JUSTIFYING DEMOCRACY BEYOND NIETZSCHE’S CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation pursues two main concerns. I begin by engaging the plenitude of scholarship on Friedrich Nietzsche, expounding on his interlocking critiques of democracy, Enlightenment thought, and Christian morality. Doing so, I explicate the commitments that undergird his criticisms, placing in context his views on metaphysics. I demonstrate that his rejection of democracy does not stem from a de facto anti-egalitarianism, as is often assumed, but rather from a worry that how we—moderns—justify democracy relies on problematic Christian moral categories. Nietzsche is concerned that Christianity’s prescriptive dimension demands slavish acquiescence, which, in turn, threatens our ability to adapt to changing circumstances and the general flux of existence. Although he worries that egalitarian theories either mis-describe human beings empirically, or make problematic ontological claims, his main concerns are that the worldview underwriting many modern egalitarian theories enervates the instincts most likely necessary for our species to thrive in the future, and that egalitarian theories obfuscate ideological maneuverings for power. However, in rejecting this worldview, Nietzsche hopes for an era of self-creation in which particular types of individuals can emerge and overcome the hegemonic stranglehold of the modern (Christian/democratic) ethos.

This leads to the second main concern of the dissertation. While I spend the bulk of the dissertation engaging Nietzsche’s questioning of how we ground our democratic commitments, I conclude by proposing a justification for democracy that does not rely on Christian moral notions—particularly that of compassion. Arguing against the directive to place compassion as a central discourse in the justification of democracy, I engage Hilary Putnam’s reading of John Dewey and argue for an “epistemological justification of democracy.” This justification evades Nietzsche’s criticisms while resolving a problem in his constructive project, namely his inability
to account for how the conditions for the emergence of his desired autonomous individuals can be generated. I conclude that not only does an epistemological justification of democracy still allow us to account for robust ethical commitments that are themselves understood as fallible, but that democratic openness to marginal voices can generate the conditions for the emergence of the type of individuals Nietzsche seeks.
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Introduction

I suspect that anyone writing a project in which Friedrich Nietzsche takes center stage will be pressed to justify that decision, regardless of one’s discipline. This circumstance is especially true for a scholar of religion—particularly one who also works in African American religious thought. Often, the assumption is that Nietzsche’s critique of what he terms “slave morality” is well-known, and that it fails. Not only does Nietzsche sabotage his own argument by displaying his ressentiment towards religion, especially Christianity as it continues to inform our (modern/western) moral worldview;¹ his criticism also fails to disqualify some of our best religious exemplars as models worