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche considered *Zarathustra* to be his finest work. He says in *Ecce Homo* that:

There is no wisdom, no investigation of the soul, no art of speech before Zarathustra; what is nearest and most everyday, here speaks of unheard-of things. Epigrams trembling with passion, eloquence music, lightning bolts knurled forward into hitherto unfathomed futures. The most powerful capacity for metaphors that has existed so far is poor and mere child's play compared with this return of language to the nature of imagery (EH 305).

Upon reading Nietzsche's rather smug, acerbic, and self-congratulatory autobiography, one might at first conclude that Nietzsche's impending madness was manifesting itself while he was writing the aforementioned passage. Nietzsche appears to have grown embarrassingly fond of himself by telling us why he is so clever, why he writes such good books, and why he is a destiny. Perhaps Nietzsche is being ironic. Should Nietzsche have the honor of being a harbinger of great things to come? He was always self-reverential and self-referential, mostly droll, never insipid, never apologetic. In *Ecce Homo*, he cannot but bring up Zarathustra every time he has the chance. Nietzsche is quite satisfied with his other works, but Zarathustra seems to take precedence. It is not the only

book that alludes to eternal recurrence. It is a book however that entails one cryptic passage after another. In *The Gay Science*, eternal recurrence will not seem as enigmatic. At times it is difficult to determine whether Zarathustra should be taken literally or figuratively. Unlike other texts, *Zarathustra* is a narrative, not a collection of aphorisms. Why has Nietzsche chosen Zarathustra to teach eternal recurrence? We must not forget the “profound”. We are ennobled by “profound” suffering, and the “profound” Zarathustra loves his masks. Zarathustra’s maddening adventures and misadventures shed much light on Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence.

The subtitle for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is “A Book For Everyone and No One”. Zarathustra’s oracular and demagogic style might compel readers to infer that *Zarathustra* is just a book for “Someone”, most likely Nietzsche. Nietzsche is aware that many passages in this book are far more confounding than illuminating. Zarathustra indeed has a message, yet if this message is nearly impossible to decipher with all of the dramatic interludes and breathless affirmations, why would “Everyone” or even anyone care to read past the prelude? A person who wishes to affirm the same life would need a little more than a sometimes puzzling text to do such a thing. Zarathustra is a character that appeals to those who love the mask. Meaning in poetry tends to be deeper and more hidden than meaning in prose. This is a person who loves what is deep and hidden, far from the mind-numbing surface. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is a profound character who tells parables that few could and should understand. In the age where talk-show hosts have book clubs that greatly influence the reading habits of

millions of viewers, the enigmatic Zarathustra would not have been on the book-of-the-month selection. Nietzsche did not write a book for everybody; such books are “malodorous” books that pander to the superficial interests of those herd-like television watchers. Zarathustra, the mouthpiece of Friedrich Nietzsche, has a style that is rarely seen in philosophy. Philosophers have no trouble being dense and turgid, and they are rarely poetic.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a difficult book to negotiate, as is almost everything written by Nietzsche. Nietzsche typically writes in an aphoristic style, so his thoughts come at the reader in a *blitzkrieg* fashion. Nietzsche’s aphorisms are not always known for their clarity. His aphorisms are not all hard to penetrate or crack. Aphorisms are dramatics, but they are not long-winded narratives. There is no circuitous story that the reader must follow. The strange narrative of Zarathustra should not be ignored because of its not so user-friendly style.

Zarathustra was Nietzsche’s most personal work. The very personal nature of the work could not have been captured in his aphorisms, and it certainly could not have been captured in the traditionally stuffy philosophical manner. Nietzsche could have stated an argument, then refuted or defended it. He was a trained academic. He could have accomplished that task admirably. Instead, only committed readers would tag along with Zarathustra for his entire narrative. One must remember that this higher culture only admits the most creative, willful, and uncomplaining free spirits. Any reader who finds this warped sojourn tiresome can put the book down. There is little aesthetic distance between Nietzsche and Zarathustra. It is a book that is confessional because it is the culmination of

Nietzsche's personal and professional life which preceded the writing of this book. None of Nietzsche's previous works had captured the visceral emotions, the paradoxes, and fancies of Nietzsche in the same way. There was no better way to depict his life than in a poetic, grandiose style. Zarathustra is Nietzsche's loftiest self-expression. And Zarathustra comes to us with a message that needs to be heard. Zarathustra is at times a pathetic, lonely man. Nietzsche himself had friends, but was betrothed to no one. If Zarathustra is Nietzsche in a poetic disguise, why hasn't the misunderstood Zarathustra chosen to jump off one of those cliffs? Zarathustra had descended the mountain in hopes of disseminating his irreverent and irreligious gospel. No one was ready to hear him. Nietzsche himself had felt that despite the bottomless suffering that incessantly bedeviled him, life was worthwhile and could still be affirmed.

Instead of attaching a metaphysical meaning to his suffering, Nietzsche chose to affirm his life with all of its pleasures and all of its pain. In spite of everything, Nietzsche could genuinely redeem his life *now*, and not in the afterworld. For Nietzsche, this life was all one had. Redemption for Nietzsche is not the Christian redemption of accepting God and being forgiven for one's sins. Sins, like good deeds, must be affirmed too if one is to sincerely affirm life in all of its joyfulness and misery. Nietzsche says in "Of Redemption", "to redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into 'I wanted it thus!' – that alone do I call redemption!" (Z II:20). To redeem one's life is to accept affirm every moment. The past cannot be changed yet it is constitutive of every given person's identity. Removing one moment from your life would not make it the same life. This is the

crucible of eternal recurrence. You must wish to live your life as if the same life recurred eternally. Nothing about your life could be altered. A person can only redeem her life if she affirms every second, every event. Nothing about one's past can be changed. This can cause much distress. Ofelia Schutte observes that:

...[t]he past is represented as the 'it was', that is, the moments, conditions, and events that, due to their past nature, are perceived as lying outside the compass of the present exercise of willing. The main contrast or tension shown is that between a will that becomes disempowered and vindictive as it perceives itself limited in its functioning by the irreversibility of the past and a will that can take a course other than this vindictive reaction, keeping its energy and focus fully directed on projects of self-overcoming and creativity.¹⁹

One might despair over the fact that the past can never change, but this “willing backwards”, the desire to affirm every moment in one's life, is possible. The realization and the acceptance that even the dreary moments define the person is what Nietzsche calls “redemption”. Turning “it was” into “I willed it thus!” means that every prior moment is indispensable. I would not be living the same life if even a second were subtracted the second time around. My life can be redeemed only if I would live the selfsame life with all of its bright and dim moments. The past is reclaimed.

Christianity is a contemptible source of values for Zarathustra. Suffering is a leitmotif in Christianity, yet how Christians typically cope with suffering leaves Zarathustra rather aggrieved. There is a plethora of suffering; whatever are we to do to alleviate it? Zarathustra berates the “afterworldsmen” for having created the

¹⁹ Schutte, “Willing Backwards: Nietzsche on Time, Pain, Joy, and Memory”, from *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, op .cit. p.119.

fiction of the afterlife. “It was suffering and impotence that created all afterworlds” (Z I:3). Unless a person is complacent and totally unaware of what goes on around him, every person will experience suffering in some way. Nietzsche believes that suffering is unavoidable and inevitable, but it is also bearable. Zarathustra says “yes” to suffering while Christians say “no”. Suffering alone should not impel us to repudiate this existence in hopes of a sweeter existence in the afterlife, if there even is one. Our embodied existence appears to be all we have, so we make do with what we have been given. Zarathustra urges us not to bear suffering only because we think there will be a place reserved for us after our respective bodily lives end. This explanation may have worked for Saint Augustine, but it will not work for Zarathustra because he thinks it is unhealthy to look for solutions in the afterlife. “Weariness, which wants to reach the ultimate with a single death-leap, a poor ignorant weariness which no longer even wants to want; that created all gods and afterworlds” (Z I:3). We will not be rewarded with a seat in the afterlife because we remained faithful to God during our pitiful days on earth. For Zarathustra, the afterworld is a “heavenly nothing” (Z I:3). The past cannot be undone; sufferings are not forgotten. They can be redeemed – now.

One can overcome a great deal by accepting Zarathustra’s doctrine of eternal recurrence. The emotionally charged language of Zarathustra can complicate a swift understanding of eternal recurrence. The doctrine of eternal recurrence also wears a mask. With some care, Zarathustra’s points can be made clear. In “Of the Vision and the Riddle”, Zarathustra finds himself with a dwarf

who annoys him considerably. Zarathustra decides to tell the dwarf about his “abysmal thought” of eternal recurrence. He tells the dwarf:

This long lane behind us: it goes one for eternity.
And that long lane ahead of us – that is for
another eternity. They are in opposition to
one another: and it is here at this gateway that
they come together. The name of the gateway
is written above it: ‘Moment’ (Z III:2).

Instead of being awestruck by such an abysmal thought, the dwarf gives a sardonic reply, “Everything straight lies...all truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.” Zarathustra is upset that the dwarf is mocking such an abysmal thought. How could the dwarf take such things so lightly and sarcastically? Zarathustra continues with his abysmal thought:

Must not all things that can run have already run
along this lane? Must not all things that can happen
have already happened, been done, run past? And are
not all things bound fast together in such a way that this
moment draws itself after all future things. Therefore,
draws itself too (Z III:2)?

In other words, must we not recur eternally? We are here now, we were here before, we will be here again – eternally. What is one to make of this?

After Zarathustra says this, he hears a dog howling nearby and the dwarf had disappeared. Zarathustra then questions whether the dwarf actually existed or came to him in a dream. If Zarathustra had been dreaming, did he really teach the doctrine of eternal recurrence? Is it Zarathustra’s mission to teach eternal recurrence? Zarathustra then sees a shepherd nearby who is choking on a snake. The black snake is hanging out of the shepherd’s mouth. Zarathustra yells at the shepherd to bite the snake’s head off. What does the snake represent? Who does

the shepherd represent? Zarathustra asks, “Who is the shepherd into whose mouth the snake thus crawled? Who is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest, blackest will thus crawl?” (Z II:2)? The question is never clearly answered. The shepherd does bite the snake’s head off and then is transformed unto something that is not human:

No longer a shepherd, no longer a man – a
transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing!*
Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed? O
my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human
laughter, and now a thirst consumes me, a longing
that is never stilled (Z III:2).

This passage perhaps implies that the shepherd is the *Übermensch*. Such a being has yet to emerge since this is a laughter that Zarathustra has never heard before. The shepherd is no longer human, but we still are. Does this mean that we are not ready to be *Übermenschen*? Will we ever be? The shepherd bit off the snake’s head. Will we ever be able to bite off all that is heavy and black? I do not think that one must be an *Übermensch* to will eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence is an abysmal thought. That will never change. *Übermenschen* appear to be superhuman beings though. We are human beings who shudder and struggle at the thought of eternal recurrence. Human beings may have a harder time biting the snake’s head off. We can still laugh, but our laughter will be human. We can still be part of higher humanity, but it is still humanity.

In “The Convalescent”, Zarathustra decides to call upon this abysmal thought of eternal recurrence again. When he decides to do this, he slips into unconsciousness for seven days. He finally awakes and his animals come to him and remind him about eternal recurrence:

...O Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence*, that is now *your* destiny!...Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally and we ourselves with them, and that we have already existed an infinite number of times before and all things with us...so that all these years resemble one another, in the greatest things and in the smallest. So that we ourselves resemble ourselves in each great year, in the greatest things and in the smallest (Z III:13).

Furthermore, “everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls forever. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs on forever” (Z III: 13). The stunning irony is that Zarathustra never appears to be the teacher of eternal recurrence. With the dwarf, Zarathustra “teaches” eternal recurrence in what appears to be a dream, and while he convalesces from his coma, it is his animals that speak of that “abysmal thought” of eternal recurrence. The dwarf scoffs at this abysmal thought. The animals seem to celebrate this abysmal thought. As dreadful as eternal recurrence is to Zarathustra, the animals want to rejoice because of it. It is a thought so abysmal that Zarathustra falls unconscious, but the animals want to sing and dance. How abysmal is this thought? Do the animals not understand how excruciating eternal recurrence is? Why the irony?

The dwarf and the animals see nothing abysmal about it. I do not think they do not understand eternal recurrence. If all things recur eternally, then the great man and little man must recur too. All that is great and all that is appalling must recur eternally. All that enlivens and all that terrorizes Zarathustra must recur eternally. “The greatest all too small! – that was my disgust at man! And eternal recurrence even for the smallest! That was my disgust at all existence!” (Z

III:13). The smallest man will recur too. The thought of that does not imbue Zarathustra with the desire to sing and dance. This is probably the worst part of eternal recurrence. The smallest man will recur too. Is Zarathustra even ready for eternal recurrence? He is supposed to be the teacher of eternal recurrence, yet the thought of it causes him to grimace, to bristle. If eternal recurrence were a cosmological thesis, Zarathustra would not need to shrivel at the mere mention of eternal recurrence. Shriveling, grimacing, and bristling - these all would have happened before.

But as a thought experiment, eternal recurrence could even cause its purported teacher to panic. Life does not recur, but if it did, the smallest man would be there too. If life recurs eternally without change, that little man will be back every time. That mortifying moment, that terrifying moment, that saddening moment, and that excruciating moment would all recur eternally. It is no surprise that even Zarathustra must pause and rethink his doctrine, the doctrine he never actually teaches.

Perhaps there are few people who could accept life in its unedited entirety over and over. How many of us would want the little man? I do maintain that despite his high anxiety, Zarathustra could accept eternal recurrence. None of his companions are ever able to accept it though. The thought is so horrifying that most people would do more than tremble at the thought. Our lives contain events we simply cannot bear to live again. How could we wish to live again and again if those events could not be erased? With eternal recurrence, our lives must be written in ink, not in pencil. It is no wonder that in the end, Zarathustra ends up

alone. Perhaps the people he met on his way home were not ready, but others might be. This is a demanding test to pass, but some could. The doctrine of eternal recurrence allows to assess our lives and ascertain whether we are living our lives as we want to live them. Am I living the life that I would wish to live eternally? Zarathustra muses in “The Intoxicated Song”:

O Man! Attend!
What does deep midnight’s voice contend?
I slept my sleep,
And now awake at dreaming’s end:
The world is deep,
Deeper than the day can comprehend.
Deep is its woe,
Joy – deeper than heart’s agony:
Woe says: Fade! Go!
But all joy wants eternity,
Wants deep, deep, deep eternity (Z IV:19)!

There is no greater affirmation than to accept one’s life “eternally”. You accept the joy and the pain cheerfully. We affirm even the smallest man too. If we affirm our lives in their entirety, we have been redeemed. No task could be harder. It is not that these teachings are too premature even for Zarathustra. He is human after all. It is an abysmal thought that gives everyone pause.

As a character, Zarathustra frightens, excites, and irritates. In short, he is the literary Friedrich Nietzsche. While Kierkegaard used pseudonyms to communicate indirectly, Nietzsche uses poetry to communicate dramatically, with the aid of masks of course. Through Zarathustra, one has emotion, power, and drama. Prose can rarely deliver such passion. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was the result of Nietzsche’s accrued personal problems. After all Nietzsche endured, he had to devise a way of sublimating his energy into something creative and artistic.

He affirmed his life in *Ecce Homo*. This autobiography was one of the last books he wrote. It was also through the baffling character of Zarathustra that a downtrodden Nietzsche could affirm his life since the joy still far outweighed the agony.

IV

Nietzsche is less dramatic in the *Gay Science* when he brings up this celebrated topic of eternal recurrence. *The Gay Science* preceded *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *Zarathustra*, in contrast the latter's text was more of a poetic text while the *Gay Science* was an aphoristic text. In Book Four, Nietzsche entitles section 341 "The Greatest Weight." In this section, Nietzsche proposes what I claim to be a monological thought-experiment, and not a cosmological principle or normative imperative. Nietzsche asks:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself' (GS 341).

If this demon were so kind as to let us edit our lives and omit the tragedies, cataclysms, wars and all the depression that many of us feel each morning when we awake or each night when we lay ourselves down to sleep, then perhaps everyone would take the demon up on his offer. Imagine re-living your life gliding only the crest and not in the dank trough! Yet Nietzsche's demon is not

giving us this option. The reader is not even given the option of declining the demon's offer and living this life only once instead of once more and innumerable times more. The demon's "offer" is an offer we cannot refuse. The demon asks, "[w]ould you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus" (GS 341)? 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)?

Nietzsche mentions eternal recurrence elsewhere, but he is at his most devastating – and succinct – in this section. This idea of having to live one's life again and again, an unedited life with mirth but also with melancholia, would leave any person cowering the corner somewhere, praying this is a nightmare. Tracy B. Strong claims that "Nietzsche understands eternal [recurrence] to produce in human beings a transformation sufficiently deep and general as to completely change the nature of all interactions men have with themselves, with others, and with the world around them."²⁰ One would have to be transformed into order to accept eternal recurrence. This means that one would have to seriously consider whether this life is joyful and cheerful to live again and again. This does not only include the turning of "It was" into "I willed it thus!". Our future choices would also be affected. Those of us brave enough or perhaps brash enough to address this issue would have to take a sober look at our lives and how we are living them. This is an issue that would jolt any reader into seriously reconsidering the choices that were and are made.

²⁰ Tracy B. Strong. *Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (The University of California Press: Los Angeles) p. 271.

Along with the anti-cosmological stance, I argue that eternal recurrence is not normative for Nietzsche, especially if it is paired with the cosmological interpretation. Many could easily adopt a normative interpretation. Yet, it is unclear as to how a person *ought* to live her life if her life has already been lived many times before. If the selfsame life really has been lived over and over, no choices could be made. That would make eternal recurrence in a sense deterministic. The person would have no choice in determining whether her life ought to be lived over and over. It is being lived over and over. No decisions – moral or otherwise - could be made. If there is an “ought” in eternal recurrence, I do not see any normativity attached to it. Maybe I ought not regret imbibing liquor at that ill-fated Passover gathering years back or I ought not fear leaving my hometown for another city. These “oughts” are personal and not evaluative. There is no universal ought either. Whatever I need to do to crave nothing more fervently than eternal recurrence may not correspond to what another person needs to do to crave that eternal confirmation and seal. Nietzsche is largely allergic to modern morality because of its seemingly unavoidable absolutism. He would, on my interpretation, be averse to prescribing a rigid moral system for his free spirits to follow. If Nietzsche lambastes modern moralists for codifying morality into a homogeneous and universal system, then Nietzsche would sacrifice his intellectual integrity by simply replacing Kantians or Utilitarians. To crave that confirmation and seal is a personal craving. Richard Schacht has argued that an *Übermensch* can still be an *Übermensch* and be moral since all people are anchored within certain traditions and cultural contexts from which

they cannot fully escape. Schacht claims that “Nietzsche does not even try to say with any precision or clarity what he would have people in general do, or how he would have them do it.”²¹ Schacht believes that there can be “Nietzschean normativity”. But normativity for Nietzsche at best would be localized, particularistic, and personal. It might even be normativity within a larger normative edifice. Nietzsche had taxes to pay after all.

V

In this part of the chapter, I would like to examine what other scholars have said about eternal recurrence and how it relates to my arguments, focusing on contributions by Bernd Magnus, Alexander Nehamas, and Richard Schacht. Much has been said and misunderstood regarding Nietzsche’s puzzling doctrine of eternal recurrence. Many scholars who preceded Magnus took Nietzsche quite literally when he claimed that we live our lives once more and innumerable times more. Many scholars believed that Nietzsche was propounding a cosmological view of the universe, and because of this, scholars labored over the apparent truth-value of eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence would seem self-defeating if it were cosmological. We would not have any choice in affirming our lives that we currently live. We would have already done that before and will do it again.

Bernd Magnus takes a different course when he examines eternal recurrence. Perhaps if one peels away the layers that are Nietzsche’s lyrical words, there might be a pearl of wisdom beneath it after all. I will examine

²¹ Richard Schacht, “Nietzschean Normativity”, from *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche’s Prelude to Philosophy’s Future*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: NY) p. 154.

Magnus' claims from *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*. This was published in 1978. I will also use "Perfectibility and Attitude" which was published in 1983, and a paper he gave at the Spindel Conference" at Memphis State University. Magnus' claims have been modified over the years.

In *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, Magnus quotes section 341 in the *Gay Science* in an attempt to ascertain what Nietzsche might have meant saying that the world recurs an infinite number of times. In this section, the truth value of eternal recurrence, whether the world really does recur eternally, is not at issue according to Magnus. The purpose of the agonizing question posed by the demon is to determine whether anyone *would* crave nothing more fervently than to live her life again and again without subtraction or addition. She would live the selfsame life over and over, a life possibly fraught with disappointment and adversity. All that is bad would have to recur with all that is good. It is no wonder that many, if asked that question would gnash their teeth and crave nothing more fervently than complete annihilation the first time around. According to Magnus, it does not matter whether all of us truly are condemned to live life an infinite number of times. What section 341 spotlights is the question as to whether a person is well-disposed enough towards her life so that *if* life did recur an infinite number of times without any editing, she would want to live once more and innumerable times more. How many of us would clamor for this opportunity?

According to Magnus, it is a mistake to interpret eternal recurrence as a normative and/or cosmological interpretation. Magnus is quite swift with his dismissal of these two interpretations. According to the cosmological

interpretation, the world really does recur eternally. According to this interpretation, as I sit here typing this paper, I have previously sat here nervously typing this paper an infinite number of times before. I will sit here nervously typing this paper over and over in the future. Presumably, I will always be “nervously” typing the paper instead of “confidently” and “lovingly” typing this paper. How could I answer the demon affirmatively or negatively? If I have already lived my life an infinite number of times before this present life, nothing about my experiences or my actions will change. In life #112, I will do the exact same thing as I did in my previous 111 lives. I would be unable to change the outcome of any event in my life since the outcome is always the same. There is nothing new that I can do in this life. Why gnash my teeth? If I haven’t done that already in my previous lives, I will not do it now. Eternal recurrence seems rather useless on this interpretation. Magnus claims that the cosmological interpretation “has the least to recommend” regarding the coherence and tenability of eternal recurrence.²² This means that if eternal recurrence were a cosmological principle, then life really would recur. How could we have any control over our actions if they have already happened and will happen over and over? We could not control whether we wish to will eternal recurrence.

The normative interpretation suffers a similar fate. If, according to Magnus, eternal recurrences were normative, then we are being asked to behave *as if* eternal recurrence were true.²³ If your life recurred eternally, what ought you to do? You would tailor your actions so that your life would be tolerable if not

²² Bernd Magnus. *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN) p.140.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 140.

swell – just in case you had to live it over and over. Magnus points out that for the most part, the normative interpretation collapses into the cosmological interpretation. Magnus is unsure as to what we are being “asked to imagine”. We are enjoined to behave as though eternal recurrence were true, yet how can we be accountable for our actions if “we are being asked to behave in ways that we have behaved in an infinite number of previous recurrences.”²⁴ Our behavior is not going to change in this life because we have already behaved in the same way before. Making the normative interpretation hypothetical does not make the interpretation any more convincing. Another problem that Magnus raises is whether anyone can “behave as if X were true” if they do not believe X to be true.²⁵ If one is truly skeptical about the truth value of eternal recurrence, then one would have to “abandon rationality” in order to believe X to be true when one knows X to be false. If I believe that eternal recurrence is not true, how could I convince myself that it is true? Both interpretations are too deeply rooted in the truth value of eternal recurrence, according to Magnus. If we were to jettison considerations of truth value regarding eternal recurrence, there is still plenty for us to salvage from section 341.

Magnus is happy to assume the task. Magnus asserts that his interpretation is completely indifferent to the supposed truth value of eternal recurrence. Magnus claims that “recurrence...is a visual and conceptual representation of a particular attitude toward life...[and] the attitude Nietzsche wishes to portray is

²⁴ Ibid., p.141

²⁵ ibid., p.141

the opposite of decadence, decline of life, world-weariness.”²⁶ The antitheses of the life-negating qualities are overfulness, celebratory affirmation, and joy – to just name a few. The second part of Magnus’s thesis is that “the attitude toward life captured in the doctrine of eternal recurrence is the expression of nihilism overcome.”²⁷ According to this attitudinal interpretation, it is the *Übermensch* who would be so well-disposed toward life that she would cheerfully express such affirmation and crave nothing more fervently than to live once more and innumerable times more.

According to Magnus, Nietzsche’s “existential imperative” claims that the task is to live in such a way that we must wish to live again.²⁸ We do not have to accept eternal recurrence as true in order to live in such a way that we would wish to live again. Nietzsche is not telling us explicitly what we must do in order to wish to live our lives over and over. The existential imperative is a personal imperative. No single formula exists for everyone to follow. Kant’s categorical imperative is universal. Any maxim that can be willed into a universal law is binding on all autonomous agents. Not only is Nietzsche’s existential imperative amoral, it is an imperative that must be customized per person. At best, this existential imperative narrowly resembles Kant’s “hypothetical imperatives” which are conditional and personally binding in nature.²⁹ Magnus adds that “the

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.143

²⁹ see Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans T.K. Abbott (Prometheus Books: NY).

important thing is to become aware of what is worthy of infinity in our lives...[and] about these things we will surely differ. We are different after all.”³⁰

Discussing the chapter “On Redemption” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Magnus asserts that the point of “redemption” is for the will to “affirm and accept its own creative power, its accomplished past, its chosen present, and to-be-created future.”³¹ A person should sidestep the old adage that “all life is [negative] suffering”. A person must be able to bring joy to this life instead of waiting for joy to come in the afterlife. A person should embrace fully her past, present, and future without a tincture of revenge because of the way life turned out. All this constitutes a person who would crave that eternal confirmation and seal. Magnus concludes that “Nietzsche’s imperative heightens, intensifies – and eternalizes – the content of experience.”³²

Magnus has slightly backed away from his earlier interpretation of eternal recurrence. In *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*, Magnus claimed that most people, if they were truly joyous in Nietzsche’s iconoclastic way, would crave nothing more fervently than eternal recurrence.³³ Magnus appears to have mellowed somewhat. In more recent work he is less upbeat regarding eternal recurrence. He seems quite suspicious of the doctrine. In an essay entitled “Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*”, Magnus is no longer sure whether anyone could really live her life over and over without revision. Perhaps that existential imperative has become too frightening to bear. If

³⁰ Magnus, op. cit., p. 143.

³¹ Ibid., p. 151.

³² Ibid., p. 154.

³³ Ibid. p.154.

someone lives her life in such a way that she would wish to live eternally, no editing is permissible, whether it is the second or eightieth time around. Would a person require self-deception in order to want to live again?³⁴ Magnus now thinks that a person would have to appreciably deceive herself in order to believe that life is worth living over and over without any revision. According to Nietzsche, no one gets to affirm her life selectively; she must affirm their life *entirely*. Yet the desire to live life selectively trumps affirmation. There are a couple of moments I would love to omit next time around. Yet this desire then undermines my wish to live again and again the same life. Magnus claims that the only person who could will eternal recurrence without a touch of self-deception is that mystifying *Ubermensch*. Perhaps if Magnus is able to figure out who this person is, we might be able to determine who really could will to live life once more and innumerable times more. If the *Ubermensch* is human, then perhaps we could mimic him. If the *Ubermensch* is inhuman as he does appear in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we may not be able to will eternal recurrence.

Magnus offers two possible interpretations of the *Ubermensch*. On one reading, the *Ubermensch* “exhibits certain traits of character, traits in which the typical are associated with notions of self-overcoming, sublimation, creativity, and self-perfection...[and] construed in this way, [the *Ubermensch*] expresses Nietzsche’s vision of the human ideal, of what humans beings should or might be like.”³⁵ This is what Magnus calls the “ideal-type” reading. Magnus calls the other interpretation the “diagnostic” or “attitudinal” reading. On this

³⁴ “Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche’s *Ubermensch*, from *Review of Metaphysics* 36 (March 1983), p.649.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 633.

interpretation, the attitude “portrayed is supposed to be that of affirmation, overfulness; the attitude which expresses ascending life, life in and as celebration...[and] one consistent with a wide range of directly conflicting first-order traits and attributes.”³⁶ On this reading, there are no specific traits which are universally constitutive of the *Übermensch*. The traits will differ from person to person. Under the first interpretation, there will be only one class of traits that comprise the *Übermenschen*.

According to the ideal-type reading, the *Übermensch* resembles a heroic ideal. This is a person who is anchored in the human-all-too-human herd, yet managed to go beyond that mundane herd and transform himself into a self-perfecting, superior individual. It is the “immoralist”, this “creator of values” who is a cause for concern. Magnus cites many passages from scholars who insisted that the *Übermensch* was some kind of proto-fascist and proto-Nazi entity. Some, like the critic J. P. Stern, believe the *Übermensch* to be the quintessential expression of the Hitlerian ideal.³⁷ Many fear that the drive for self-perfection, a drive which would require one to transcend good and evil, leaves a person susceptible to committing violence against others in order to achieve this state of higher morality. Since the ideals are the same for each person wishing to transcend good and evil, perhaps these values are of an Aryan nature? Could one advocate a master race under the guise of an ideal-type *Übermensch*? Magnus is not sympathetic to this ideal-type reading. This reading may not only allow for

³⁶ Ibid., p. 635.

³⁷ Ibid., p.638.

intellectual misappropriation such as the “Hitlerian ideal” This is an ideal which seems unattainable.

Perhaps the other reading might protect the *Übermensch* from any gross misinterpretation. The other reading might let the *Übermensch* look more attainable. The “diagnostic” reading of the *Übermensch*, according to Magnus, does not “emphasize the *Übermensch* as a human ideal of perfectibility...[instead] I take the *Übermensch* to be a nonspecific representation...of a certain attitude toward life and world – the attitude which finds them worthy of infinite repetition.” On this reading, whatever constitutes the *Übermensch* purposely remains opaque. If my life is worthy of infinite repetition, I am the only one who can make such a declaration about my life. Only I can affirm *my* life. I have no other references against which to judge my life. I cannot affirm anyone else’s life, and nor can they do the same for me. Our criteria are different. Magnus urges us to read Nietzsche “bifocally”, which entails that one cannot be intent on ascribing to Nietzsche any particular world-view or vision of what constitutes the *Übermensch*.³⁸ Whatever path a person needs to tread in order to believe that life is worthy of infinite repetition, Magnus states that only the *Übermenschen* could tread such paths. Magnus does believe that both readings could be correct though the diagnostic reading, on my interpretation better fits Nietzsche’s perspectival approach. However, what needs to be made clear is whether we can be *Übermenschen*.

In this essay, it appears that we can be. The description of such a person is unclear. What if it turns out the *Übermensch* is unattainable? Only the

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.643.

Übermensch can tread that lofty path, perhaps the rest of us must be self-deceived if we think we are able to will eternal recurrence. Even with the diagnostic reading, the *Übermensch* has an otherworldly quality that human beings do not possess. It is still an ideal. Only this enigmatic *Übermensch* can think life is worthy of infinite repetition. We cannot even come close to this mark. We would have to be fooling ourselves to believe that every moment, even the tragic ones, can be willed over and over. I can only will eternal recurrence for myself, and you can only will eternal recurrence for yourself. We have to adopt a subjective attitude regarding our ability to will eternal recurrence. No one else can will it for me. Yet if I am not an *Übermensch*, the only way I could even think that I could will eternal recurrence is to deceive myself into thinking that my life is worthy of infinite repetition. I may think I am an *Übermensch*, but I must have deceived myself into thinking that I am such a thing.

In a later paper entitled, “Asceticism and Eternal Recurrence: A Bridge Too Far”, Magnus seems to have turned his back on his earlier works, or he is at least strongly reconsidering them. Magnus is now claiming that eternal recurrence is an impossible doctrine to adopt. In the earlier essay, Magnus needs to assure himself and the readers that self-deception would not be mandatory in order to will eternal recurrence. It appears now that the self-deception needed to will eternal recurrence would be of epic proportions. Life just contains too many tragedies to be redeemed. Some moments cannot be redeemed. Apparently no affirmation can be had if life is to be lived over and over in its unexpurgated

version. Magnus boldly asks in the paper: “How can eternal recurrence be willed after Dachau and Auschwitz?”³⁹

Now it appears that eternal recurrence is apparently too light-hearted and blithe to be taken seriously in the weaponized age of the 21st century. Perhaps Nietzsche spent a little too much time sequestered in the placid Swiss mountains to have a firm grasp on reality and tragedy. Magnus removes the leavening that Nietzsche gave to eternal recurrence by viewing it with much more trepidation and solemnity than he had before. Magnus is now asserting that most of us would find the idea of eternal recurrence to be:

...shattering because they should always find it possible to prefer the eternal repetition of their lives in an edited version rather than to crave nothing more fervently than the recurrence of each of its horrors. Only a superhuman could (*Übermensch*) accept recurrence without emendation, evasion, of self-deception, a being whose distance from conventional humanity is greater than the distance between human being and beast.....⁴⁰

Magnus and I differ regarding eternal recurrence insofar as I argue that eternal recurrence can be willed and Magnus believes that it would be a nearly impossible exercise. Yet we are not too far apart regarding the *Übermensch*. Like Magnus I maintain that the *Übermensch* is so far removed from humanity that his emergence into society is highly unlikely. In “The Vision and The Riddle”, the man who bit the head off of the snake is described as a remarkable if not preternatural specimen that Zarathustra has never seen before. This may seem as if the *Übermensch* is too superhuman for humans. I do agree with Magnus that

³⁹ “Asceticism and Eternal Recurrence: A Bridge Too Far”, from “The Spindel Conference on Nietzsche and Politics”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol XXXVII, Supplement, p. 107.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.102.

the *Übermensch* is not an attainable ideal for humankind. However, I disagree with Magnus when he claims that one would have to be superhuman, an *Übermensch* in order to will eternal recurrence. According to Magnus, the world has too much misery and not enough joy to bear once more and innumerable times more. Magnus believes that only a person riddled with self-deception would want to live her life over and over without any editing. I am not discounting the magnitude of evil that befalls nearly every person. I argue that in spite of every calamity, a person can still wish to live the exact life again and again. A person need not be an *Übermensch* to will eternal recurrence. This does not mean that willing eternal recurrence *is not* a crucible itself. Tragic events can devastate even the most emotionally impermeable person. The majority of people probably would prefer to live their lives over and over only if they could instead have an edited version to relive. If one is to will eternal recurrence, the editing cannot take place. This is why “higher humanity” is unattainable for most. I do not think the *Übermensch* and “higher humanity” are the same. I maintain that if a person manages to ascend to “higher humanity”, they would and could will eternal recurrence.

Magnus is now reluctant to embrace the *Übermensch* and the ramifications that he thinks follow from such an endorsement. Eternal recurrence may be a hard concept to accept, but it is not an impossible concept to accept. It is useful for Magnus to allude to the Holocaust now that he wishes to disrupt a person’s attempt to will eternal recurrence. After the ghettos, after the yellow stars, after the gas chambers, and after Anne Frank – how could any Holocaust survivor will

eternal recurrence? Why would any of them want to? Fortunately, most of us will never have to suffer those horrors personally. I do not think that when one wills eternal recurrence, one wills all of history along with it. As the scene with the demon in section 341 of *The Gay Science* suggests, I will eternal recurrence because I want to live my life once more and innumerable times more. On my interpretation of eternal recurrence, I am willing the life that I have experienced through my eyes only. I cannot will eternal recurrence for others. Others may have experienced events that had more of an impact on them than it had upon me. I can only affirm the events as I experienced them. Some events impact me directly, others indirectly. A death in the family would have a direct impact on my life as opposed to the Holocaust which is not only temporally distant from me, but also has fewer personal ramifications than the former. A moment that occurred four hundred years ago may have impacted me in ways that I will never know. I might have been different if this event did not occur. I did not experience it though. In a way I would have to will that distant event for me to be the person I am, but this event still is not one of my “moments”. I affirm every moment that I have experienced. My moments are all that I have.

Who is to say that Holocaust survivor would not crave nothing more fervently than eternal recurrence? Magnus claims that “no matter how content I may be with my life I can always imagine a better one, for example, my life plus a reduction in the total sum of the world’s pain and suffering, a world without disease, without hunger, without hatred, without genocides.”⁴¹ Has Magnus forgotten Nietzsche’s claim that “the path of one’s heaven leads through the

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.107.

voluptuousness of one's hell"? We could never affirm our lives if we had no appreciation for the suffering that has strengthened and emboldened us. Of course we could imagine a better world. Yet sounding like a modern-day Voltaire does not mean that we cannot affirm the lives we have, even if they could be better. This perfect, Edenic world is the product of a fecund and idealistic imagination. I see no point in imagining a world without disease, hunger, or genocide. Such a world is never going to exist. A sick Nietzsche swaddled in blankets up in the mountains pointed this out long before the twentieth century. This is not pessimism. Magnus argues that all of history is willed when we will eternal recurrence. This would mean that *all* moments in this universe are linked together inextricably. Every moment would need the previous moment to remain intelligible. I take a less extensive view of eternal recurrence. I will only the moments that I have experienced. As a personal thought experiment, I do not will *every* moment that has occurred and will occur. This is why I maintain that eternal recurrence does not involve the amount of self-deception and elusion that Magnus that thinks it would need. Without a somber reading, eternal recurrence ostensibly risks becoming a casualty of pop psychology. Magnus does not want to take the *Urbmensch* and "convert him into the philosopher's version of a sublime Ann Landers."⁴² Magnus would not have to do such a thing. Like Magnus, I believe that the *Urbmensch* remains this unattainable ideal. But willing eternal recurrence is not impossible, just very difficult. I doubt that such a person who can will eternal recurrence has been reading too many advice columnists or watching too many daytime talk shows. What is important is not

⁴² *ibid.*, 105.

our wanting to erase all of the pain, but to respond to all the pain affirmatively. Magnus believes that scholars like Richard Schacht take a far too generous approach to Nietzsche by neglecting to acutely examine life's vicissitudes. I will discuss Schacht later, but his approach I find to be far more user-friendly and of course, more cheerful. Next, I would like to examine Alexander Nehamas's contributions to Nietzsche scholarship.

VI

Another reader who has made the *Übermensch* and eternal recurrence a primary concern for his scholarship is Alexander Nehamas. In his book, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Nehamas also sifts through Nietzsche's work in an attempt to understand what eternal recurrence really means. Like Magnus, Nehamas also dismisses the cosmological and normative interpretations. Nehamas claims that eternal recurrence is a view of the self.⁴³ Upon quoting section 341 of *The Gay Science*, Nehamas claims that Nietzsche is interested in the "attitude one must have towards oneself in order to react with joy and not despair to the possibility that the demon raises, to the thought that one's life will occur, the very same in every detail, again and again for all eternity."⁴⁴ We are not given the luxury of adding or subtracting moments. Why doesn't the demon offer us such a possibility? According to Nehamas, Nietzsche maintains that a

⁴³ Nehamas. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA) p. 150.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.151.

person is the sum of her actions and experiences and nothing besides. To remove one experience or action is to have a completely different person.⁴⁵

We cannot subtract even one occurrence of misery from our lives because if we are the sum of our actions and experiences, there is no substantive self beneath each of us which would preserve our identity. Who we are is the product of our respective personal narratives. Our personal identities are dependent on our narratives. A coherent narrative reads just like a text, or at least ideally it should. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche uses the metaphor that the world, and even the individual is a text that is to be interpreted.⁴⁶ We interpret our lives as if they were literature. Who I am today is the result of my past actions and experiences. What I have in me to become is contingent upon my present actions and experiences. This tightly woven narrative does not allow me to erase a couple of pages so that my next life does not include any pitfalls. So, if I am to live my life over and over, I have to relive every moment of my life and nothing less. Nehamas adds that “wanting to be different in any way is for Nietzsche to want to be different in every way; it is to want, impossible as that is, to be somebody else.”⁴⁷ Also, if one feels that her life can be lived again and again, she will have to redeem her life as she is living it. She cannot redeem her life in the afterlife. We cannot expect to be given the option of living after dying. All we can redeem are the lives we are currently living. It is redeeming *this* life which is possible, and there is no single answer for how one is to redeem her life with the eternal confirmation and seal of eternal recurrence.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.155.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.164.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.156.

Nehamas will use the metaphor of life as literature to clarify what he thinks Nietzsche is claiming about eternal recurrence. He points out that “perhaps the proper approach to Nietzsche’s view is to think of his ideal life, the life of the *Übermensch*, as a framework within which many particular lives, each one of which exhibits the natural unity and coherence he finds so important, can fit.”⁴⁸ Nehamas does not argue that life should be lived and interpreted as a literary text. A text once it is written is a done deal. No changes can be made to prevent the suicide of Ophelia or the jealous rage of Othello. There may be a multiplicity of ways to interpret a text, but the text never changes. A person’s narrative is always a work in progress. For Nehamas, in order to form a unity out of a seemingly fragmented narrative and to redeem the entire past even if it contains much more grief than bliss, one might make use of self-deception. Nietzsche does tell us that “giving style to one’s character” is necessary in order for the “ugly...to be reinterpreted and made sublime” (GS 290). This is a concern for Nehamas and for me. Must we lie and confabulate to achieve style? Must we be disingenuous so that our life is like a thrilling, coherent text? Having an enduring character for Nietzsche may never be outmoded, but is honesty *passé*? These questions always loom in the background.

Another idea of Nietzsche’s is to “become who you are” (GS 270). Nehamas believes Nietzsche is claiming that in order to become “who you are”, you must “actualize the capacities for which [you] are inherently suited.”⁴⁹ From a narrative standpoint, we are the sum of our actions and experiences. We must

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.175.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.175

create a self out of these chaotic actions and experiences which befit our capacities. To “become who you are” does not imply that all people will become *Übermenschen*. Becoming who you are may mean that a person only has it in her to remain with the herd. Knowing what you can become is dependent upon what you have already done, which has influenced who you are today. It appears in Nietzsche that many talents and capacities are inborn. There are some people who never had it in them to transcend the herd. Self-deception still haunts some people since many permanently deceive themselves into thinking that they can become something they can never be. The quest for “style”, Nehamas warns, is always endangered by the future as one tries to unify the past with the present.⁵⁰ The “future” may have nothing to do with the past or present. What comes next may cast the person into a narrative wreckage. Life still must be “redeemed”. Seeking that redemption might be a thorny problem. Nietzsche never sees the self as fixed or static. The future can always chip away at the self unless one is inclined to fib somewhat so that she can become who she is. Redemption is contingent upon the vagaries of each person’s existence. As Nehamas observes, sometimes those vagaries have to undergo a little cosmetic change to look more significant and purposeful.

Nehamas concludes the book with a discussion of transcending good and evil. An *Übermensch* presumably craves life once more and innumerable times more and is always engaged in that process of becoming who she is. What aids the *Übermensch* become who she is would be her stark refusal to adhere to the vulgar, life-denying values of good and evil. Nehamas points out that Nietzsche

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 185.

was not trying to preclude the possibility of morality. Nietzsche stood in opposition to any morality that was in Nehamas's view, "absolutist".⁵¹ "Style" is not universal. Different people find different ways to affirm their lives. Prevailing moral values subsume everyone into the same category of agents who adhere to the values uncritically. Nietzsche swiftly destroys values, but his creation of new values is a bit trifling, trivial, and banal, as Nehamas sees it. Nietzsche is averse to systematizing his philosophy. He says so forcefully in *Twilight of the Idols* that the "will to a system lacks integrity" (TI 1:26). Nehamas does not expect a system out of Nietzsche, but a little order out of chaos might have been useful.

After all that Nietzsche has said, do we *really* think about transcending good and evil? Nietzsche does not permit us to generalize and universalize – he would only perpetuate that damned moral tradition if he did. According to Nehamas, becoming an *Übermensch* is a singular odyssey which might not even be so rewarding after all. Nehamas is not disgruntled by this. He claims that in the end, Nietzsche "urges others to make a way of life out of views of their own – views which...he cannot and will not supply for them."⁵² That sentiment is never *démodé* to those who dare to be a little different, dangerous, and less ordinary.

VII

Like Bernd Magnus and Alexander Nehamas, Richard Schacht also offers intriguing interpretations of Nietzsche. Eternal recurrence is briefly discussed in Schacht's *Nietzsche* (1983). In this work, Schacht has spent more time trying to

⁵¹ Ibid., p.209.

⁵² ibid.p. 234.

unveil the odd *Übermensch*, and he has a fascinating interpretation. Many scholars like Magnus would disagree with the way Schacht has viewed Nietzsche. Schacht's views are very liberal and at times he soft-pedals controversial points in Nietzsche's texts. Schacht believes that higher humanity and the *Übermensch* are the same thing. In "Nietzschean Normativity" (2001) Schacht has a very liberal approach to Nietzsche which allows the *Übermensch* to seem less superhuman. As I will show in the forthcoming discussion, Schacht argues that an *Übermensch* is a part-time vocation. I have stated earlier that I do not believe the *Übermensch* and "higher humanity" to be the same. While I think a person must will eternal recurrence to be part of higher humanity, I do not think that one must be an *Übermensch* to be part of higher humanity. I do agree with Schacht's assessment of higher humanity. I am not convinced that an *Übermensch* is even human. Still, I argue that many of Schacht's views are important to the discussion of Nietzsche and how his philosophy of culture can impact us personally and politically.

In the article, "Nietzschean Normativity", Schacht sets out to elucidate the perennially puzzling *Übermensch*. Schacht has never failed to point out that Nietzsche did not seek to quash all of morality.⁵³ Nietzsche was perturbed by the stultifying and stifling herd morality of his Europe. Other higher moralities were possible. Herd morality was but one interpretation although it was certainly the predominant interpretation of his time. Indeed, Schacht claims that Nietzsche did

⁵³ See *Nietzsche* (Routledge: NY) p. 417.

seek the elimination of morals. Nietzsche sought a “moral renewal”.⁵⁴ Always keeping in mind Nietzsche’s aversion to systematizing, this “renewal” is never developed in Nietzsche’s texts. It is up to Schacht to pick up where Nietzsche left off.

What would shock many readers is that, according to Schacht, the *Übermensch* does not have to lead a solitary existence. *Übermenschen* could live among us and we probably would not be able to tell them apart from the rest. Schacht always reminds us that Nietzsche would never tell us explicitly what he would have us all do in order to ascend to higher humanity. Here is where I turn away from Schacht. Higher humanity and the *Übermensch* are one and the same for him.⁵⁵ What Schacht claims about higher humanity can be claimed about the *Übermensch*. As Schacht points out, “[f]ighting for what one cherishes and esteems, and against what one abhors and despises, is the last thing a Nietzschean would eschew – but there are, in Nietzschean eyes, no moral monopolies or trumps.”⁵⁶ If one were to find the source of Nietzschean normativity, the source would reside in the individual person and not in an impersonal, universally binding system. Normativity arises from “historically engendered, culturally configured and socially encoded macro- and micro-forms of human life or broader and narrower *Lebensphären* (“spheres of life”)...”⁵⁷ In other words, we are socioculturally encumbered selves whose normative affiliation arises from historical contexts. Herd morality has had over two thousand years to anchor

⁵⁴ “Nietzschean Normativity”, from *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism*, ed Richard Schacht (Cambridge: MA) p. 151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.161-163,171.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 159.

itself in many societies and cultures. Herd morality is too deeply anchored in society for any of us to fully and cleanly escape. The *Übermenschen*, according to Schacht, have some herd-like proclivities.

Nietzsche does allow the possibility of a higher morality. That claim might meet little objection. There are some individuals who can attain the status or at least approximate status of “higher humanity”. “Higher humanity” sounds like a permanent stage in which one always remains. Yet for Schacht, it is not.

“Nietzschean higher humanity is best conceived, on my view, in such a way that it never really is – or is likely ever to be – more than a sometime piecemeal thing even among those who have it in them to be exceptions to the human rule...”⁵⁸ If one were to carelessly read Nietzsche’s texts, it could appear that once a person has attained higher humanity, the person never returns to earth. No one comes down from the pedestal of higher humanity. According to Schacht, even the most exceptional person never fully transcends the mundane.

When they leave the mundane, it is temporary and intermittent. Schacht has done well to de-claw Nietzsche. When a person transcends good and evil, she does not necessarily shirk her mundane responsibilities. She most likely is not living alone in the mountains, hunting for food and a few companions. The exceptional human being is more creative than the unexceptional and ordinary human being for sure. Yet one might not immediately be able to tell the extraordinary from the ordinary according to Schacht. Unlike Schacht, I think a member of higher humanity can be both ordinary and extraordinary. What

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.161.

separates this person from an *Urbmensch* is that the latter is always extraordinary. We are human after all.

Schacht's intention is to vindicate Nietzsche from charges of fascism, immorality, and barbarism. Nietzsche has always left himself vulnerable to such charges. When Nietzsche declares that "life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation..." (BGE 259), it is not surprising that one might get apprehensive if one were to read this quotation literally. This "higher humanity" seems like a sphere reserved for pugilists. Nietzsche's claims leave us to wonder what he really meant here and meant there. Schacht has to remove the sting from Nietzsche if the latter is to be spared from further misappropriation. Mass appeal was never Nietzsche's desideratum. Schacht views Nietzsche as a thinker who is not trying to galvanize the few into ousting the *ancien regime* and impose a brutal new world order upon the weaker. Schacht thinks that Nietzsche was trying to protect himself and others against moral absolutism and imperialism. Such features strangle those who are more creative and artistic by delimiting difference of perspectives and attitudes. All morals in the Nietzschean sense, for Schacht, are local – "a first-person singular affair".⁵⁹ No one thing will promote flourishing.

Along with this, Schacht claims that "much of our lives, for much of the time, even in the cases of the most *ubermenschlich* among us, are herdlike affairs ..."⁶⁰ Schacht maintains that commonplace situations call for commonplace

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.166.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.172.

morality. Even the greatest human beings still have to stop at red lights. No needs to be *ubermenschlich* regarding the paying of income taxes, tipping the bartender, or stopping at red lights. At times, life can be mundane, and there is no need to transcend good and evil in such a situation. I doubt that any of us can be *ubermenschlich* at all. If we were, there would not be any “flashes” of creativity. Creativity would be a perpetual light. It is a little different with higher humanity. With higher humanity, a person does experience flashes of creativity and brilliance coupled with flashes of ennui and torpor.⁶¹ Those who belong to higher humanity have more of the flashes of creativity and brilliance of course. This mild-mannered if not diluted “higher humanity” is Schacht’s way of welcoming Nietzsche and disciples into the public sphere so they can live far and near to the crowd at the same time. It will be my task for the rest of the dissertation to determine what effect these creative and brilliant flashes in the public sphere, and what kind of cultural politics can best nurture these flashes.

VIII

Even with Schacht’s generous optimism and his liberal interpretation of “higher humanity” and of the *Uberschensch*, much of what Nietzsche says can still be viewed as beastly and eternal recurrence still difficult to accept. There is always Magnus’s concern that eternal recurrence cannot be willed after monumental tragedy. There is always Nehamas’s concern that willing eternal recurrence and giving style to one’s character might mandate so much self-deception that the person’s character becomes fictional. Eternal recurrence is an

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.176.

idea most people would rather not think about. Turning suffering into something positive seems like an impossible task. Magnus (early on), Schacht, and Nehamas have shown us ways to affirm suffering. We have to affirm suffering before we begin to fashion any higher culture. We need personal confidence and poise before we can even approach the challenges of the public sphere. We must see ourselves as worthy opponents before we begin the contest. Ignoring the idea of eternal recurrence will not wipe away tragedy.

Eternal recurrence might instead sharpen our response to tragedy. What else is there to do? Magnus might claim that “only self-deception of theological proportions could affirm the unconditional worth of every moment of one’s life...”⁶² We do not get the option of purging and cleansing our lives so that the blood and tears are never shed. This coping is the manifestation of Nietzsche’s *amor fati*. For the last eleven years of his life, Nietzsche did not have the opportunity to affirm his life due to his catatonic state. Before that of course, the sickly and nearly blind philologist-turned-philosopher from Leipzig would have and probably did will his life again and again, even though Lou Salome still would have turned down his marriage proposals once more and innumerable times more. It is my claim that tidying up and celebrating one’s private life enables one to function and perform optimally in the public sphere. One’s personal life has to be receptive to life-creating values before she emerges in public. It was necessary to determine what sorts of people constitute a higher culture. I have discussed the personal. It is my next challenge to ascertain how the personal will affect the political. This is the next step in seeing how Nietzsche’s

⁶² Magnus, “A Bridge Too Far”, op. cit., p.108

cultural politics can have in the public domain. The personal has been serviced. How is “higher humanity” viewed in the public sphere? What kind of higher culture can be produced when Nietzsche’s personal and political are finally bridged? What kind of political system could allow the emergence of this higher culture?

Chapter Three

Revenge, *Ressentiment*, and Resistance: Nietzsche's New Homeric Contest

You Higher Men, learn this from me: In the marketplace no one believes in Higher Men. And if you want to speak there, very well, do so! But the mob blink and say: 'We are all equal,' 'You Higher Men' - thus the blink - 'there are no Higher Men, we are all equal, man is but man, before God - we are all equal!' Before God! But now this God has died. And let us not be equal before the mob. You Higher Men, depart from the marketplace (Z IV:12)!

The study of the average human being, protracted, serious, and with much dissembling, self-overcoming, intimacy, bad company - all company is bad company except the company of one's equals (BGE 26).

I

Departing from the marketplace and "bad company" is Zarathustra, the would-be harbinger of higher men who will have overcome themselves and will have overcome morality. The *Sturm und Drang* tempo of Zarathustra's narrative boldly heralds the arrival of men (and women perhaps?) who have overthrown the traditional values of good and evil in order to transcend cultural mediocrity which has become institutional in our time. These are the proud men who have risen above the herd. As riveting and amusing as Zarathustra's histrionics are, is such a culture of men possible? At times Zarathustra seems a bit feckless, especially when the abysmal thought of eternal recurrence is brought up. Will these men ever come? Will there ever be a contest among these higher men? If they are not here now, will they ever be? For Nietzsche, there appears to be a modicum of

human beings who are simply better and stronger than the rest of their species. When we become who we are, we are becoming the kinds of people that it was in our nature to be. Will any of these stronger and better types realize their true natures? Or, will their capabilities and talents lay fallow if these men fear detaching themselves from the comfortable herd? As Kathleen Marie Higgins has observed, perhaps anyone who is eligible to become a higher man is still encumbered by their pre-fab values.

Higgins claims that “[p]oison abounds, as apparently do its victims...[b]ut Nietzsche startles us with his admission that he is among those poisoned.”⁶³ Higgins is referring to the third essay in the *Genealogy* where Nietzsche asserts that “we, too, are still victims of and prey to this moralized contemporary taste and ill with it, however much we think we despise it - probably it infects even us” (GM III:20). Is Nietzsche’s inherent elitism a cause for concern if these higher men never emerge in order to engage in the contest? Is our culture even conducive to the emergence of higher men and their agonistic proclivities? Not everyone belongs to this class of higher men. Not everyone gets to play. Most of us are going to languish in the marketplace with our human-all-too-human beliefs, convictions, and sentiments. Fortunately the herd makes us complacent to the point where we might not know that we are languishing. Those of us on the lower rung of mankind can attend church every Sunday to appease God and busy ourselves with other holy icons while the higher men are preoccupied with their much more creative labors.

⁶³ Kathleen Marie Higgins, “On *The Genealogy of Morals*: Nietzsche’s Gift”, from *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (University of California Press: Berkeley, CA) p.52.

Being an avid reader of Nietzsche, I can quickly be flattered by being placed in the category of higher (wo)men. I would probably be responsible for that placement since *I* would be averse to loitering around the herd's popular hangouts. *I* am not a constituent of the vulgar and the ugly. I am ready to live dangerously. I concur with Nietzsche's sunny feeling that "whatever one casts into us, we take down into our depth - for we are deep, we do not forget - *and become bright again*" (GS 379). I believe that the public sphere should be an open space for competition. We either think Nietzsche is mostly or completely wrong with his characterizations of human beings, or we wholeheartedly agree with him. If it is the former, we might be the kind of scholars who ascribe fascist traits to his corpus or bristle at his inexorable elitism. If it is the latter, we accept Nietzsche assuming that we have membership in the denomination of higher men. Why would we support Nietzsche's agonistic politics if we did not receive preferential treatment of sorts? What are the requirements for membership? What sort of dues must we pay? As Zarathustra states, we must overcome ourselves and morality. Would this overcoming result in more of a Pyrrhic victory for those who dared to transcend the life-denying values of the herd? Would we alienate ourselves from friends and family to engage in this lofty contest? It would be a toilsome task to strip ourselves of the very moral convictions by which we have lived for so long. As I mentioned earlier, even Nietzsche says that we too are poisoned. Are we poisoned irreparably? If one carefully reads the *Genealogy*, and if one agrees with what Nietzsche says in that book, perhaps our adherence to those moral convictions is indeed flawed and is detrimental to human flourishing.

Nietzsche's claims can appear counterintuitive and dangerous. But is he right? By tracing the genealogy of morality, is he correctly identifying where human beings went wrong? Will we ever get to compete with one another again?

There will be a cavalry of Nietzsche disciples who do attest to the allegation that the omnipresence of morality has been a pox to the creativity of a few talented and strong men. Once one accepts Nietzsche's diagnosis of modern-day Europe, we begin to identify the source and origin of the common and the ordinary. We also identify ways of precluding a possible collapse and/or relapse into the common and ordinary. Jacob Golomb points out that "[t]he division of the personality and the repression of many essential elements characterizes the prevailing ethical norms, preventing human beings from achieving personal harmony and full expression."⁶⁴ Morality may be a salve for the weak, but it is a pestilence to the strong - us higher men and women of course. It may turn out that the near-messianic coming of higher men will never be. But just in case it does, Nietzsche recognizes ways to differentiate stronger men from the mass of moral yet weak men. If upon due examination, no one can be that quixotic *Übermensch*, perhaps one can come close. Taking part in this contest is never a waste.

Nietzsche plays not only the part of culture physician, he plays the role of cheerleader too at times. Nietzsche will not tell you how to join higher humanity, but he could certainly convince you that any attempt is worthwhile. What could help revive the ancient Greek *agon*? While Nietzsche may not give any clear-cut steps, he will gladly share with us what behaviors and beliefs will not be catalytic

⁶⁴ Jacob Golomb, "How to De-Nazify Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology", from *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?*, ed Jacob Golomb and Robert Wistrich (Princeton Paperbacks: Princeton, NJ) p. 28.

for the new Homeric contest

II

Nietzsche declares in *Twilight of the Idols* that “to *have* to combat one’s instincts...is the formula for *decadence*: as long as life is ascending, instincts and happiness are one” (TI The Problem of Socrates: 11). Nietzsche is not arguing for the re-emergence of savages who have nothing but their instincts. Nietzsche still prefers civility over savagery. However, too many instincts are being repressed which in turn leads to *decadence*. One has to combat and even suppress one’s instincts if one is to be considered “moral” in the conventional sense. As Nietzsche sees it, we would seemingly have to fetter ourselves to any given moral system since it would run counter to our most basic instincts. Nietzsche claims that “[m]orality has always been a bed of Procrustes” (TI Skirmishes of an Untimely Man: 44). Morality, metaphorically and at times literally speaking, tames the man who would be the carefree beast of prey without it. Morality ensures docility. As Procrustes would chop off the legs of men who were too tall or stretch the legs of men who were too short so that everyone could fit on his bed, morality manipulates the array of human personalities so that they all conform to one prevailing code of conduct. Perhaps we would all be happier if we did not need any moral superintendence. Perhaps we could rely on ourselves for personal moral guidance instead of relying upon a generic, law-like code which behooves us to forgo certain desires and needs for the sake of everyone. Many of us would prefer to act as our instincts dictate. However, to live in a community,

we need to thoroughly oversee our behavior so as not to violate any moral norms that are operative within the community. Under any supervening moral system, disrupting moral norms is seen as undermining the community upon which these norms are based. This is why those members of higher humanity can cause many critics to grimace since Nietzsche's brigade of higher men disobey the norms which they would view as inimical to thriving beyond good and evil.

Judeo-Christian morality also involves slighting the passions. One of Nietzsche's many admonitions is that "[t]o exterminate the passions merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences - this seems to us today a merely acute form of folly" (TI Morality as Anti-Nature: 1). We have a plethora of passions, desires, and emotions that often manifest themselves in an intense and visceral fashion. Gratification does not always have to be visceral. These passions, desires, and emotions can also be sublimated. Nietzsche's point is that we often feel the need to repudiate these feelings as swiftly as we can. If we indiscriminately satiate ourselves, we might spurn and neglect others. We might be so egoistic as to withdraw care and concern for everyone else unless they aid us in maximizing our personal interests. A moral regimentation entails disregarding our instincts. We would also have to disregard our self-interests since universal ethical egoism is not a solvent moral theory. One of Nietzsche's innumerable complaints about modern Europe is that most Europeans are engaged in some kind of moral practice, and those that rule them recycle those hackneyed, herd-like values:

The strange narrowness of human evolution,
its hesitations, its delays, its frequent retrogressions

and rotations, are due to the fact that the herd instinct of obedience has been inherited best and at the expense of the art of commanding... This state of things actually exists in Europe today: I call it the moral hypocrisy of the commanders. They know no way of defending themselves against their bad conscience other than to pose as executors of more ancient or higher commands, or even to borrow herd maxims from the herd's way of thinking and appear as 'the first servant of the people' for example, or as 'instruments of the common good' (BGE 199).

Transcending good and evil entails an entirely different outlook towards life, a life devoid of misgivings and fears. As Nietzsche says in the *Twilight*, "[w]e others, we immoralists, have on the contrary opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, approval...[and] we do not readily deny, we seek our honor in *affirming*" (TI Morality as Anti-Nature: 6). However, this particular attitude may estrange and isolate the immoralists from all others. To avoid being an "immoralist", one has to relinquish certain things for the good of others and for the community. We have to be compassionate. We cannot steal. We cannot harm others. We cannot only care about ourselves individually. Why not? We all have the same moral standing; we are equal in the home and in the marketplace.

Substantive equality implies that everyone, no matter how impoverished, stupid, and unproductive, deserves the same moral consideration as those who are urbane, bright, and ambitious. Presumably, people deserve equal moral consideration because they all belong to the same class - human beings. Equal moral consideration is also given because those who are not bright, urbane, and ambitious are at a moral and social disadvantage. Morality could certainly appear

undesirable at first. Personal satisfaction and self-interests would most likely have to be shelved permanently if we are to co-exist peacefully. The benefits of a moral system would override any costs, or would they? As we have already seen, Nietzsche has viewed current morality as hostile to life-affirming values. Self-expression and self-creation might have to be limited or completely eliminated since such plans may seem unfair to those who do not have the capabilities and capacities to express and create themselves as others do. Substantive equality tries to eradicate the seemingly unfair and arbitrary nature of the world so we can all win in the end. We are leveled to the point where no difference among us can be recognized. Many would agree with Nietzsche that morality is a social construct that requires us to make a few sacrifices to live in a harmonious society. Any side effects of morality should be rendered mild.

According to Nietzsche, morality has deleterious effects. As I stated earlier, Nietzsche believes that some people are by nature better than others. They are stronger; they have more promise. For Nietzsche, these higher men should not be considered equal with the lowly, mild-mannered herd. Traditional morality requires us to recognize equality among all men, or at least most of them. For Nietzsche, inequality is natural, which is a stance many ethicists would not share with him. Higher men have to be emancipated from traditional morality, if they can be. The higher men might still be poisoned. The fetters of every moral system are secured onto everyone. Morality, as Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “levels” the base with the free spirits so that the goal of the “green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, comfort, and an easier life for all” is

attained and sustained (BGE 44). The “levelers” clamoring for a democracy protect the weak but wound the strong. How could this happen? How is it that a stifling morality has endured for so long?

III

Nietzsche points out in the preface of the *Genealogy* that he is searching for the origin of our moral prejudices, and that “I learned to separate theological prejudice from moral prejudices and ceased to look for the origin of evil behind the world” (GM P:3). Nietzsche is seeking the answer to the question: “under what conditions did man devise these value judgments of good and evil and what value do they themselves possess?” (GM P:3). If the values of good and evil for Nietzsche are no longer sought “behind” the world, then these values appear to be man-made. These values are not supernatural. Morality does not appear to be constitutive of divine commands, nor is it a natural occurrence in the world. These are values which cannot be divorced from their social construction. Morality seems more like a folkway, an arbitrary construct. Nietzsche has to offer evidence that this is the case. Was there a time when we did not need these moral values? At some point in time, morality was created and enforced to protect a certain people from some kind of iniquity? Why?

Nietzsche traces good and evil to the ancient nemeses of the ‘noble’ and ‘ignoble. According to Nietzsche, there was a time long ago when there was a noble caste and a separate caste of the ignoble ones who were considered ugly and base. This dichotomy is not unique to the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche had already

made such a distinction in *Human, All Too Human*:

As a good man, one belongs to the 'good', a community which has a sense of belonging together because all of the individuals in it are combined with one another through the capacity for requital. As a bad man one belongs to the 'bad', to a swarm of subject, powerless people who have no sense of belonging together. The good are a caste, the bad a mass like grains of sand. Good and bad is for long a long time the same thing as noble and base, master and slave (HAH 45).

Nietzsche's analyses of good and evil are not ostensibly normative. He is not claiming that this dichotomy is the way things *ought* to be. He is describing a historical stratification of types. Despite his admiration for much of the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, Nietzsche is not advocating a return to the ancient. Rarely in the *Genealogy* does Nietzsche even use the words "master" and "slave". Fascist sympathizers may have seized the opportunity to intellectually hijack Nietzsche's genealogy believing he was advocating a "master race" to rule over the "slaves". As we delve deeper into the *Genealogy*, we will see that master and slave are metaphorical terms. Nietzsche typically uses words like "high-born", "noble" to refer to the former and use words like "low" and "common" to refer to the latter

Nietzsche's intention is to trace to origin of "good" and "evil" This is a bifurcation between peoples that existed long ago. Nietzsche begins with the word "good" At this point in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims that to designate a person "good" meant that he had an "aristocratic soul" or a "privileged soul" (GM I:4). Nietzsche claims that "the judgments 'good' did not originate with those to whom 'goodness' was shown...rather it was 'the good' themselves, that

is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common, and plebeian” (GM I:2). The Greek word for good was *agathos*. This word had a family resemblance with words whose English translations are “beautiful”, “noble”, and “powerful”. The Greek word for “bad” was *kakos*. English words which resembled bad are “ugly”, “ill-born”, “mean”, and “craven” (GM I:5). People who were bad were low-born, common, and “plebeian” (GM I:4). The “noble” class was certainly aware of their blessed fortune. For Nietzsche, the ancient and contemporary use of “noble” does not entail that one be born an aristocrat. A fabulously wealthy person can still have an all-too-human, slavish mentality that is hinders her immensely. The “noble” ones could emerge from the darkest recesses of a ghetto. From a contemporary perspective, Nietzsche will usually substitute “noble” with “strong” and “ignoble” with “weak” (GM I:13). Nietzsche views nobility as a “mode of valuation: it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly...” (GM I:10). As Nietzsche is tracing the origin of good and evil, he discovers how intimately connected words like “good”, “noble”, and “aristocratic” are. The same goes for “bad”, “common”, and “low”. How did these values become inverted? Did the common ones grow resentful of the noble and stage a revolt?

The “noble” ones keep that “pathos of distance” between themselves and the base class (GM I:2). “Noble” men and women were not going to pity those beneath them. The low-born types were presumably low-born for good reason.

Did these plebeian types never have a chance to better themselves? Did they ever have a chance? They were born “ugly” and “base”, and they can never extricate themselves from their lowly existence. Any chance of social mobility was eradicated since it was not in the nature of the common types to be any better than they already were. Nietzsche’s task is to determine how we have come to value the things we do. The point of Nietzsche’s account of these early noble and ignoble types is that these types are merely descriptive, not prescriptive.⁶⁵ Value terms were not originally moral; they described the way things were. The ethos then does not resemble the ethos now.

I have stated earlier in Chapter One that while Nietzsche is an elitist *par excellence*, one does not have to be a modern-day “aristocrat” or a plutocrat to belong to “higher humanity”, though the accoutrements of an affluent lifestyle would not hurt. In modern times, an “aristocrat” does not mean what it used to mean. This kind of aristocrat is more of a plutocrat, meaning someone who has money, power, and influence. The kind of aristocrat that I believe Nietzsche to be lauding is the kind from Greek or Roman antiquity. This aristocrat was part of the elite because he was the best educated and most fit to rule.⁶⁶ He would not be the kind of aristocrat who had to buy votes or bribe campaign contributors.

In Nietzsche's account, the case of “good” and “bad” were descriptive terms. “Good” and “bad” have not acquired a normative connotation just yet. If someone were “bad”, he was not acting immorally. The values of good and bad did not prescribe any course of action. “Bad” described a person. He was bad

⁶⁵ My thanks again to Professor Schutte for clarifying this discussion for me.

⁶⁶ See Aristotle’s *Politics*.

because the good ones viewed him as base and ugly. These values described the way things were in the eyes of the dominant group, not the way they ought to be. Those unlucky with their lot in life could only cope by accepting their immutable fate. Nietzsche claims that eventually there was a “slave revolt in morals”. This slave revolt was perpetrated by a “priestly-aristocratic” class (GM I:7). Nietzsche argues that priestly types “are the most evil enemies” (GM I:7). Why is this the case? According to Nietzsche:

It is because of their [priests] impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred. The truly great haters in world history have always been priests; likewise the most ingenious haters: other kinds of spirit hardly come into consideration when compared with the spirit of priestly vengefulness (GM I:7).

In the end, these priestly-aristocratic types became moral seditionists. They began the inversion of the previous values of “good” and “bad”. The world with the meek at the helm would look dramatically different from the world where the noble and high-born ones reigned while keeping the weak ones at bay. After this slave revolt in morals, the world would no longer be viewed through what moderns would consider an amoral lens. Suddenly, the world was “moral”.

IV

The “slave revolt in morality” begins with revenge (GM I:10). The desire for revenge is a reactive emotion. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche tells a tale about a gathering of angry and resentful tarantulas:

For that a man may be freed from the bonds of revenge: that is the bridge to my highest hope and

a rainbow after protracted storms. But naturally the tarantulas would have it differently. 'That the world may become full of storms of our revenge, let precisely that be called justice by us' - thus they talk together. 'We shall practice revenge and outrage against all who are not as we are' - thus the tarantula-hearts promise themselves. 'And the will to equality - that itself shall henceforth be the name of virtue; and we shall raise outcry against everything that has power!' (Z II:7).

Nietzsche accuses the tarantulas of projecting their repressed envy onto the powerful. This is what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*. The word can be loosely translated as "resentment", but I maintain that the word is best left untranslated since *ressentiment* involves more than just resenting. *Ressentiment* is a reactive and potentially hazardous emotion to bear. I will say more on that later. The tarantulas are powerless and are angry that others have power. They seek revenge to overturn this state of affairs. It is no different with the ignoble and weak ones. The envy of the weak ones begins to burst. This is an envy which has smoldered for ages. This envy is intolerable. The possessors of envy react with a longing for revenge:

The 'well-born' felt themselves to be happy; they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their enemies, or to persuade themselves, deceive themselves, that they were happy; and they likewise knew, as rounded men replete with energy and therefore necessarily *active* [my italics], that happiness should not be sundered from action - being active was with them necessarily a part of happiness - all very much the opposite of 'happiness' at the level of the impotent, the oppressed, and those in whom poisonous and inimical feelings are festering, with whom it appears as essentially narcotic, drug, rest, peace, 'sabbath', slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs, in short *passively* (GM I:10).

The anger becomes spiritual and lofty. The enmity is reactive and also creative (GM I:11. With the slave revolt in morals, “ignoble” values are venerated and “noble” values are scorned. Those who were once “good” descriptively now lose that appellation. Instead of a perfect inversion of values where the “good” ones become the “bad” ones, the good ones are now “evil” and the bad ones are “good”. Nietzsche adds that:

This ‘bad’ of noble origin and that ‘evil’ of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred - the former an after-production, a side issue, a contrasting shade, the latter on the contrary the original thing, the beginning, the distinctive deed in the conception of a slave morality - how different these words ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ are, although they are both apparently the same concept of ‘good’. But it is not the same concept ‘good’: one should ask rather precisely *who* is ‘evil’ in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The answer... is: precisely the ‘good’ man of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man, the ruler, but dyed in another color, interpreted in another fashion, seen in another way by the venomous eye of *ressentiment* (GM I:11).

This “other way” became the prevailing morality which still guides us today. If nobility is evil, one *ought not* exemplify nobility with all of its complacency and indifference to those who are weak and base.

Nietzsche is not resorting to hyperbole with his genealogical account of morality. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims that slave morality begins with *ressentiment*.

The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside’, what is ‘different’, what is not ‘itself’; and *this* No is its creative deed (GM I:10).

While *ressentiment* may be a reactive emotion, it can still be creative. *Ressentiment* is a bitter and spiteful emotion. A man of *ressentiment* despises those who are greater than him. Nietzsche views nature as indifferent and amoral. Demanding to know why nature seems evil or at least unfair is a non-issue for Nietzsche. Yet men of *ressentiment* refuse to acquiesce to their current situation. There is nothing wrong with trying to improve one's life. But, ignoble ones, the common ones, wished to lay the blame on others for their terrible lot. The outside world to them is hostile, not indifferent. The men of *ressentiment* want recompense for living in this malicious and hostile world. They want to be disentangled from the underbelly of society. Since they had to suffer considerably, they should be compensated. How? This was a blame-ridden and vindictive envy that was also immensely productive. *Ressentiment* is the emotion out of which concepts like Heaven and Hell are constructed. Nietzsche points out that "[I]t was suffering and impotence that "[w]eariness, which wants to reach the ultimate with a single leap, with a death-leap, a poor ignorant weariness, which no longer wants to even want: that created all goods and afterworlds" (Z I:3).

The noble ones, in most cases, have no *ressentiment*. If they do, the feeling dissipates and has little effect, if any. Nietzsche adds:

[t]o be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds very seriously for very long - that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate, and to forget (GM I:10).

The noble ones are satisfied with their lives and lament to no one. The ignoble types lack this self-possession and blame others for their misbegotten lives. In

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, there is a section entitled “On the Adder’s Bite”. In this section, Zarathustra is bitten by an adder, but does not seek to harm the adder in retaliation. A person seeking retribution would attempt to exact a penalty for being bitten. Instead, Zarathustra tries to determine if he in any way can benefit from the adder’s bite. Zarathustra’s disciples are puzzled by his refusal to harm the adder. Zarathustra, in desiring the presence of a worthy enemy, tells his disciples that they should not “requite him [the enemy] good for evil, for that would make him ashamed, but prove that he has done something good for you” (Z I:19).

A noble person could ascertain what he would gain from this adder’s bite, an ignoble type would instead languish with his unremitting desire for revenge. Nietzsche makes a similar point in the *Genealogy* regarding revenge, though he couples it with a discussion of justice and punishment. Nietzsche claims that as a community becomes stronger, it “ceases to take an individual’s transgressions so seriously because they can no longer be considered as dangerous and destructive to the whole as they were formerly...” (GM II:10). The community more often declines to avenge past wrongs and to punish those who err. According to Nietzsche, a healthy and strong community could “attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it - letting those who harm it go unpunished...[because] ‘What are my parasites to me?’ it [society] might say...’May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!’” (GM II: 10).

Moral judgments, at least according to Nietzsche, are derivative of the

Judeo-Christian tradition, which in turn is derivative of the slave revolt in morals. Are we teeming with spite and envy if we imprison those who murder, rape, and steal? This is a legitimate concern for me. Should I abstain from making any value judgments for fear of remaining a scion of the plebeian types who revolted against the noble ones? No moral judgments were made in the *antebellum* period preceding the slave revolt. Now, how does making a moral judgment show weakness and hostility towards life? This is a problem in Nietzsche to which I will return later.

Returning to the ignoble types, these people could have embraced what they had been allotted and everything would have gone according to nature. However, the ignoble types were persistent in identifying the causes of their vexation, distress, and suffering as something which occurred outside of themselves. They sought revenge and according to Nietzsche, the eventual reprisal for their anguish was slave morality. Eventually even the noble types fell prey to this wondrous creation. Noble types gradually sensed the alleged dishonor of good fortune and nobility (GM III:14). This is not unexpected. Moral systems have guided nearly everyone for centuries. Even Nietzsche has to admit that the ignoble ones, the sick ones, were clever and very convincing, after all they “succeeded in poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery, with all misery, so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said to one another; ‘it is disgraceful to be fortunate; there is too much misery!’” (GM III:14). The erstwhile apathy of the noble types is transformed into guilt for their unchosen fortune. The noble types become

cognizant of widespread suffering. Good fortune is re-conceptualized as detestable and scandalous.

Robert Solomon does not dispute Nietzsche's claim that Judeo-Christian values arise out of *ressentiment*. However, Solomon claims that *ressentiment* can be a catalyst for social change. Solomon does not view *ressentiment* as being a negative emotion. According to Solomon, a man of *ressentiment* can be a man who senses a social justice and seeks to have it rectified.⁶⁷ Under this interpretation, Martin Luther King, Jr. or Gandhi can be seen as men of *ressentiment* since they fought against the injustices of their day. Both men were viewed as lesser human beings according to the powerful in their day. Are people who wish to counteract segregation in the South and British colonial rule envious? Spiteful? Resentful? If Solomon is right, Civil rights activists are from the same stock as the weak types. Solomon continues his argument:

What Nietzsche ignores - in part because of his own sense of biological determinism, but also, I suspect, because of his own sense of rootlessness and social impotence - is the legitimacy of the sense of oppression, the proper resentment toward an unjust world and the felt need to change it. The sentiment of resentment is not the voice of mediocrity or incompetence but the passion of justice denied.⁶⁸

Solomon adds that “[r]esentment, indeed, is the emotion of legitimacy - the emotion that more than any other prompts the ‘slavish’ demand of the ‘herd’ (that is, the socially responsible insistence of the community) for justice and

⁶⁷ Robert Solomon, “100 Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals”, from *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Morality*, op. cit., p. 112.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

justification.”⁶⁹

I think Solomon is misguided with his interpretation of *ressentiment*. A person who seeks to eradicate an injustice does not imply that person is filled with repressed envy. The desire to topple those who are more successful and more creative may be a desire that is averse to promoting social change. Solomon admits that *ressentiment* is “nasty...[i]t looks enviously at those who are on top, who have the power...[and] it wants to pull them down.”⁷⁰ However, wanting to topple someone because he will not allow you to vote or requires that you use a separate drinking fountain does not mean that you are filled with envy and resentment. Nietzsche’s maligned weak ones may think that their situation is unjust because they can never extricate themselves from their ignoble class. For Nietzsche, some inequities are being natural. Indeed his view is slightly problematic. It appears that a person is condemned to remain in their class for as long as they live. This is why Solomon cautions against Nietzsche’s apparent biological determinism. Yet, Nietzsche views these weak ones as quite embittered, if not catty. Nietzsche would view these weak ones as unlovable losers who sought to equalize the strong and the weak out of envy and unrequited desire - and *not* out of a genuine sense of injustice and discrimination. Claiming “Property is theft!” because you drive a Pinto while an acquaintance drives a brand-new Porsche will not help legitimize the claim that social classes ought to be equalized.

In contrast, the “Americans With Disabilities Act”, on my interpretation,

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

would not be another instance *ressentiment*. Arguing for reasonable access into a building and a few handicapped spots in the parking lot does not amount to repressed envy and spite. This is not a case of a disabled person seeking revenge against everyone else by being allowed to cut in line at a theme park instead of waiting with everyone else. No one is equal in the sense that they are given equal access into a building or all have suffrage. This in no way affects a person's natural talents or capabilities. Their being recognized as people who have natural talents and capabilities is a separate issue. I maintain that Nietzsche has made clear enough what constitutes a man of *ressentiment*. Justice is rarely at the end of every endeavor which is born from *ressentiment*. Desiring access into the contest does not imply that one is entitled to argue for preferential treatment once one is allowed to play. The issue of being recognized politically as a "participant" is an issue I will take up in the next chapter.

Another matter that I find important to discuss is whether when Nietzsche discusses "higher humanity", he is advocating the emergence of a "master race". If one makes a cursory reading of Nietzsche, one might think the master/slave dichotomy describes a current state of affairs. Are the higher men part of a master race? If so, who are the slaves and what happens to them? Anyone with fascist, racist, or just plain bigoted tendencies might see Nietzsche as their poster child for a new master race. According to Jacob Golomb and Robert Wistrich, Adolph Hitler was not that familiar with Nietzsche, but his many subordinates were.⁷¹ This was enough to bestow the posthumous honor of patron saint of fascism onto

⁷¹ Golomb and Wistrich, "Introduction", from *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?*, op. cit., pp. 5-6. The authors claim that Hitler had read more Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche. Even white supremacists in the United States (mis)appropriate Nietzsche for their own use. Are burning crosses, dressing in white sheets, and supporting the annihilation of Jews, Catholics, and African-Americans indicative of a master race? It is my claim that utilizing any part of Nietzsche to promulgate or recommend a fascist or racist program is completely erroneous.

I have stated in chapter one Nietzsche's endorsement of a pan-European race. However, this is a "race" that is the amalgamation of Christians and Jews. Nietzsche did not support the extermination of those who were not part of this proposed pan-European race. The "good European" is not the master we have seen in the *Genealogy*. No one from the herd is "vermin"; nor is anyone from the herd in danger of being "processed" at a concentration camp. Looking even further into Nietzsche's men of *ressentiment* can clarify any confusion that might surround the topic of masters and slaves.

Of course Nazis fancied themselves to be the *paterfamilias* of the master race - the Aryans. The master race had to be purified of any undesirables, hence the *Third Reich*. Nietzsche is actually quite helpful in explaining where the Nazis and people of their ilk go so terribly wrong. Nietzsche remarks in *The Gay Science* that "the state in which we hurt others is rarely agreeable, in an unadulterated way, as that in which we benefit others, or it shows a sense of frustration in the face of this poverty; it is accompanied by new dangers and uncertainties for what power we do possess, and clouds our horizon with the prospect of revenge, scorn, punishment, and failure" (GS 13). What is interesting about this remark is that Nietzsche argues that harming others is a sign that one

may feel hindered, that one lacks power. The men of *ressentiment* may look like Nazis and white supremacists. Why? Nietzsche asks, “what do you suppose he finds necessary, absolutely necessary, to give himself in his own eyes the appearance of superiority over more spiritual people and to attain the pleasure of an accomplished revenge at least in his imagination?” (GS 359).

A few sections later, Nietzsche claims that “hatred places people on a par, vis-à-vis; in hatred there is honor; finally, in hatred there is fear” (GS 379). These two quotations come from a chapter entitled “We Fearless Ones”. It is doubtful that fascists are fearless. Some men of *ressentiment* try to will equality so that they are eligible for competition even when they do not have the talent and creativity to compete with others. This leveling of the contest befits those who remain with the herd but wish to soar with higher humanity without making any effort. These people are those who are angry at their lower positioning on the cultural hierarchy. On the flipside, fascists do not want to compete with others. They wish to force their subordinates to do as they say. Fascists also fear competition from others who are different. If they wish to imprison or even liquidate a people or culture, they must fear something about those who differ from them. Anti-Semitism did not begin and end with the Nazi party, it just reached its most frightening peak during 1933-1945. On a Nietzschean view, one could be claiming that the Nazis were a contingent of men and women who were exceptionally frustrated. They were stymied by their own repressed anger and projected it onto others. The “Final Solution” was the unfortunate culmination of self-loathing turned outward. Nazis and others are fraught with so much hatred,

suspicion, and fear that they feel it is imperative for them to drastically streamline the population of those who are the wellspring of their malignant feelings.

Nietzsche was not around to comment on Nazi Germany, but I maintain that his analysis of *ressentiment* fits. Men of *ressentiment* loathe the external world and at times loathe themselves for their wretched condition. They project their loathing into unsuspecting and undeserving bystanders who are not to blame.

Those guilty of *ressentiment* do not have to be Christians. *Ressentiment* is not a singular occurrence. Its frequency can be seen all over the world. Suicide bombers in the Middle East and in Chechnya are angry at someone. Being part of higher humanity entails resisting *ressentiment*. The bonds of *ressentiment* are difficult from which to be released. We envy what we do not have. We are embittered by social slights. Even close friends and family can spurn us, which may leave us incensed, insulted, and indignant. This is something we have to overcome. We may not be able to prevent all misfortune that befalls, but we can control our response to it. It is a response that must be free of *ressentiment*.

V

Our moral prejudices use the template “good” and “evil” by which to judge human beings and their actions. However, Nietzsche does not adequately indicate the source of secular morality. According to Nietzsche analysis in the *Genealogy*, many moral judgments are derivative of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not all moral judgments are part of a Judeo-Christian construct. As narrow as Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals is, he is tracing a genealogy where the particular

categories of good and evil are Judeo-Christian categories. In other words, Nietzsche forcefully attacks *a* system of morality, even though it is not the only system of morality available. It is the predominant system in our moral tradition.

With Nietzsche's help, we can understand the origin of the concepts of good and evil now. Are these concepts empowering at all? If we are Christians, we are empowered by calling ourselves "good" and scoffing at our counterparts by calling them "evil". We are good only if we act according to the dictates of Christianity. These dictates involve many sacrifices. We become subject to guilt and punishment if we transgress. So we can be assured a place in the heavenly afterworld, our bodily existence in this earthly den has to be disciplined. We may not even enjoy being disciplined, but it is something we feel we must do in order to please the Almighty judge himself. Such religious rigor trains men to be herd animals who abide by what their ministers or holy books say. The herd rarely questions religious authority. Religious hierarchies have enjoyed ongoing security and reverence from their congregates. Nietzsche takes it upon himself to mock such reverence.

An integral part of a person's identity comes from the religious tradition in which he was raised. There are other constituents that make up a tradition such as ethnicity, gender roles in any given culture, and nationality. Religion does carry a great deal of weight in determining a person's views towards many social issues. A man can convert to another religion, but he usually remains within his inherited tradition. Unless a child is reared by agnostics or atheists, the child will spend her Saturdays or Sundays in a holy temple. At least she'll celebrate

Christmas or Chanukah. We are brought up in some kind of religious environment. Or at least a religious environment is hard to ignore. It is rather difficult to avoid seeing Christmas decorations or hearing carols. Most of us are raised in a religious environment that is equipped with prayers and a pantheon of at least one God. In the monotheistic tradition, God is usually seen as an insatiable being, always wanting to be appeased lest the heathen suffer for his lack of reverence. Appeasing God is a laborious project. Nietzsche was unwilling to appease, but his immediate family was not disinclined to please God. He was from a good Lutheran family. How do we convince others to believe? Christianity could be seen as having a will to deception complete with a packet of promises and threats for its believers. It would seem foolish to incur the wrath of a vengeful God. He can promise to reward you with a pleasant afterlife if you obey him. He can threaten to punish you severely if you disobey. What are we to do?

Perhaps we are tainted by Adam and Eve's blunder in Eden. Even if we are not, we are imperfect in the eyes of God. I have already discussed Nietzsche's notions of "creditor" and "debtor" in chapter one. This relationship explains why we feel so indebted psychologically. There are debts we can never repay. We are guilty because we believe that we have violated one of the Ten Commandments. We have sinned. We are guilty and we owe God. If we are suffering any hardships here on earth, we probably owe God for something. We might sin because we followed our instincts, and these instincts are antithetical to God's commandments. Acts of contrition following sins should be expected. Nietzsche derides the "morbid softening and moralization through which the animal 'man'

finally learns to be ashamed of his instincts” (GM II:4). One feels the sting of his bad conscience when he has trespassed against God. Nietzsche remarks that the conscience was the “forcible sundering from man’s animal past” (GM II:16).

In other words, as free and instinctive creatures, human beings were not aware of “good” and “evil”. That feeling has long since expired. Those affected by a guilt-ridden conscience now regret that they have done wrong. Dante’s *Inferno* certainly does not depict hell as an inviting place. No one would want to reside there, even if its existence may be questioned. If we follow what Nietzsche called “slave morality”, we must presumably act as if heaven and hell do exist. Believers have deep-seated fears of a grim afterlife where they would eternally mingle with fallen angels and other evil spirits if they do not go with God. “Burning in hell” is a useful mnemonic image for believers. This belief-system teaches that if someone is condemned to suffer the torments of the damned, he must have deserved it - justice was served. Divine justice exacts punishments for those who did not heed the word of God. No misdeed is ever forgotten, though it might be forgiven depending on the religious sect. This is part of the legacy of the “slave revolt” in morals. *Ressentiment* became creative and gave birth to new values. Now, we have heaven and hell.

In the last essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche censures what he labels “ascetic ideals”. This is the ideal of an ascetic priest who negates his own bodily existence since he sees himself as “too good for this world.” An ascetic ideal is the “chief weapon in the struggle against slow pain and boredom” (GM III:1). Ascetic priests would view the sublunary world as a devilish playground of

temptations and delights which leave men enslaved by their passions and desires. Men easily become distracted and divert their attention away from God. Commitment to self-abnegation seems to be the most effective way to cure man's faithlessness. Few would actually like deprivation. Perhaps even priests struggle with their passions. But believers must practice constant self-constraint to prevent themselves from surrendering to temptation, no matter how challenging this is. Denying one's instincts by practicing self-constraint can even lead to exhaustion. Inordinate amount of time is devoted to suppressing these powerful instincts. Nietzsche maintains that such self-constraint quickens degeneration and *decadence*:

The ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life which have remained intact, continually struggle with new expedients and devices (GM III:13)

After all, what does life have to offer except suffering and pain? Ascetic priests tell us we can only escape this pain by adhering to the ascetic ideal. Furthermore:

Read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence would perhaps lead to the conclusion that the earth was the distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at 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...[f]or ascetic life is a self-contradiction; here rules a *ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions... (GM III:11).

Renunciants may not enjoy a barren existence, but such an existence is apparently

indispensable for the afterlife. This is “*ressentiment* without equal” because priests are so embittered by the world and ravaged by nature that they repudiate this existence altogether. Instead of accepting his life and trying to redeem it, the priest negates all of life and urges his congregation to do the same lest they let their souls fall into disrepair. Anyone who ignores the ascetic ideal would, according to the priests, be carving their own path to hell. Those who ignore the ascetic ideal are content trying to improve their lives now - not later. Is this existence so bad? Nietzsche claims that “the Christian resolve to make the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad” (GS 130). There are a few priests incapable of handling their helplessness, so they take it out on the world around them. They threaten those who are not as amenable to depriving themselves of simple pleasures. Is a dull and deadened existence all we have for the time being? According to Nietzsche, this does not have to be the case. Men who follow the ascetic ideal simply do not want to compete in this world. There is no contest if we look only into the distant future for possible gains. Ascetic priests denounce those who do not ignore their agonistic leanings. These leanings may not be that distracting. Must we always be penitent? Must we always feel we have sinned everyday? The ascetic priests try to convince us this is the case. Nietzsche warns that “it is the ascetic priest who alters the direction of *ressentiment*” (GM III:15).

Ressentiment was initially seen as repressed envy redirected externally towards the world of the ignoble types. Hatred may have turned outward, but it must be simmering internally for awhile. Manifestations of *ressentiment* are the products of internalized hatred - self-loathing. Self-hatred becomes hatred. There

must be someone to hate; that lucky person is the one victimized. Self-hatred can be seen on a national level as we have witnessed in pre-World War II Germany. We are all susceptible to loathing ourselves, just as we are susceptible to blaming others for our suffering and impotence. The trajectory of *ressentiment* is dangerous, whether it leads from the person onto the external world, or leads back to the person. As we have seen in chapter two, redeeming one's life, even with all of its tragedies and calamities, is never an easy task. *Ressentiment* is a bitter emotion, but it is an easier emotion to have than sheer joy. One has to work to be joyous. Bitterness and envy come quite easily. Nietzsche points out that "what we know about ourselves and remember is not so decisive for the happiness of our life as people suppose...[since] one day that which others know about us (or think they know) assaults us - and then we realize that this is more powerful. It is easier to cope with a bad conscience than a bad reputation" (GS 52). It may be easier, but not necessarily the recommended course of action. Should we worry if the ascetic priest thinks we are damned? Should we worry about what anyone thinks? If we do, we will be hindered. We will try too hard to impress others instead of enhancing ourselves. There can be no contest if one is not willing to compete with others, compete against the elements. Those against whom I compete are willing competitors, of course. Collapsing into bitterness and weakness seem second nature since we can now take medications to negotiate these turbulent periods without having to address our psychological states. The solace of redemption comes at an onerous price. Few are willing to risk it.

Nietzsche is so averse to the ascetic ideal because of its mistaken

explanation of suffering in the world. We all suffer. Nietzsche does not believe that we suffer because we are the debtor to God's creditor. We are not suffering because we are eternally beholden to him. We are not born with congenital birth defects, left widowed or bankrupt because we owe favors to a supernatural being. The ascetic priests would like us to believe that we are indebted to God and that we will never fully repay him in this life. It may not be my fault that I suffer today, but I could be faulted for it tomorrow. Nietzsche writes that "the meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far - the ascetic ideal offered man meaning...[since] it was the only meaning offered so far; any meaning is better than none at all" (GM III:28). Nietzsche adds that "man would rather will *nothingness* than not will..." (GM III:28). Man would rather will something than nothing.

There must be a way to explain the presence of suffering. Suffering cannot be meaningless. Suffering can be made meaningful as long as there is a reason for suffering, even if that reason is erroneous. The fact suffering *could* be meaningless is, pardon the pun, insufferable. For Nietzsche, there does not have to be a metaphysical explanation for suffering. There does not have to be an explanation at all. We can act without *ressentiment* towards our suffering. Blaming others and languishing in one's misery is not the best response. Looking for pity, looking to be excused, or wallowing in self-pity disqualify a person from higher humanity. He is not even trying to improve himself. The crucible of reevaluating values and transcending good and evil leaves little time for blame and self-pity.

We can allow ourselves to deteriorate. We can flee to the comfort of a church or let a talk-show host tell us how we are feeling and what we can do about it. This will not spare us any further grief. Or, we can overcome ourselves and those moral traps which stifle our creativity and competitive edge. Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science* that “the poison of which weaker natures perish strengthen the strong - nor do they call it poison” (GS 19). Nietzsche should be more willing to admit that some suffering is so profound, it does poison its host. This does not mean that a few sad events will cause a person’s life to unravel. Nietzsche should however, at least recognize that suffering can hinder a person. Overcoming suffering is possible, but Nietzsche does himself a disservice by making this self-overcoming sound so easy in certain passages. Some suffering seems too deep to be converted into something positive. Eternal recurrence requires every moment to be lived over and over. Willing eternal recurrence is never easy. A person may more or less, need to detoxify some of that “poison” and convince themselves it was never poison. In the end hopefully, the “higher man” will have been strengthened as a result. Some endure suffering only by saying “no” to life and waiting impatiently for it to end. A “higher man” wants life to recur eternally. Nietzsche thinks we are better served by living life as if it is the only one we are given. Life can be affirmed despite its deficiencies and excesses. One way to live life affirmatively is to shed the morality that infuses false hope into its enthusiasts.

VI

Most would claim Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Slobodan Milosevic,

to name a few, are mass murderers and judge them to be evil. Are they evil because they breached a few slave values? No. They are evil because they are responsible for deaths of millions. On one interpretation, these men violated Christian ethical norms. We could also say that they violated secular ethical norms. Are these secular norms nonreligious versions of slave values? They appear to be so. Can we then call someone evil without being accused of maintaining herd values? Secular accounts of evil do not have to be conditioned by religion. Nietzsche seems to think they are. Can we ever escape the herd if we make moral judgments? Should higher men recoil at the thought of branding someone “evil”? How else do we describe a murderer? Or a sex offender? Or a wife-beater? Could we call such a person fanatical, zealous, indecent? “Good” and “evil” for Nietzsche seem like passwords into the gates of a living death - the herd. Would invoking the categories of good and evil undermine our strength and promise as creative human beings? Are we barred from accessing higher humanity if we label such people as good or evil? Nietzsche’s genealogy trivializes the categories of good and evil. What if higher men, god forbid, make moral judgments? Are they sinking towards that “green pasture happiness”? Without being careful, some poor sap might actually renounce ethics, thinking he is transcending good and evil when instead he is alienating himself from others. Nietzsche does not deny that other moralities are possible (BGE 202). Even though there may be moralities which are far higher than what we have now, herd-morality is the only morality with which we are adequately familiar. Telling us there may be other moralities is tantalizing, but it gets us nowhere when

confronted with a genuine ethical problem. Since Nietzsche also claims we are poisoned by morality, so that search for a higher morality might even seem fruitless to many:

We are still 'too good' for our job; probably, we, too, are still victims of prey to this moralized contemporary taste and ill with it, however much we think to despise it - probably it infects even us. (GM III:20)

Being slightly poisoned by contemporary morality does not prevent the task; it just makes it harder. The poison might be fatal only to those who never exceed the boundaries of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Again, Nietzsche never tells us exactly how to become higher men. We only know or think we know what to avoid in the process of chasing the dream of higher humanity.

Nietzsche contends that only a few are made for independence; the rest just follow the herd. Nietzsche is not advocating an overthrow of morality. Some might cure themselves of that poison and resist *ressentiment*. The rest are still poisoned and weakened by it. Nietzsche might write in an aggressive and pugnacious style, but he is not an anarchist or a fascist. Even though Nietzsche says that "the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment - is to *live dangerously!*" (GS 283), he is not sponsoring a war against all. Nor is he daring someone to jump in front of a moving train.

We have to accept Nietzsche's love of masks, even if they confound us. He speaks to a minority who do not read "books for everybody [since they] are always malodorous books: the smell of petty people clings to them" (BGE 30). Furthermore, "where the people eats and drinks, even where it worships, there is

usually a stink...one should not go into a church if one wants to breathe pure air” (BGE 30). These “immoralists” do not absorb the judgments of others. They do not adopt other judgments as their own. Our moral judgments are predominately inculcated by family, priests, and others whose tutelage we are under. Nietzsche’s higher men must forge their own judgments and crawl out from under the wool that others have fashioned for us.

Higher men adjudicate matters using their own perspectives. Nietzsche claims that “my judgment is my judgment; another cannot easily acquire it...one has to get rid of the bad taste of wanting to be in agreement with many” (BGE 43). Those who aspire to be higher men do not return to the days of the “masters” and “slaves”. These “masters” were still barbarians; they just weren’t ugly and base. This was a pre-moral culture that is permanently lost. We could not mimic Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit either. In both cases, whether we interpret the former, the latter, or both allegorically, innocence has been lost, and the poison has seeped in.

The task of reevaluating all values is trying for any of us. These are values which we have borne for such a long time. We may never fully extricate ourselves from the Judeo-Christian. It may still taint us. That alone should not deter us. Nietzsche says in “Of 1001 Goals” that “[a] change in values - that means a change in the creators of values [for] he who has to be a creator always has to destroy” (Z I:15). The bulk of us are happily ensconced in our instant values, so we do have the desire nor the audacity to nullify these values since we are too meek, dependent, and vain. Higher men do not need the approbation of

others since “it is ‘the slave’ in the vain man’s blood, a remnant of the craftiness of the slave...which seeks to seduce him to good opinions about himself; it is likewise the slave who immediately afterwards falls down before these opinions as if he himself had not called them forth” (BGE 261).

Vanity, for Nietzsche, is an “atavism”, a remnant of the slave revolt. No one wants to be called ugly and base. It might upset us and cause us to seek revenge. Higher men have no patience for vanity or any judgments that people pass down. A clean break with traditional values that cleave to us may not be so easy, but it is possible. This break might leave us at sea for some time since Nietzsche would not want to violate his perspectival approach and tell us what values to destroy and what values to create. But as Richard Schacht observes, “[o]ur understanding of ourselves and our world may always be improved upon, and the manner of our human existence as well.”⁷² The process of creating values and improving ourselves is an open-ended and incomplete project. Even attempting to overcome ourselves is better than remaining idle. Resisting *ressentiment* is still better.

However, determining new values is not the only trait of higher men. There is that softer side of Nietzsche that is often overlooked. The question, “what does your conscience say? - You shall become the person you are” (GS 270). does not presuppose determinism. This is not a person becoming who she is because it is already determined just who she will be. Becoming who you are is a plea for authenticity. Traditional morality appoints values for us and we obligingly consent to them. One must cast off these restraints so we become the

⁷² Richard Schacht. *Nietzsche* (Routledge: NY) p. 534.

person it is in us to be. We can still make choices. The restraints of traditional morality prevent us from creating the values which are suitable for each of us individually.

Another step in becoming who one is is accepting the fate we are dealt.

This is *amor fati*, or love of fate:

Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth!
I do not wage war against what is ugly. I do
not want to accuse; I do not even want to
accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be
my only negation. And all in all and on the whole:
some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer (GS 276).

Nietzsche had his problems. Some he could control, some were completely beyond his control. We might be able to prevent heartache if we choose our suitors wisely. But we cannot prevent all of our allergies; we cannot always prevent terminal illnesses. All we can control is our response to them. Instead of being bemused by sorrow, and instead of bemoaning his ailing state, Nietzsche chose to embrace that which ailed him. We need not blame others or blame God for our adversity. Some enjoy more luck than others. Being envious of the lucky ones does not help us at all. Fate is indifferent to our needs and to our entreaties. We can either choose to accept what we have been allotted, or our spirits can atrophy with the dim hope that we will avenge our misfortune. Free spirits do not reproach themselves or others for their fallibility, nor do they shrink with self-pity.

Nietzsche's inquiries into the origin of our moral prejudices is certainly restricted enough to complicate any seamless application to the secular environment of our existence. Nietzsche either ignores the secular genealogy of

good and evil, or he truly believes that all categories of good and evil are derivative of that slave revolt in morals. I am of the persuasion that Nietzsche does hold that many of our moral beliefs in the West are adaptations of Judeo-Christian beliefs. Such a consequence is the culmination of a very limited and myopic account of morality, then and now. However, all is not lost. That higher morality could be around the corner. I have to create it myself and you must create it for yourself.

Even with such a narrow account of morality, we can still aspire to higher humanity, or at least try get near it. Higher men can still surface in a world that has been subject to Christian hegemony for millennia. These higher men might be condemned to silence if they witness a spectacle of evil. How they would describe a spectacle such as ethnic cleansing cannot be predicted. However, the creation of new values is a labor that can enliven the free spirit. Discarding the old, stale values for new ones is a task that few would have the nerve to pursue. It is a challenge few will accept. Those who make an attempt might even be rewarded in this life. For after the death knell of God is sounded:

[a]t long last the horizon appears free to us
again, even if it should not be bright; at long
last our ships may venture out again, venture
out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover
of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea,
lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been
such an 'open sea' (GS 343).

Even if that open sea is hard to find, it is worth making an intrepid excursion to try to find it rather than timidly staying behind. No one would be rewarded if they sat out and watched others play. There is no contest without that open sea. There

is no contest if we all think alike. There is no contest if everyone wins or loses. The vast “open sea” is an open space for unlimited competition. The “open sea” is public space amenable to competition. Where did Nietzsche get the idea for a contest - the *agon*? He was inspired by Homer.

VII

In the essay, “Homer’s Contest”, Nietzsche celebrates the potential that men can have if they engage in a competition:

Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. Those of his abilities which are terrifying and considered inhuman may even be the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity can grow in impulse, deed, and work (HC, p.32).

Human beings thrive when they are competitive with each other. They thrive when they are engaged in a battle. When we are all rendered equal, we find no reason to distance ourselves from everyone else. Presumably we would be equal regarding talents and capabilities. We are all worth the same. We are equal in merit. We are equal regarding our level of intelligence. This is not the case though. Measures have to be taken to democratize and equalize the crowd. This is why we become part of the herd. Most of us would not endeavor to distinguish ourselves. That requires work. When there is no competition, nothing is earned. Nietzsche calls this modern humanity “flabby”. We have become ensconced in a tradition leveling until no one can stand out because doing so would be *gauche*. Nietzsche marks Homer’s contests as a time when men rejoiced in every conflict.

No warrior was a spectator.

Nietzsche adds “combat is salvation; the cruelty of victory is the pinnacle of life’s jubilation.” (HC, p.34) Again, one must tread carefully through these passages. Any fascist can read this cursorily and believe that Nietzsche is declaring nothing short of a bloody revolution where might makes right. Nietzsche claims that the Greeks valued the concept of *eris* or strife. When there is strife, there is no peace. Strife ensures an endless struggle between opposing forces. As long as there is strife, every man will compete with one another since there is no one telling us to get along and make peace. This is a war against all. This does not involve one violent coup after the other or guerrilla warfare. Homer’s warriors waged battles of mythical proportions. We cannot really compare ourselves to Achilles or Agamemnon. However, we can relate to the spirit of competition. These heroes did not rest on their laurels if they won a battle, so why should we? According to Nietzsche:

...not only Aristotle but the whole of Greek antiquity thinks differently from us about hatred and envy, and judges with Hesiod, who in one place calls Eris evil - namely, the one that leads men into hostile fights of annihilation against one another - while praising another Eris as good - the one that, as jealousy, hatred, and envy, spurs men to activity of fights which are *contests*. The Greek is envious, and he does not consider this quality a blemish but the gift of a beneficent godhead. What a gulf of ethical judgment lies between us and him! (HC, p.35)

Nietzsche is not suggesting that people shred each other from limb to limb. He is recommending a healthy contest between suitable competitors. Nietzsche believes that “the contest is necessary to preserve the health of that state.” (HC, p.36)

Another interesting feature in the time of these Homeric contests is that of “ostracism”. Nowadays, ostracism has a negative connotation. If you are ostracized, you are being shunned. According to Nietzsche, ostracism meant something quite different back in Homer’s time. Ostracism then meant that no one would be considered “the best” competitor or “the best” warrior. If someone is the best, he might stop competing, or everyone else might quit the contest for fear of a perennial losing streak. Ostracism keeps the contest alive since it is anyone’s game. Nietzsche points out that ostracism was intended for “stimulation: the individual who towers above the rest is eliminated so that the contest of forces may reawaken” (p.36) Furthermore, this is “an idea that is hostile to the ‘exclusiveness’ of genius in the modern sense and presupposes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses who spur each other to action, even as they hold each other within the limits of measure.” (pp.36-7) Few enjoy watching the same person or the same team win the same tournaments every year. The competition becomes stale and boring when the same people win since it no longer is a competition. When the victors remain the same, there are no surprises. There is no impetus to fight if you know you have no chance to win.

How do we translate this Homeric contest to today? How do we wage these bloodless battles but still breathe life into the *agon*? Alan Schrift has a view on the ancient contest that can easily dovetail into the twenty-first century. Without a contest, there is no multiplicity of viewpoints, interpretations, preferences, biases, likes, and dislikes. Without competing ideas, there is often

one prevailing idea. If multiple viewpoints are not recognized and at least heard, there is no contest. On one side, there is fascism no one is allowed to compete, no one is allowed to express a dissenting opinion lest they are punished. In this case, one viewpoint is brutally imposed. On the other side, in an egalitarian society, there may not be sufficient contrast among viewpoints since it has to be shared by all. According to Schrift, the “Nietzschean critique of dogmatism, grounded as it is on a perspectivist position that calls for multiplying points of view and avoiding fixed and rigid posturings, may be an important voice to heed in constructing a politics that can challenge the panoply of emerging fundamentalisms.”⁷³ With fundamentalism, opposing viewpoints vanish; one viewpoint is stubbornly and inexorably held in place. There is no recognition of difference. There is no recognition of many talented competitors. There can be no *agon* if there is fundamentalism or any overriding viewpoint. Schrift also says “an absolute victory within the *agon* would mark the death of the *agon*, and Nietzsche acknowledges that to preserve freedom from dominance, one must be committed to maintaining the institution of the *agon* as a shared public space for open competition.”⁷⁴ Neither nationalism nor egalitarianism allow for that “shared space for open competition.” It is odd that such antithetical political philosophies as nationalism and egalitarianism share the same result, but their interdiction of healthy contests inevitably lead to dominance by one party or one viewpoint.

Another point Schrift makes is one which will be the subject of the next chapter. Along with recognizing the *agon* as a contest between worthy

⁷³ Alan Schrift, “Nietzsche’s Contest: Nietzsche and the Culture Wars”, from *Why Nietzsche Still?*, ed Alan Schrift (University of California Press: LA) p. 192.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

competitors, Nietzsche also recognizes the need for differing viewpoints. Schrift points out that “to be able to see the world with more and different eyes now appears to be a political necessity for those individuals who, by virtue of their membership in certain historically marginalized groups, find themselves in socially subordinated positions that result from traditional and/or essentialist judgments as to their diminished worth.”⁷⁵ Schrift claims that Nietzsche is advocating a “politics of difference”. With open competition comes many viewpoints. Open competition, according to Nietzsche, is indispensable for the health of the state. A state cannot thrive with one viewpoint that its leaders force their constituents to share. With open competition, there may be viewpoints that had not been previously heard. These may be viewpoints from marginalized peoples whose perspectives have finally been recognized. They have finally been entered into the competition. As to whether these viewpoints will indeed be recognized in the public is an issue that I will address in the next chapter. It turns out that in advocating a new Homeric contest, Nietzsche may have been advocating a very postmodern politics of difference.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

Chapter Four

Democracy, Discourse, and Difference in Nietzsche

We do not need to plug up our ears against the sirens who in the marketplace sing of the future: their song about 'equal rights', a 'free society', 'no more masters and no servants' has no allure for us. We simply do not consider it desirable that a realm of justice and concord should be established on earth...[since] we are delighted with all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventures, who refuse to compromise, to be captured, reconciled, and castrated; we count ourselves among conquerors.... (GS 377)

I

Unlike Odysseus who needed to have his ears covered, lest he be enchanted by the sounds of the dangerous Sirens, Nietzsche believes that he and his free spirits need not plug their ears to avoid dangerous democratic voices. Democracy could never tempt his free spirits. Nietzsche has an arsenal of criticism directed towards democracy. Nietzsche claims that democracy presupposes equality, leveling, and sameness. Richard Schacht observes that Nietzsche allows "that a kind of actual equality among human beings generally is attainable; but he contends that its realization would mean the stultifying confinement of these potentially exceptional human beings to the level of the rule, fixed at a relatively low level by the inherent mediocrity and all-too-human limitations of the latter."⁷⁶ In this view, the revaluation of values could not occur in a democratic environment. We would never strive to transcend values if we are

⁷⁶ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, op. cit., p. 327.

all created and considered equal. If we are equal, what makes us think we deserve more acclaim than others?

It is my claim, along with that of other critics I discuss in this chapter, that Nietzsche might actually be more amenable to democracy than he might think. I will include such critics as Larry Hatab and Iris Marion Young to complement my arguments. I will show that liberal democracy does not have to presuppose substantive equality. Every contest has rules which must be followed to ensure fair play, but that does not mean that every competitor must be seen as equally talented and capable. Democratic societies can still be rife with inequities, some of which might be good while others are bad. No presidential election is a genuine contest. Many can run for office, but only a couple have a chance of winning. But, the rules are there to ostensibly guarantee that candidates have the capacity to run.

I will argue that having rules alone does not necessarily entail equality. I will also argue that liberal democracy has agonistic tendencies which make it the best political system for engaging in contests. We have seen earlier that totalitarian regimes are hardly agreeable to difference of opinion and competition from all ends. Democracy promotes discourse which can be seen as a free exchange of ideas. Many ideas may be discarded, but the fact we get to noncoercively air our ideas allows us to be competitive, even if we are perennial underdogs.

Furthermore, democracy can recognize differences among citizens. If we can all participate, there is a good chance that we will not all share the same

views. Democracy does not have to guarantee that everyone must have a herd-like mentality in order to have stability. If anything, democracy allows self-expression and dissent. Why didn't Nietzsche ever view democracy as having such agonistic potential? Was he that close-minded that he uncritically assumed democracy did nothing but level the best and the worst? I believe that Nietzsche did not carefully examine democracy as a whole. He claimed that democracy and its few equalizing tendencies could hardly be the conduit to the emergence of the free spirit. At best, free spirits would emerge in spite of democracy.

II

Democracy is not spared in any of Nietzsche's texts. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche proudly differentiates his "new philosophers" from the herd and its democratic proclivities:

We, to whom the democratic movement is not merely a form assumed by political organization in decay but also a form assumed by man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, a process of becoming mediocre and losing his value: whither must we direct our hopes? - Towards *new philosophers*, we have no other choice; towards spirits strong and original enough to make a start on antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse 'eternal values'; towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future who in the present knot together the constraint which compels the will of the millennia on to new paths (BGE 203).

Nietzsche declares that democracy is unable to encourage the revaluation of values because of its apparent emphasis on equality and sameness. Democracy would also discourage originality. What would be the point of daring creativity if

we have no need for those “antithetical values”? As I stated earlier, the free spirits or “new philosophers” as Nietzsche calls them in this passage may emerge in spite of democracy, and not because of it. Nietzsche was not amenable to a politics that stifled reevaluation and homogenized the people. Nietzsche had an aversion towards democracy because he viewed it as a perpetrator of “degeneration and diminution of man to the perfect herd animal, this animalization of man to the pygmy animal of equal rights and equal pretensions...” (BGE 203). Democracy makes this degeneration and diminution “collective”. The free spirit would realize that there is so much more to man than democratic politics admits. The free spirit “comprehends in a *single* glance all that which, given a favorable accumulation and intensification of forces and tasks, could be *cultivated out of man*, he knows with all the knowledge of his conscience how the greatest possibilities in man are still unexhausted...” (BGE 203). According to Nietzsche, there is a cache of rich possibilities and promise come with a few men whose discovery is often obscured or obstructed by democracy.

In most of his texts, Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy does not change a great deal. Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy intensifies in *Twilight of the Idols*. He is even more polemical here than in many of his previous texts. His aversion towards democratic equality resounds throughout his “Expeditions of an Untimely Man”:

Our virtues are conditioned, are *demand*ed by our weakness... ‘Equality’, a certain actual rendering similar of which the theory of ‘equal rights’ is only the expression, belongs essentially to decline: the

chasm between man and man, class and class, the multiplicity of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out - that which I call *pathos of distance* - characterizes every *strong* age (TI 9:37).

Democracy would not recognize this *pathos of distance* since democracy would not recognize distance or difference between others. Its focus on equality would prevent this. Nietzsche adds that:

The man *who has become free* - and how much more the mind has become free - spurns the contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats. The free man is a warrior. How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft* (TI 9:38).

Democratic societies are teeming with liberal institutions. Certain freedoms are guaranteed to all. As a foundation for the elusive “American dream”, liberal institutions are in place so that ideally all citizens have the freedom and capacity to pursue what they desire. According to Nietzsche, what liberal institutions attempt to do is surmount and erase any natural inequalities among people. Some were born stronger and smarter. Ostensibly, this is unfair to those who were born weaker and less intelligent. Liberal institutions attempt to overcome inequality so that, assuming material resources are available, as many as possible have an equal chance of succeeding to at least a minimum level of competence. No one should be disadvantaged from the start. Nietzsche laments that these liberal institutions “undermine the will to power, they are the leveling of the mountain and the valley....[for] liberalism is in plain words, *reduction to*

the herd animal...” (TI 9:38). Even worse, liberal institutions presume that “reality” itself can be overcome and be given some purpose for all human beings:

No one gives a human beings his qualities:
not God, not society, not his parents or ancestors,
not he himself. No one is accountable for existing at all,
or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the
circumstances and surroundings in which he lives. The
fatality of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality
of all that which has been and will be. He is not the result of
some special design, a will, a purpose; he is not the subject
of an attempt to attain the ‘ideal of man’ or an ‘ideal of
happiness’ or an ‘ideal of morality....in reality purpose
is lacking (TI 6,8).

Capabilities and talents are often inherited, not acquired. This arbitrary allotment is no more unfair than one person out of twenty million winning the lottery. The will to equality here is simply another institutional case of *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche does not think we will in anyway be better off erasing personal talent and ambition so that many are not left out. Some have reason to be confident and self-assured, and many do not. Nietzsche himself says that “[t]he value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it; it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible.” (TI 9,33).

There are too many people in the valley, and they are levelled with those freewheeling in the mountains. “‘Higher education’ is no longer a privilege...” (TI 8:5). Even though Nietzsche pinpoints his disgust for broad higher education towards his fellow Germans, his criticism can be extended to many more cultures. Higher education for all is valued in many places. Could we force one sector of the population to attend a technical school, another, a community college, and another an ivy-league institution? If we took aptitude tests seriously, students

could be sent to their “proper” places since higher education, according to Nietzsche, should be privilege and not a right. Privileges rarely entail equal opportunity. Nietzsche points out that “‘equality for equals, inequality for unequals’ - that would be the true voice of justice; and, what follows from it, ‘Never make equal what is unequal’”. (TI 9:48) Not everyone belongs in a four year college and not everyone belongs in public office. Yet cutting off many from higher education or other opportunities may conspire to make an even more degenerate society. Allowing people to pursue these opportunities does not make equal what is unequal. Many students in college are not competitive enough to remain in that contest. They should at least be allowed to compete. There is little substantive equality in higher education. If there were, grading would be superfluous. There would be no admission guidelines. But it is clear that Nietzsche is unwilling to cooperate with democratic politics. Because of his objections, one must find a way for Nietzsche and democracy to see eye to eye. Nietzsche’s opinions have to be partially overridden, which is not a simple task to assume. Even more, at times we might even have to be traitors to Nietzsche’s antidemocratic cause.

III

I have benefited greatly from Larry Hatab’s discussions of Nietzsche and democracy. Hatab is trying to promote a strong alliance of Nietzsche, democracy, and postmodernism. Like Hatab, I will argue that Nietzsche’s free spirits would have their best chance of emerging from the crowd in a democratic society.

According to Hatab, Nietzsche views “democracy as a secular, political extension of traditional religious and philosophical frameworks that are now suspect, indeed that have already lost their central role in culture.”⁷⁷ In this view, democracy is merely the secular wing of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Democracy would take the religiosity out of Christianity, but the latter’s tenets would still haunt its politics. According to Hatab’s view of Nietzsche, “the unfortunate consequence is the hegemony and promulgation of mediocrity and a vapid conformism, which obviates creativity and excellence and portends the aimless contentment, the happy nihilism...”⁷⁸ At first blush, democracy would seem to have that leveling urge which could be suppressed. Can democracy escape the propensity towards egalitarianism?

Hatab claims that democracy need not be viewed as synonymous with equality:

[D]emocracy can be sustained without its traditional banner of human equality. Democracy does require that all citizens be given the same rights; that they all have the same access to, and fair treatment by, the legal system; that they all have the same opportunity for political participation; and that all voices count the same in elections. Such constructions, however, need not reflect or depend upon any version of substantive ‘sameness’ in human beings or in the outcomes of their lives.⁷⁹

In other words, democracy does not necessarily ensure equality. According to Hatab, democracy does not assure that every citizen will be equally talented, creative, smart, and prosperous. Some talents may be innate while others are

⁷⁷ Larry Hatab. *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy* (Open Court: Chicago) p. 22.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

acquired. But democracy cannot guarantee that every talent will be the same in every person. Every citizen should have the freedom to exercise a talent. Any person can try to learn to play piano, but only a few will have the talent to play it well. In a democratic society, we do not have to consider every pianist a virtuoso for the sake of equality. No one should be forbidden from applying to a reputable college of music, but no college should feel it necessary to admit everyone that applies. Again, enforcing rules which assure fair play in no way compels one to render all participants equal. Not everyone can make it in the majors. As Hatab puts it, “a democratic apologist can agree that equality need not refer to something substantive or intrinsic in human nature, but simply to equal treatment, equal consideration, and equal opportunity for political participation.”⁸⁰ Is this too far removed from higher humanity? I doubt a free spirit would ever feel comfortable or secure in declaring his revaluated values if he feared reprisals from a fascist government. I also doubt a free spirit would even be given the chance to express himself or be an undertow to the all-too-human tide if he were not guaranteed certain freedoms on the basis of his citizenship. Free spirits need the same freedoms that their herd-like contemporaries have.

Hatab also focuses heavily on what he sees as agonistic inclinations in democracy. Nietzsche views aristocracy as the best form of leadership. The agon would be best played out and realized in an aristocratic setting. We would simply have the best competing with the best instead of everyone else competing along with the best. While aristocracy may be Nietzsche’s preferred way of life, its exclusivity and elitism can hardly be championed. The biases and prejudices of

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

aristocrats form a better partnership with plutocrats and others in the upper crust. There is no competition here. Hatab chooses democracy as a better alternative for agon. As I stated in the previous chapter, no one ever is truly victorious in the agon. There would be no contest if there were a final end to contestation. As Hatab sees it, this “agonistic spirit” of the Greeks could be perpetuated as long as contests were staged. To avoid stagnation and disengagement, harmony and concord were discouraged.⁸¹ Liberal democracy does not impose harmony on its citizens.

Even in a democratic society there can still be discussion and dissent. The power could not be with the people if they were not permitted to debate and disagree. In a democratic setting, there are far more people debating than in an aristocracy, yet unanimity is not always the result of the former. According to Hatab, democracy has bestowed upon the people the opportunities to contend with each other in the public spaces. In a democratic society, candidates debate with one another, voters go to the polls, and then the votes are counted. The winner has won that contest. The winner can be replaced at the next election. The results of these political contests are never permanent. The outcome is not always pleasant, but it is still preferable to a dictator seizing power in a coup.

Hatab adds that in a democracy, even though the majority has won the contest, in no way does the majority have the right viewpoint or the better viewpoint.⁸² There are more people who agree with that viewpoint. No viewpoint is given an “ultimate warrant” or eternal confirmation. In a democracy, it must be

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 62.

⁸² Ibid., p. 65.

emphasized that while everyone will have the opportunity to engage in a discourse, certain viewpoints will always seem to win out over others. In a two-party system, it is difficult for lesser known candidates to receive federal funding and national exposure. Democracy cannot guarantee that every viewpoint will be accepted or even appreciated. This why Nietzsche preferred his few talented types over the many. Aristotle was not particularly comfortable with democracy either. Being entitled to speak, being entitled to compete is better than being silenced. However, having only community radio or public access television as a forum to air your views can leave many a citizen rather disgruntled and dissatisfied. Democracy does not erase privilege or pork barrel politics.

Hatab wishes to introduce postmodernist considerations into the discussions. Hatab feels Nietzsche can dovetail nicely into a discussion of postmodern democracy. One facet of postmodernism that is crucial for agonistic democracy is the specter of suspicion cast over all viewpoints and claims to knowledge. While at times seeming self-defeating, a postmodernist would usually cast doubt on points of view and other assorted claims. This does not imply that postmodernists are committed skeptics. This means rather that postmodernists would most likely not accept any claim as universal and immutable. No one would compete if the outcome were known in advance. Universal truths would always rig the contest. Postmodernists are also suspicious towards equal regard. Postmodernists will respect all viewpoints, but they do not have to accept and abide by all viewpoints. Hatab points out that:

Fair play need not make any purchase on
equal regard, and any resistance to such move

might bear out a Nietzschean suspicion that equal regard continues to express a problematic resentment and discomfort with difference.⁸³

One should always be suspicious of the epistemic value of universal claims. At best, any claim to knowledge is a very local, contextualized.

Hatab points out that postmodernism “represents a radicalization of traditional democratic skepticism by undermining all confidences and preventing the possibility of traditional epistemological and ethical groundings.”⁸⁴ Nietzsche can be coupled with postmodernism because of his perspectivism. The postmodern repository of local “claims” are like the many perspectives of which Nietzsche speaks. Perspectivism can help relieve dogmatism. Postmodernism also assumes the same task. Demagogues stubbornly cling to their beliefs and often try to foist them on their constituents or anyone listening on the AM talk radio. A postmodernist need not have a riposte to every unexamined opinion of another. A postmodernist needs the opportunity to challenge or disregard opinions she sees as unexamined. A democracy can ensure such freedom. Hatab adds that:

[a] postmodern democracy... can argue for inclusiveness without equality by simply refusing to sanction any decisive criteria for *exclusion*, since postmodernism is suspicious of privileging any discourse. Such inclusion-by-nonexclusion would not then have any baseline conceptions that would problematize difference and conflict.⁸⁵

Not everyone has to be involved in a discourse. Everyone has the opportunity to participate. No one should feel compelled to accept one discourse over the other.

⁸³ Hatab, op. cit., p. 99.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

In a democracy there would be no shortage of people who would uncritically adhere to alleged truth claims. As long as they are not forced to accept these claims, their collective ignorance is a chosen evil. Of course any beliefs that run counter to what Nietzsche's free spirits hold have to be admitted too. Any foolish beliefs are permissible because "postmodern openness would allow no criteria for excluding any beliefs from political discourse, even if some citizens have very closed convictions."⁸⁶ If we allow everyone to have their say, conservatives and liberals will most likely exercise their right to speak, even if we do not wish to hear them. A wealth of perspectives might seem like pure epistemic entropy, but its alternative in the form of dogmatism and/or rigidity does not seem to be more desirable. Many opinions as opposed to only one "truth" serve to enliven and enrich a discourse.

In the next section, I would like to show how democracy and discourse together can form a vital link in Nietzsche. When rules are set in place that ensure inclusive participation, the agon is best sustained. I will draw on the works of Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib to show how inextricably bound democracy and discourse are. Neither Habermas nor Benhabib explicitly use Nietzsche as their political compass, but their support of democratic discourse is valuable to the discussion at hand.

IV

Habermas operates from a standpoint similar to one of Nietzsche's favorite nemeses - Kant. Habermas is not a particularist any more than Kant is,

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

and he is definitely a rationalist. Habermas modifies the “Categorical Imperative” by appending a process of intersubjective agreement. Contextualization of these laws, or “norms” as Habermas calls them, is sidestepped, at least for the time being. What is important about Habermas’s formulation is that there are no longer any self-enclosed autonomous agents conversing only with themselves over whether they can will their respective maxims into universal laws. Habermas is never clear as to what norms participants test amongst each other are real or just hypothetical. However, what is key for my purposes is to examine the idea of equality in Habermas’s ideal speech situation.

An ideal speech situation entails many participants discussing and debating ethical norms. The situation is ideal because everyone is given an equal opportunity to speak and participate. I do not find his emphasis on attaining consensus to be very useful, and neither would Nietzsche. In a real speech situation, there is a wealth of viewpoints that would offer an interesting point/counterpoint debate. However, the more views that are expressed, the less likely consensus can be reached. A discourse does not have to be a failure if consensus is not reached. Nietzsche could converse with members of the herd, but I doubt that they would agree on much. Yet the idea that everyone can and should participate in a discourse can never be discounted or ignored. This is a participatory democracy that does not have to stubbornly cling to egalitarianism, an egalitarianism in the sense of equality as sameness. This is why Hatab believes that Nietzsche can be amenable to democracy, even if he (Nietzsche) denies it or is unaware of it. Participatory democracy does not need to negate the “contest”.

I can have a norm that I think I should prescribe for our behavior, and someone else could claim that a norm which differs from mine or offers a better prescription. One recommendation is that since neither of us will ever be able to convince others that our respective prescriptions are valid, we ought to both follow our separate plans of action without airing them in public. Nietzsche's sometimes banal comments regarding that "higher morality" which is still "possible" might lead us to this conclusion.

This is not what Habermas advocates. Instead, since there is more than one potential norm, the participants engage in rational argumentation with all of those who would be affected by the norm and determine with the input from everyone which is indeed the better norm. For Habermas, this is the procedure for justifying moral norms and/or sustaining the ones we already have. For Kant, the autonomous agent would will a maxim into a universal law that affected all moral agents. The way Kant's system is fashioned, all those affected, if they are rational agents, would will the same maxim. For Habermas, anyone who could be affected by the norm is not just invited, but urged to be a part of the discourse. Habermas elects instead to have all those affected by the norm debate with each other over norms, since any norm can be controversial or hard to accept. No one should be a quietist and opt out of the discourse. No one should even want to do that. A norm affects everyone. The unwillingness to engage in a discourse is indicative of a person who is too cozy in the herd to question norms and values. Habermas calls his theory "discourse ethics", which, like Kant's ethics, still entails universality. This means the agreed upon norms are applicable to all people in a discourse

community. In discourse ethics, anyone admitted into the discourse has to follow the norm by virtue of the fact that everyone agrees to its promulgation.

“Everyone” does not mean the select few who chose this method over Kant or Utilitarianism. From this theoretical standpoint, Habermas envisages all societies engaged in a discourse with one another.

Discourse ethics, unlike Kant’s ethics, is dialogical and not monological. Individuals in discourse ethics do not have to make the assumption that their individually formulated maxims will automatically obligate others to obey the laws that come out of their maxims. Rather, the participants rationally engage in a discourse to justify norms, following established procedures. This can include a norm whose validity has come into question. In a discourse of justification, the norm in question can be sustained, or it can be discarded for a different norm. Everyone has to agree to maintaining or dismissing the norms in question. Argumentation is public, not private. Participants have to communicate with one another in order to restore the consensus that has been sundered. Participants engage in what Habermas refers to as “communicative action”.⁸⁷

According to Habermas, interactions between participants are communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point in the discourse evaluated in terms of intersubjective recognition of validity claims.⁸⁸ This means that the moral life of each participant vastly affects how others live their lives. In other words, our moral lives connect each of us. We have come to expect others to act

⁸⁷ Jurgen Habermas. *Justification and Application*, trans Ciaran Cronin (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA) p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 58.

in certain ways morally. Our lives are too entangled to separately pursue our personal projects as if there were no one else around. Our self-interests have to be secondary at best. Intersubjective agreement is starting to appear herd-like, but the agreement is the conclusion of communicative action. The process of communicative action need not be herd-like. Habermas lets the participants themselves solve any moral dissent they may and will encounter. This will entail some personal sacrifice. Despite his metaphors of battle and blood, even Nietzsche perhaps would not want society to completely collapse into anarchy. With anarchy and chaos, the higher men would go down along with the herd. Even for Nietzsche I doubt anyone would or should pursue their self-interests *with abandon*.

Nietzsche's fear of leveling could surface with the mere mention of "consensus" and "intersubjectivity". Must we agree to certain norms for the sake of consensus? What if I am the sole objector to a norm which I feel stifles me in some way? Should I assent to the norm anyway so we will not have a hung jury? Consenting to norms that I feel are unjustified perhaps can level me with the others. Again, the process of discourse ethics I think is more valuable than its ultimate goal. The moral lives of many participants would have to be altered in order to obey the norm that has been agreed upon in what Habermas calls "practical discourse". It is here that communicative action takes place.⁸⁹

The rule of argumentation that must be recognized at the start of any discourse is the "principle of universalization" which is stated as follows:

⁸⁹ Habermas. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Weber (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA) p. 121.

Every valid norm must satisfy the condition that the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each could be freely accepted by all affected (and be preferred to those of known alternative possibilities).⁹⁰

The principle of universalization belongs to the “justificatory discourse”. It is not a discourse that determines the applicability of a norm. Can the norm actually work in society? This is not a question Habermas seeks to answer. Justificatory discourse is a discourse that merely “tests” the validity of a norm. This discourse is similar to the application of the Categorical Imperative. No agent actually issues universal laws. They merely test whether their personal maxim *could* be willed into a universal law. The participants can later engage in a discourse of application to see whether the norm to which they all consented can be applied in practice.⁹¹ Arguing for or against the discourse of application is clearly outside of the parameters of the immediate discussion. For now, the participants will coordinate their plans of action under the norm to which they all consented theoretically.

Rawls’s “original position” operates in a similar fashion. Theoretically, certain principles and norms might work for everyone. In reality, they may not. Consensus may be reached any time in the duration of the discourse. The consensus is intersubjective not only because all who were affected gave their consent, but also because the norm generated out of the discourse was the result of the participants coordinating their diverse plans into one norm or another. Here we have the primacy of the “Right” over the “Good”. We can pursue our plans

⁹⁰ *Justification and Application*, op. cit., p. 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

once we have all agreed upon the norms which place restrictions on our activities. We cannot do what is good for each of us until we have decided what is right for all of us.

These constraints on personal behavior would certainly not be suitable for Nietzsche. The agreed upon norms are the end of discourse. Those agreed-upon norms are the norms to which we must adhere. Such adherence seems herd-like. We do not have to reach the end in order to succeed. We can still have a contest even while engaged in a discourse. The discourse does not have to end at all. What is important here is that all validity claims must be recognized, for every participant is entitled to speak. In the end, all those affected are given the opportunity to make a claim, but to reach a consensus, some claims must be jettisoned. Habermas insists that:

just as an individual can reflect on himself and his life as a whole with the goal of clarifying who he is and who he would like to be, so too the members of a collectivity can engage in public deliberation in a spirit of mutual trust, with the goal of coming to an understanding concerning their shared form of life and their identity solely through the unforced force of the better argument.⁹²

If an agreement is reached, which according to Habermas is the aim of discourse ethics, many of the participants will modify their plans of actions to cohere with the agreed upon norms.

I do not think consensus is essential for discussion. The process of communicative action can be just as important as the desired results. With so many perspectives being admitted to the deliberation, consensus may be less attainable. The discourse does not have to be a failure as a result. Nietzsche

⁹² Ibid., p. 23.

would be very unhappy to see his would-be higher men adjust their plans and forgo transcending good and evil for the sake of agreement. I can sympathize with Nietzsche regarding this. Our creativity might be stifled if certain norms place strictures on us. We cannot go around creating our own personal values if we take communicative action seriously. After all, if consensus is the ultimate goal, we may have to give up on some personal values if we want to reach that goal. If participants are uncoerced in their agreement, however, modifying their plans of action does not have to be a devastating process.

Discourse ethics does not have to completely polarize Nietzscheans and Habermasians. Habermas does make the important distinction between the aforementioned communicative action and what he calls “strategic action”. The latter involves a participant or group of participants seeking to influence others by causing the discourse to proceed and end as *they* desire.⁹³ They could compel others to assent through duress, disinformation, or through any other disingenuous way so as to justify a norm they wish to be agreed upon, even if it is not the better norm. Such a consensus is contrived and therefore fraudulent. I have stated earlier that Nietzsche is certainly no fan of fascism. Forcing others to accept values does not support higher humanity in any way. Strategic action violates the principle of universalization since the consequences and side effects of the norm’s general observance were not anticipated by all, nor were the interests of all affected satisfied. Supporters of strategic action do not wish to engage in a contest equally or fairly. The agon is lost. Even in a democracy, strategic action may run rampant. It is imperative for all participants to think each

⁹³ Ibid., p. 58.

claim through thoroughly. If anything, the herd may effortlessly emerge from as a culmination of strategic action. The participants would blindly and uncritically accept norms that should be tossed.

Another reason why practical discourse commences is that the validity of a norm has become controversial. At this point, one participant may want the norm to be maintained while another wants it abandoned. Any agreement reached through strategic action would certainly be devalued since only communicative action is acceptable. A practical discourse is the means for a norm to be *legitimately* justified according to Habermas. For a norm to have been justified legitimately, the validity of the norm must extend beyond particular cultures. It must also be based on a demonstration of universal and necessary presuppositions of rational argumentation.⁹⁴ From an ethical standpoint, to avoid any strategic action from the outset, participants must presuppose:

1. Complete reversibility of perspectives from which participants produce their arguments
2. Universality: validity claim must bind all concerned
3. Reciprocity of equal recognition of the claims of each participant by all others.⁹⁵

The first presupposition requires the participant to avoid testing a claim from a strict “egological” perspective. This means when we test a norm, we do not ask “What would *I* do?” Nietzsche might use that egological perspective, yet Habermas forbids us to do so. Since I should be concerned with a norm that affects many others, I should not ask what I should do when confronted with a controversial norm. What I would do may not be what you would do. Each

⁹⁴ *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, op. cit., p. 118.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4

participant should adopt the perspective of the other participants as best they can. I would ask myself how this norm could affect others in their respective positions. The norms produced through communicative might be rather generic and broad.

The second presupposition further outlines the principle of universalization. The agreed upon norm has to bind all concerned or it would not be universal. Any norm, if freely accepted by all would have to be a universal norm since all of those affected did agree to it. We must emphasize the phrase “freely accepted by all”. Without that adverb, we would have strategic action.

The third presupposition is a vital underpinning of discourse ethics. To avert strategic action and insure that every participant is given equal access to the communicative process, every validity claim should be admitted into the discourse. The claim can be quickly dismissed as long as everyone agrees to that. Every participant is endowed with symmetrical rights for argumentation. These rights are already implicit in the dialogical process. If there is communicative action, then every participant at some point is recognized as having a stake in this matter. Nietzscheans may not summarily wince with the third presupposition. No contest is a good contest if fascists or bigots make the rules. If only a few people and/or viewpoints are recognized, we have no communicative process; we have no competition. Everyone should be given the chance to speak, to compete. No one should be compelled to accept certain norms. As Nietzsche sees it, “there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’”. (GM III:12) Shunning multifarious perspectives for the sake of one generic perspective eliminates that reciprocity that makes communicative action work. In the agon, some competitors

simply will be better than others. While communicative action is not the same as the agon, there are some similarities. Recognizing everyone as a potential participant or competitor is essential for a discourse or contest to be staged at an optimal level. Claims can be dismissed. Some participants and some competitors may be smarter and more creative than others. There can be a spirit of competition between these participants in communicative action. The agreed upon norms would not issue from a traditional agon, but these agreed upon norms need not be absolute and immutable. Norms can shift even for Habermas.

In order for these presuppositions of argumentation and the principle of universalization to be observed with every practical discourse, the participants must argue from what Habermas calls the “moral point of view”.⁹⁶ Arguing from the “moral point of view” is not unique to Habermas. In his book entitled *The Moral Point of View*, Kurt Baier states that rules argued from this point of view should be for the good of everyone alike. It would be to take the position of an “independent, unbiased, impartial, objective, dispassionate, disinterested observer.”⁹⁷ Arguing from the moral point of view indeed buttresses Habermas from Nietzsche’s perspectivism. The need for objectivity and impartiality partakes in what Nietzsche calls the “family failing of philosophers” for their positing man as an “*aeterna veritas*”. In doing so, these philosophers lack any “historical sense” (HAH 2). Habermas is not positing an ideal observer like Baier. But he still is placing a great deal of weight on objectivity and impartiality. Rich contextual experiences may have no place in his speech situation. Judging the

⁹⁶ *Justification and Application*, op. cit., p. 198.

⁹⁷ Kurt Baier. *The Moral Point of View* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY) p. 201.

validity of norms impartially does require the complete participation and consensus of everyone involved. That single, isolated observer passing judgment from an Archimedean point would be unqualified in tending to the interests of those affected by the norms.⁹⁸ Yet Habermas's rigorous focus on consensus prevents any concern for personal relationships, responsibilities, and goals. We may never reach a consensus if the particularities of our own experiences were to be admitted to the discourse. Also, our own inclinations might possibly resort to strategic action. The participants in this discourse are still anonymous. Habermas is on the right path in the beginning, but he takes an impartialist detour too early.

Habermas's impartialism still is not identical to Kant's. Participants may ask, "What norms should we prescribe for everyone?" My actions will affect the interests of others, and their actions will affect my interests. We must reconcile our differences in an impartial manner. With Kant, an autonomous moral agent is expected to will a maxim into a universal law impartially and apart from any inclination. The categorical imperative requires that a mode of action be good in itself and make no references to ends. The law must be unconditional and objectively necessary. The impartial adjudication of moral norms in discourse ethics is not so stringent. Because the validity of any norm can become suspect, it is neither an unconditional nor objectively necessary law. The norm of truth telling can become controversial. The norm of promise-keeping might even become controversial. I may be a person of a duplicitous nature who wants this norm to be discarded for that says lying is permissible. Another participant may strongly disagree. Instead of each of us silently testing whether we could will our

⁹⁸ *Justification and Application*, op. cit., p. 48.

maxims into universal laws, we and everyone else affected engage in a discourse from the moral point of view. We reciprocally acknowledge the validity claims of each other and adopt each other's perspectives to ascertain how this norm would affect us all. Ideally, I should come to realize that lying does not satisfy the interests of all affected. Habermas points out:

everyone must be able to will that the maxims of our action should become universal law. Only a maxim that can be generalized from the perspective of all affected counts as a norm that can command general assent and to the extent is worthy of recognition or, in other words, is morally binding. The questions 'What should I do?' is answered morally with reference to what *one* ought to do.⁹⁹

One participant may want X, another may want Y. In order to harmonize a plurality of plans of action under a few norms, participants must detach themselves from their egocentric perspectives so as not to favor certain claims over others.¹⁰⁰ A norm is the generalized interests of all participants; these interests must transcend the boundaries of the participants' social, cultural, and historical context. Despite the fact some participants may have had to convert their plans of action to freely give their consent, the norm to which they have ostensibly agreed does embody their rational interests somehow. No set of values can be held so strongly by the participant that it cannot be forsaken or revised for the interests of all others who would be affected.

The generalized participant is a very thin conception since so much of her character, her personal narrative of who she is and she wants to be is inadmissible into the discourse. For example, one participant may respect another participant

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

because the latter is a courageous or selfless person. But for Habermas, it does not matter how virtuous the participant is in real life. The personal characteristics of participants, whether remarkable or mediocre, cannot be part of the discursive configuration. Admirable or despicable qualities do not enter into the conversation. Habermas claims there are no “gradations” of persons in the discourse, for any kind of acclaim or disapprobation that is attached to a participant could possibly give them more leverage in argumentation.¹⁰¹

Habermas feels he can better avoid strategic action if no participant’s personal characteristics come into play. Perhaps we would be more inclined to consent to a norm if a participant fostering that norm were a handsome young athlete or an action movie actor. For Habermas, particularity must be compromised so that the discourse is not biased. We respect persons only as fellow participants who are capable of acting freely in the discourse. We cannot respect someone more because she helps feed the hungry or because he is a member of a royal family. A person’s particular life may perhaps be factor in whether he gets more airtime for his viewpoint. Active participants on Habermas’s formulation are still homogenous in nature and in appearance. In this case, Habermas has not gone much further than Kant. For the argument to proceed with as little cultural, historical, social, and personal tainting, the participants must lose their individuality so all interests can be taken into account. As long as a participant is capable of being a member of some community, then they are admitted into the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 45.

discourse.¹⁰² However, the communities in which the participants are actually situated are not themselves factors in the discourse.

When participants engage in a discourse according to the principle of universalization, they are using their collective moral imagination only to test the norm's validity, and not to apply a norm. At best participants can anticipate certain favorable and unfavorable consequences and side effects that norm *may* appear to generate if we were all to agree to it.¹⁰³ The norms that come out of justificatory discourse are not necessarily impracticable. The participants have all agreed that these norms should dictate their lives. But, this is all a thought experiment. This is an experiment which is promising at first, but empty in the end.

This is an ideal speech situation which entails dialogical symmetry by demanding reciprocity of all the participants. For Habermas to equalize the situation, he has had to generalize all persons and subsume them into the category of "participant". Habermas has an inclusive checklist to make sure that everyone has equal access to the discourse and that everyone has the right to speak in the discourse. Participants are all dialogical equivalents so that every claim is at least considered, even if it is an ignorant claim. Conservative talk radio hosts and liberal news anchors could all participate. Participants are all placed into a practical discourse since at some time during social interplay, the consensus they once shared came asunder somehow. Consensus must be restored. The participants may offer a wealth of norms, but they all must agree on something.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 47.

In many cases, people in large societies would not be able to secure a consensus unless some participants resorted to strategic action. The notion that all participants will be able to harmonize their plans of action under a few norms to which they all agreed is seemingly implausible. A norm will affect everyone, but it is doubtful that all who are affected by it will accept it. Nietzsche's free spirits would ostensibly shudder at the thought of agreeing with everyone. Differing values and the creation of new ones separate us from everyone else. We all have certain courses of action that we would like to pursue. If consensus is the only end we ought to have, then certain courses cannot be undertaken. The Dionysian spirit would surely be trampled. If there are participants who steadfastly cling to courses of action that embody their values, assuming they would be willing to abandon these courses for the sake of consensus is mistaken. If someone always follows uncontroversial norms, he probably never had his very own course of action in the first place. For the purpose of impartiality, persons must pare their identities down to nothing for the assurance that no participant will be favored over others. Nietzsche's aristocratic leanings tend to have him favor those who are more accomplished and stand out from the crowd. That may not be such a bad thing. Some of the more ordinary, untalented people seem to be in front of the camera or behind the podium.

In no way am I suggesting that Habermas is a closeted Nietzschean. He is nothing of the sort. But there are aspects of his communicative action that I do find useful for Nietzsche. Nietzsche *in practice* is certainly not Nietzsche *in theory*. At times we are left to surmise how Nietzsche's ideas could be applied to

our current sociopolitical climate. While consensus is not a Nietzschean project, discourse can be. Habermas's argument that the discourse have equal access and complete reciprocity could enhance Nietzsche's contest. Many are unable to compete because they are not allowed to compete. Many of us are like miniature Zarathustras. We are shunned and ridiculed because we are different or dare to dissent. We may never get the chance to speak. There can be fifteen candidates running for the same office, but only two have a genuine chance to win. Our claims may never be given equal weight, but the capacity to participate is essential. There can be no contest if only a select few can enter. This does not mean that everyone will enter. This does not mean that upon entering, we can easily pick out the victors. Habermas was on the right track, but Seyla Benhabib concretizes communicative action. Through her we can see how an actual contest could be staged.

Seyla Benhabib's purpose for reformulating Habermas's discourse ethics is to retain the universalist spirit of discourse ethics while replacing the disembodied subject with a more concrete, particularized subject who is engaged in a dialogue with others. Benhabib often calls discourse ethics "communicative ethics".¹⁰⁴ Benhabib takes out the disembodied, transcendental subject in order to concretize the self; it is a self that is an active participant in the dialogue. The understanding exhibited by the ahistorical participants is replaced with an understanding of all actual participants engaged in the discourse.¹⁰⁵ This means that participants do not speak to one another from a timeless and impartial

¹⁰⁴ Seyla Benhabib. *Situating the Self* (Routledge: NY) p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

standpoint. They speak to one another as members of this particular community and this particular culture. For Habermas, the participants do have to be anchored in a particular culture. If they weren't, their norms would make no sense. There has to be some cultural reference. However, in the ideal speech situation, the Habermasian participants exhibit a generic, bare self, much like the Kantian subject. Benhabib's subjects have contextual references from the beginning. Participants, according to Benhabib, would not and should not disengage from their gender, race, and religious affiliation for the sake of impartiality. Why impose uniform selves on the dialogue? Benhabib concedes that such an undertaking would prevent the dialogue from being morally neutral. Those who would be participants would each have a far more pronounced vested interest in airing their claims. Is this a bad thing? Should any dialogue or contest be neutral? This is not a terrible concession. We as individual participants expect so much from ourselves and others. We have these expectations because of the relationships we have built. Participants can share a course of action they see fit to bind others, but not everyone in the same way. One person's rationale for seeking a particular mode of life may differ from someone else's. We can tailor our lives to fit our needs and wants. Benhabib argues that public discourse must be viewed as a collaborative effort among participants who share more than just formal characteristics of rational agents. In a contest, a collaborative effort implies that some of us might need to be on teams. Perhaps only someone like Zarathustra plays by himself.

Benhabib does not discard the universalism of Habermas's discourse ethics. The universalism can guarantee certain freedoms like equal access and free speech. The universalistic presuppositions are the foundations of her theory. Without these elements, participants in the discourse would be able to privilege certain claims over others, possibly even preventing some participants from speaking. With these universalistic presuppositions, perhaps Judeo-Christian claims would be inevitably privileged in the discourse at all times. Even Nietzsche would need to be recognized as a speaker in the discourse, even if his claims were quickly forgotten or discarded. With recognition, one can be a heretic and not risk burning at the stake. Benhabib's model has these presuppositions:

1. Recognizing the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants in the moral discourse.
2. Recognizing that each participant has the same symmetrical rights to speak, offer new topics, and discuss these very presuppositions.¹⁰⁶

Benhabib calls the first presupposition that "principle of universal moral respect", and the second the "principle of egalitarian reciprocity".¹⁰⁷ Benhabib has slightly reworded the presuppositions that Habermas has formulated. These are presuppositions without which her theory could not be sustained lest she sanction something like strategic action in the discourse. Nietzsche does "mistrust all systematizers" since "the will to a system is a lack of integrity (TI 1,26). Benhabib does offer a system, but she hers is not in the same tradition as Kant or Hegel. Her system is constructed out of presuppositions. Without certain rules, there would be no competition since the same potent, high-ranking, and hostile

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

players would always win. Those aggressive players may not be free spirits but ascetic priests.

Even Nietzsche would have to realize that in order for a contest to be genuine, rules have to be in place to ensure fair competition and eliminate cheaters. Even the agonistic Greeks had rules of fair play. We have to know how and when we cross the finish line. We cannot have a discourse without attempting to preclude privileged claims. Some people have always been allowed to speak while others were muffled. Benhabib is not trying to rid discourse of its agonistic tendencies. She is trying to prevent the silencing of others. She is always trying to recognize difference among participants. Nietzsche himself had said that difference engenders hatred (BGE 263). By recognizing different opinions, we can battle each other in a discourse without some of us being muzzled and constrained.

Benhabib also emphasizes the reversibility of perspectives as Habermas does, but her version of reversibility is not done from the “moral point of view”. Her granting of a universal label to these two presuppositions is not tantamount to the universalizability test in the Kantian sense. This is not that rigid of a system. No universal laws are issued forth which bind all agents at all times. Universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity are attributes that all participants are required to display upon entering the discourse. Respecting others’ right to speak need not strip away a person’s creativity and valor. These two presuppositions are universally binding in the discourse, but what may be produced in the discourse will not be universal moral rules. That is not the point of the discourse. This is

where Benhabib veers sharply from Habermas. Consensus will not be attainable in all discursive practices. Consensus should never be the ultimate goal. By recognizing differences among participants, we reduce the likelihood of a consensus. But the lack of consensus is not the *bete noire* of discourse that Habermas thinks it is.

It is at this point that Benhabib believes Habermas to be mistaken in his theory. He claims that the purpose of discourse is to reach a consensus on moral norms. A norm is only justified when it is accepted by all who would be affected by it. The participants engage in a discourse because consensus over a norm's validity has been lost. It is the task of the participants to restore that lost consensus. For Habermas, the process of communicative action is just when all participants adhere to the principle of universalization. The participants have taken into account the consequences and side effects that a norm's general observance would have. It does not even matter which norm is justified. All that matters is that the participants have fairly and equitably examined every claim and then reach a consensus about that norm. There would not seem to be any purpose for engaging in rational argumentation if the discourse did not reach a consensus.

As Benhabib points out, however, consensus cannot be the criterion of validity.¹⁰⁸ Such an ambitious assignment would repeatedly end in disappointment. It would be like having one hung jury after another. Participants are not guaranteed a consensus simply by placing themselves in an ideal speech situation. It would be possible that after such deep, public reflection over

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

controversial norms, dissent would be better guaranteed than consensus.

Benhabib instead claims that it is the process and not the result of argumentation that is of significance.¹⁰⁹ It is the fact that there are participants in a discourse, mutually recognizing and respecting each other from start to finish that matters. Nietzsche maintains that our enemies made us better and stronger, especially if they did not kill us (TI 1,8). What better way to confront our enemies than in a discourse where we are on equal footing. Although a discourse is the means for justifying claims to validity, if all of the participants adhere to the minimal constraints imposed on their discourse, then the process has some merit. We are not required to accept what others say. We have to let them say it though. For Benhabib, the necessity of a discourse does not reside in the rational agreement of all participants. If agreement were the goal, discourse would be a rather tedious and fruitless labor. Rather, the emphasis is shifted from the need for consensus to the need to simply keep the dialogue going. We cannot always agree on what is right or wrong even if it is through a concerted effort. What is more significant to Benhabib is how the participants can sustain a lasting dialogue between them. What should be significant to Nietzsche is how competitors can sustain a lasting contest between them. Nietzsche said in *Homer's Contest* that an ultimate victory was not desirable. A victory would be the worst thing to happen to competitors. The continuation of the agon is what is important for Nietzsche just as the continuation of the discourse is important for Benhabib.

Benhabib's contribution to discourse ethics is not just downplaying the importance of consensus in a discourse. This is part of her dramatic but necessary

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

reassessment of the participants themselves. I agree that there is a need to recreate the impartial and bland participant as a concrete and contextually sensitive participant who engages in a meaningful dialogue with others. Each participant has a storied existence which lies beneath the values they express. Personal considerations should not be abandoned for the sake of impartiality.

Benhabib distinguishes between the “generalized other” of Habermas’s discourse ethics and the “concrete other” of her version. The “generalized other” view allows us only to see other participants as rational agents who deserve the same rights that we would want ourselves to have. This also requires us to abstract from our self-identity and individuality.¹¹⁰ All participants have to extract from the personal and make it general and unrecognizable. To be a generalized participant means to perfectly mirror all other participants, which means we must lose all the self-defining attributes that make us unique. No contest is enjoyable or even satisfying if we compete against anonymous “competitors”. We tend to exert ourselves more and even take pleasure in competing against a famous and feared future hall-of-famer whose face is not obscured by impartiality. In this way, I look at a participant as a “concrete other”. I can still endorse the universalist constraints of discourse, but I would acknowledge the other not as a formal copy of myself and everyone else. I acknowledge the person as having her own history and matrix of values that is a definite contrast with myself.¹¹¹

It is through this process of recognizing the other as concrete and not generalized that I can understand the needs, wants, and motivations of others, and

¹¹⁰ Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (Columbia: NY) p. 340.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

they in turn comprehend the same about me. I can understand why someone would want to beat *me* (or my team if I cannot do it alone) in a contest. Participants revise and initiate subject matter in an ongoing dialogue by their acquaintanceship with others, for they learn to adjust and adapt their relationships with others. Habermas would have participants be accountable to others insofar as they recognize each other's validity claims and respect their right to participate. He does not go much further than this. Habermas's conception of a rational participant is divested of any individuality so that it is virtually unrecognizable as a human being. His depersonalized practical discourse would encounter many practical difficulties. Benhabib's retooling revives the discourse by taking a contextual and very personal turn.

We can see how democracy can affirmatively affect discourse and the many contests it would sponsor. I believe we can calm Nietzsche's anxiety over democracy in the next section. I will try to show how Nietzsche and democracy as one can protect the many differences among citizens (and competitors). Universality is needed in this account. The rules which Benhabib lays out must be universally binding on all participants. The perspectives which are aired in a discourse need not be universally true. The discourse is not staged to result in objectively true norms binding on all participants. There are to be rules which ensure the discourse will be free from coercion. An agonistic democracy will also need rules to ensure each "contest" is fair. Rights must be conferred equally so that political participation is available to all.

V

Everyone has some kind of talent. Everyone can do something that many others cannot do. Distributive justice might call for the equal allotment of opportunities to cultivate talents, even if people are not equally talented. But do we need this equality to function as long as differences are respected? While the free spirits may be monumentally creative and competitive, many of them may lack other skills. There are no genuine Renaissance men. Even the free spirits can look foolish doing certain things. Nietzsche is fully aware of this. Citizens in a liberal democracy are an eclectic group of people that do not share talents. It is a group that has a fortunate distribution of talents so that every value is questioned, every sonata is composed, and that every brake pad is replaced. Nietzsche points out:

Everyone has his good days when he discovers his higher self; and true humanity demands that everyone be evaluated only in the light of this condition and not in that of his working day unfreedom and servitude (HAH 624).

Free spirits will need a rest too. Every day is not a veritable contest. We have our brilliant days and then we have our lackluster days. Furthermore:

When we observe how some people know how to manage their experiences - their insignificant, everyday experiences - so that they become an arable soil that bears fruit three times a year, while others - and how many there are! - are driven through surging waves of destiny, the most multifarious currents of the times and the nations, and yet always remain on top, bobbing like a cork: then we are in the end tempted to divide mankind into a minority of those who know how to make much of little, and a majority of those who know how to make little of much... (HAH 627).

While elitism is never the preferred alternative, in an agonistic democracy, it emerges quite often. All competitors will have to feel they are best equipped to win.

Since liberal democracy does not need to endorse or guarantee substantive equality, there will be those people who make much of little and make little of much. What is crucial in an agonistic democracy is that fair play is omnipresent and that differences are not cast aside or discouraged. A beginner may have no chance against a virtuoso, and the beginner should not be given a head start. Even in an agonistic democracy, there is superiority and inferiority. There is no essentialism in this ranking. This ranking is not static or permanent either. Age and injuries can affect talent. A person's socio-economic standing can affect talent. Talent is there to be realized, but it can remain untapped or it can be wasted and ignored. Hatab adds:

Artists, thinkers, leaders, athletes, laborers, and so on across the social spectrum, all can have their excellences, both within and between domains, and the recognition of excellence will continually fluctuate within and between domains...¹¹²

Racial and religious superiority cannot be countenanced. Racists and bigots fear difference and punish those whom they see as violators. Racists and bigots also think that certain talents are inherited, but the inheritors are usually a very small and exclusive class. No democracy should tolerate such exclusivity. Democracy can support difference and merit without excluding sectors of the population. Nietzsche's elitism is never inescapable, but it is never exclusionary either.

¹¹² Hatab, op. cit., p. 117.

A Nietzschean democracy with its postmodern elements could be much like a meritocracy. Being rewarded for talent requires discovering and developing talents. This involves a lot of luck. Having the money for private tennis lessons will make it that much easier for a young player to develop. A girl who has to drop out of school to help her mother pay the bills will probably not have the luxury of worrying about her weak serve. In any case, no single talent is desirable over all others. Aryan characteristics are hardly meritorious, so the state should not reward blondes and punish brunettes. In a meritocracy, (ideally) better students go to better colleges, the better actress wins the Academy Award, the better candidate wins the election, and the better artists hang their works in the best museums. Exceptions are made. Lazy children of alumni often get admitted to the best schools. Excellence is not a singular notion, nor is it doled out to a select few. People will be rendered excellent for a variety of reasons. There is always a need for a great quarterback, educator, and mechanic.

Nietzsche himself thinks that differences would enhance culture instead of tenaciously clinging to one locus of value or merit:

We usually endeavor to acquire a single deportment of feeling, a single attitude of mind towards all the events and situations of life - that above all is what is being philosophically minded. But for the enrichment of knowledge it may be of more value not to reduce oneself to uniformity in this way, but to listen instead to the gentle voice of each of life's different situations; these will suggest the attitude of mind appropriate to them. Through thus ceasing to treat oneself as a single rigid and unchanging individuum one takes an intelligent interest in the life and being of many others. (HAH 618).

Competition would suffer without a wealth of differences between contestants. If all contestants were exactly the same, had the same background, same values, and same talents, the contest would end every time with an unsatisfying but expected tie. No culture can truly thrive without difference. No free spirit would be genuinely special if everyone indeed became one. Anyone can make the attempt, but not everyone will succeed. Those who decide to follow Nietzsche and “live dangerously” (GS 283) will do so in different ways. I may live dangerously because I have chosen a career which is not especially lucrative. I may spend the rest of my life rebuilding my credit and chasing a job in academia. Another might live dangerously because he scales tall mountains or surfs on thirty foot waves as a hobby. I cannot surf or climb, so such an avocation would do nothing more than mortify me in public. I have had more success in education so I can better flourish in that environment. I should have the choice and the opportunity to pursue such a career without being forced to give a child to the *Fuhrer* or being forced to marry at thirteen. I can pick my career, but I must also contend with others who have chosen academia as their profession.

Any profession should be teeming with different perspectives. Minorities and women are often encouraged to apply to many more jobs now for the purposes of promoting difference. No one should be encouraged to assimilate or integrate once she gets through the door. Difference may be compellingly erased sometimes when a woman or a minority fears that she may have been hired as a

result of affirmative action or as a rectification of a past wrong. Some admission policies have become minority friendly to increase diversity on campus.

It does not appear to me that Nietzsche would be very supportive of an affirmative action policy. He would probably feel that such a policy is another leveling tendency of democracy. However, I do not think he would also support the integration of race, gender, religion, and ethnicity so that we could harmonize and homogenize. Nietzsche's "good European" was not a glorified Frenchman or Italian. It was the mixture of all the best elements of European and Jewish culture. Some women do feel compelled to act in "masculine" ways on the job so they do not appear overwrought, thereby softer and more feminine than their male counterparts. People of other races sometimes try to act "white" to blend in. People with thick accents often try to lose them to fit in. The only contest here is one where women and minorities try to shed their personal identity the fastest. This contest could not possibly celebrate differences if half of the contestants feel the need to hide who they really are. Hiding one's true self tells of a person not only denying the culture from which she has emerged, but it also involves having to reject the agonistic tendencies that reside in her. It does not matter which "contest" a person chooses. She should not have to make a series of harsh adjustments to be admitted. An agonistic democracy embraces a pluralism which would be concomitant with the wide recognition of differences among people. A person who denies or is shameful of her history is already starting to throw the game for her opponents. Nietzsche could never run away from the fact that he

was German. He certainly aspired to something he saw as greater, but he knew his roots were firmly planted near Leipzig.

In a postmodern democracy, the recognition of difference does not mean that everyone's opinion has to be accepted. A postmodern democracy would recognize the person's right to say something, but not every perspective should be seen as gospel. There is still a competition out there. I have a perspective for which I will fight whenever I deem it necessary. If I can defend my perspective with some clarity, I probably view my perspective as better than others. If I am to adopt a postmodern orientation, I will not do myself any favors if I believe that "truth" does underlie my perspective. The foundationalism that was seen in Rationalist philosophers like Descartes would have a hard time fitting comfortably within a postmodern democracy. No one is banned from adopting a Cartesian perspective. Many might view this perspective as arcane, stuffy, or just plain wrong. Refusing to admit such a perspective would be very undemocratic. Refusing to espouse a foundationalist perspective is just one of many ways a person can negotiate her way into the discourse. Every perspective at least should be aired if someone is willing to adopt it. In this sense, it is necessary for postmoderns to have to adhere to universal rules ensuring the recognition of differences. A postmodern would need to ensure that difference *is* respected by all. Rules that bind all participants are indispensable. A postmodern person's willingness to recognize difference will inevitably lead to the airing of unpopular and ignorant opinions. Cable news programs would have no audience if steadfast conservative and liberal talking heads did not pontificate on a nightly basis.

Quieting unpopular opinions will not enhance democracy's agonistic tendencies. We are engaged in a competition with anyone, not a select few. If we were to start filtering out responses we deemed unacceptable, we would not be respecting the agon. We dilute competition when we silence the few who make us grimace. If anything, those who make us shudder and bristle make better contestants and/or combatants. We might be more likely to bring our "A" game when faced with despised opponents. One should also be willing to combat friends. In a contest, friendship should not influence one's desire for victory. Familial connections should not be a factor either. Nietzsche himself says "if you want a friend, you must be willing to wage war for him: and to wage war, you must be capable of being an enemy" (Z I,14). Enemies enable us to become more creative and exercise our agonistic tendencies. Nietzsche adds "a new creation...has more need of enemies than friends: only in opposition does it feel itself necessary, only in opposition does it become necessary..." (TI 5,3).

Ideally, a postmodern democracy will not collapse into a naïve relativism. Hatab warns that differences should not be celebrated and honored to the point where everything is permitted. A democracy should respect openness, but not respect a "myopic tribalism".¹¹³ Some people deserve to be reprimanded if not condemned for their actions. Even a postmodern democracy has to restrict cultural and moral isolationism. A racist opinion may offend those who do not share it, but if bigoted policies such as ethnic cleansing and racial hygiene are implemented, someone would have to intervene or at least raise awareness of it. However, no one would be competing if they did not think their perspective was

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 205.

better. No one would defend their beliefs if they thought other perspectives were more suitable. I have to believe that my perspective is better than others. I cannot force someone else to acquiesce to my beliefs. I may truly think that my beliefs are the “truth”. That is my perspective. Others are entitled to see me as misguided or supercilious. I may decide to accept relativism as a guiding light and assume everyone is “right”. Again, other people might think me naïve or spineless. The consummate relativism, which in my opinion I do think many share, is quite worrisome. We should never feel it necessary to accept the claims of everyone. Some opinions are very uncritical and even nefarious. Tolerating the sociobiological prejudices of Nazis as just another free opinion would send many of us back to the cattle cars if enough people countenanced such a viewpoint. I still tend to believe my perspective is better than many. I may have to work harder to see to it that my aspirations are not interrupted by another Joseph Mengele. If I am lucky, I will have many contestants on my side. No democracy could ever tolerate or should tolerate such fascist designs. We may have to tolerate fascist self- expressions.

Iris Marion Young has an interesting view of postmodern democracy. In her book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Young analyzes democracy’s relationship to many key concepts such as difference, group representation, and marginalization. What I want to discuss here is her views regarding the relationship between democracy and justice. I have discussed free speech and recognition of perspectives, but I have yet to delve deeply into how justice relates to democracy. Young views justice as having an essential link to democracy, a link which

fosters inclusion. Young begins her book by claiming that the “democratic process is the best means for changing conditions of injustice and promoting justice.”¹¹⁴ In democracy, inequalities still exist. Yet democracy is essential in allowing citizens to come together and challenge these inequalities. The democratic process enables people to be politically motivated to beginning grass-roots campaigns, go to town hall meetings and discuss relevant issues, and protest publicly in other ways. Privileges are often awarded to the richest and most powerful despite the concerted efforts of those combating such privileges. Young claims that a way to eradicate such privilege and influence is to “widen democratic inclusion.”¹¹⁵ How is this done?

Young examines two models of democracy. She calls the first model the “aggregate” model of democracy. According to Young, this model will view democracy as a “process of aggregating the preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and policies...[and the] goal of democratic decision-making is to decide what leaders, rules, and policies will best correspond to the most widely and strongly held preferences.”¹¹⁶ In other words, this brand of democracy entails the generalized interests of those involved in deciding which politicians will represent these interests. Not every interest can be taken into account, so some personal interests have to be shelved for the greater good of everyone. As citizens, we get a list of politicians from which to choose. We elect the politicians we feel will best represent us. How do we determine which preferences are the most strongly held? How are we going to ensure that everyone is represented? A

¹¹⁴ Iris Marion Young. *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: NY) p. 17.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

poll can claim that seventy-five percent of those questioned do not favor capital punishment. Does this mean that the majority of Americans do not support capital punishment? Is the repugnance towards capital punishment more strongly held than the support of it? If this poll were taken in the northeastern section of the United States, the results may not be surprising since several states ban capital punishment. Does one sampling of the population speak for all? In the same way that 100 people polled do not speak for a country of 300 million, many politicians claim that have the interests of all Americans accounted for when it is clear that they do not. A pro-life president does not represent the interests of pro-choice voters.

Perhaps the views which appear to be most strongly held are views held by those who have the most power and influence. Are the incumbents empowered by the loudest, richest, and strongest core group of voters? Is this a core group which does not take into account marginalized groups and minorities? Young's concern is that a preference which happens to have the greatest number of supporters will not adequately address many social problems which have lesser visibility. Many voters may disregard a candidate whose platform revolves around preserving the environment because welfare reform or defense spending seem more important according to the majority of Americans. Many voters will assume that interests with the greatest numerical support will best represent everyone involved in the democratic process.¹¹⁷ If some voters feel that these latter interests have no bearing on them, why should these voters be expected to select a candidate who wishes to end welfare or increase spending on warplanes?

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

The other model that Young examines is what she calls the “deliberative” model of democracy. This model involves people who “offer proposals for how best to solve problems or meet legitimate needs, and so on, and they present arguments through which they aim to persuade others to accept their proposals...[since] democratic process is primarily a discussion of problems, conflicts, and claims of need or interest.”¹¹⁸ While many politicians might simply tally up the number of supporters for any given issue, the aggregative model of democracy is not the only option for enacting certain policies. Perhaps if there were an inclusive dialogue, all issues would be addressed instead of a few. Lesser-known interests and issues may not need safety in numbers to be aired if this deliberative model is used.

Young claims that deliberative democracy works not by looking at how many people share a given preference, but by people deciding *en masse* which preferences should be sustained and supported.¹¹⁹ Which proposals could we all support for the best reasons? According to Young, for us all to be able to decide what is best for us, the deliberative model must be inclusive, equal, reasonable, and public.¹²⁰ For all of us to participate, we all have to be included into the discussion. For the discussion to be equal, we all have to be granted the opportunity to speak. The discussion is reasonable when everyone is given the opportunity to explain their views, no matter how perverse or ignorant. No one has to accept these peculiar views. Young expects reasonable people to have open

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

minds regarding other views.¹²¹ Finally, the discussion has to be comprehensible to all involved. In order for others to understand me and for me to understand others, I must publicize my reasons for defending a certain view, and others must do the same. Young defines a public as a “plurality of different individual and collective experiences, histories, commitments, ideals, interests, and goals that face one another to discuss collective problems under a common set of procedures.”¹²² This means that we are not just accountable to ourselves, but also to everyone else in the public.

What is key for Young is that the participants discuss and debate problems without facing duress or without being silenced. Young views democracy as a “process in which a large collective discusses problems...that they face together, and try to arrive peaceably at a solutions in whose implementation everyone will cooperate.”¹²³ Justice is important for Young because it delineates steps that participants need to follow in order for the discussion to be fair. Justice enlightens us by telling us how things ought to be done. In this way, Young is much like Habermas and Benhabib. All are concerned with outlining just procedures to ensure that discourse is fair and the participants are uncoerced. Young does believe that the participants should be committed to reaching an agreement. Reaching consensus may enjoin some participants to give up some of their preferences and interests if they are incompatible with justice.¹²⁴ Maintaining a just discourse is imperative. Contests are rife with discourse. No contest is fair if

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹²² Ibid., p. 25.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 28.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

some participants are allowed to break the rules. There are rules proscribing some forms of performance-enhancing drugs in amateur and professional sports. There should be more rules eliminating certain kinds of campaign contributions. Rules abound to ensure that we can compete fairly without a rival having an unfair advantage. Justice can permeate a democracy, even one that is Nietzschean.

The refusal to privilege perspectives was also championed by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard supported the “little story” (*petit recit*) over the meta-narrative or “grand story”.¹²⁵ A Meta-narrative would be something along the lines of “God” or “Spirit”. It is a grand story which purportedly defines and constitutes a society and all of its people. Meta-narratives contain the “truth”. A postmodern is typically incredulous to meta-narratives since they can be exclusionary. Some may not feel that they are part of the meta-narrative’s storyline. Some might wish to modify the character that the meta-narrative has written for them. Lyotard claims that “most people have lost nostalgia for the lost narrative...[but] it in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity.” Furthermore, “what saves them from it [barbarity] is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction.”¹²⁶ A meta-narrative may render many perspectives illegitimate. A meta-narrative may be nonsensical in reference to any given person’s life. If I do not view life from a teleological perspective, then the progress of “Spirit” will not mean a great deal to me. I should have the freedom of telling my own story which I see as legitimate.

¹²⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition*, trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN) p. 60.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

VI

It is possible that an agonistic environment that permits rampant differences may be nothing more than the opening of Pandora's box. It would be undemocratic to limit who can speak. We are not exactly making a Faustian deal if we accept the postmodern (if not Nietzschean) challenge to admit a healthy share of perspectives that an agonistic democracy would surely encompass. If we are generous with civil liberties, there will be many unpalatable opinions that we have invited into the contest. No democracy can be sustained if we do not accept that freedom provokes much discord and rancor. A culture would be very bland if everyone thought the same way. Competing and winning against a hated rival would sweeten the victory and the spirit of competition. Losing will not feel so good, but it might revitalize the vanquished and give him the desire to try again. It is important to underscore these consequences that come with an agonistic democracy.

Nietzsche would have agreed with John Stuart Mill's assessment of the "tyranny of the majority" and its capacity to silence those who differ from it:

...[T]here needs to be protection against the tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty* (Penguin Classics: NY) p. 63.

The dreaded herd stifled creativity and individual self-expression by reproaching anyone who differed from it. The herd prevented potential free spirits from transcending good and evil. Even though the herd is necessary for the emergence of free spirits, the herd still harbors that “tyranny of the majority”. Mill also feared the compulsion of the few to assent with the many. The majority would never recognize other opinions lest these opinions and attitudes chip away at the foundation of the society. Unless something or someone is proven to be harmful to others, liberty should not be restricted.¹²⁸ While a cursory reading of Nietzsche might lead someone into thinking he is the patron saint of the Nazis, had Nietzsche been living during the Third Reich, he never would have been permitted to say what he said. For instance:

No, we do not love humanity; but on the other hand we are not nearly ‘German’ enough, in the sense in which the word ‘German’ is constantly being used nowadays, to advocate nationalism and race hatred and to be able to take pleasure in the national scabies of the heart and blood poisoning that now leads the nations of Europe to delimit and barricade themselves against each other as if it were a matter of quarantine (GS 377).

No Nazi would enjoy an unflattering portrait of the fatherland. A discourse becomes hampered by the domination and exploitation of the majority or of the powerful. We have to heed Mill’s warnings and be prepared for a potential onslaught of tasteless, crass, and uncritical perspectives. Libel and slander are the stuff out of which many careers are made. Sometimes libelers and slanderers can be sued; it is difficult to silence them completely. We also have to respect the free

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

speech of the neo-Nazis who march in public displaying their anti-Semitism and racism. We would move closer and closer to the totalitarian society that these neo-Nazis would like to represent if we did not let such bigots air their grievances. Like a good Nietzschean, I can feel confident with my perspective and claim that mine is simply better than a bigot's view towards people of other races and religions. I do not have to ignore prejudice and lapse into a short-sighted relativism. Nietzsche thinks his perspective is better than that of the ascetic priests, and I can think my perspective far better than that of a Nazi sympathizer.

I am very sympathetic to Hatab's, Benhabib's, Young's, and Habermas's arguments. With their help, I have attempted to wed Nietzsche with democracy. I cannot help but view Nietzsche and democracy as a pair of antagonistic allies who love to hate each other, but are necessary together. Democracy and Nietzsche form a crucial symbiotic relationship. Nietzsche needs democracy for the *agon* to be fully realized. Democracy can guarantee that certain rules will be in place so that the contest is a bona fide competition. Contests that are staged or rigged not only show contempt for the rights of citizens who wish to engage in competition, but these farcical contests also disrespect the competitive character of the *agon*. Democracy needs Nietzsche so we can see how important it is to let marginal, divisive, and even loathsome perspectives into the debate. Democracy needs a critic like to Nietzsche to make citizens grateful for free speech, justice rules, and other civil liberties.

Conclusion

It was my intention in this dissertation to align Nietzsche with liberal democracy. This has not been an easy task, but I believe that I have been successful. While there are many facets of democracy, I chose the marriage of Nietzsche and liberal democracy. Liberal democracy promotes individual freedom of thought and expression. Nietzsche's criticism of those moderns who persistently remain in the herd and never establish a voice of their own would fit quite nicely in a liberal democracy. In a liberal democracy, individuals have the right to transcend the "herd" and express their values and not values created for them. In theory, a liberal democracy would protect freedom of speech and expression. A liberal democracy need not presuppose a substantive equality. In a liberal democracy, our freedoms are equally protected, but we are not considered to be equal to each other regarding intelligence or talent.

Nietzsche's views of democracy were myopic. Had he not presumed that liberal democracy has these alleged leveling proclivities, he might have been more amenable to it. I cannot speak for Nietzsche. This dissertation is but a corollary to Nietzsche's scholarship. I sought to answer a deceptively simple question: Under what political conditions could Nietzsche's philosophy of culture be best realized? The answer might have surprised some readers who viewed Nietzsche as a Fascist, proto-Nazi, or an anarchist.

There are lingering questions which cannot be fully answered by my account. What do we do if these rules which guarantee a fair and competitive

discourse are ignored by incumbent lawmakers? Even if all perspectives can be aired, how can we ensure that the general population will hear these marginal perspectives? How can we prevent these marginal perspectives from languishing on the periphery of mainstream politics? In a country of Democrats and Republicans, how can third parties reach out and attract undecided voters if these candidates are not even allowed to engage in a nationally televised debate with their more visible opponents? What do we do if certain perspectives are indeed privileged over others? Would those who disagree with these privileged perspectives have to participate in a contest elsewhere? What recourse do we have from these problems? Answers to these questions are not implausible. Answers are simply difficult to generate. Not even a democratic or a higher culture may have all the answers.

But all of this is certainly a start. The marriage between Nietzsche and democracy shows promise. Together they may be able to create a culture of public competition that reveals the many talents and capabilities of its participants. My purpose was to see not only what kind of impact Nietzsche's philosophy of culture would have on politics, but also to ascertain how Nietzsche's "higher culture" could be best realized. Nietzsche's sometimes opaque "higher culture" is not some kind of bestiality as MacIntyre sees it to be or some kind of unattainable and distant notion. Strangely enough, democracy is quite conducive to the emergence of the free spirits. The herd is still milling around, blissfully nestled into their human-all-too-human values. Free spirits

should be aware that their emergence would not be possible without the herd and their “life-denying” values. Nietzsche is aware of this:

What with all their might they [levelers] would like to strive after is the universal green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all...and suffering itself they take for something that has to be abolished. We, who are the opposite of this, and have opened our eyes and our conscience to the question where and how the plant ‘man’ has hitherto grown up most vigorously, we think that this has always happened under the opposite conditions, that the perilousness of his situation had first to become tremendous, his powers of invention and dissimulation had, under protracted pressure and constraint, to evolve into subtlety and daring, his will to life had to be intensified into unconditional will to power - we think that severity, force, slavery, peril in the street and in the heart, concealment, stoicism, the art of experiment and the devilry of every kind, that everything evil, dreadful, tyrannical, beast of prey and serpent in man serves to enhance the species ‘man’ just as much as does its opposite (BGE 44).

It is under trying, maddening, abysmal conditions that a free spirit can emerge from the rest of society. Free spirits are under societal duress to keep their creative instincts to themselves and coalesce with the rest of the herd. Free spirits are too grandiose and daring for their human-all-too-human counterparts. All that is “evil, dreadful, tyrannical” will build up the free spirits because these qualities are out of the ordinary. Yet their antitheses, that which is good, agreeable, and tolerant serve as human-all-too-human ciphers against which the free spirits judge themselves.

Furthermore, free spirits do not seek to abolish suffering. Suffering and all that is terrible is what makes them stronger. Every free spirit may have to bite the head off of that appalling black serpent in order to affirm her life (Z III:2).

When all that is blackest and heaviest is affirmed with all that is joyous and weightless, free spirits can cast off that which burdens the herd, the levelers. But higher humanity will mean nothing without a climate which is conducive for its emergence. Free spirits could not emerge without a democracy. Democracy would welcome the difference of opinion. Democracy would welcome rancorous debate, differing values, resonant and weak voices. No totalitarian state would tolerate free spirits. Democracy would respect the agonistic perspectivism that should underlie any discourse. Democracy and Nietzsche may at first blush form a *mesalliance* that can never be sundered. Nietzsche may not have realized it, but his higher culture would be more than amenable to democracy. His culture and his “good European” could not exist without it.

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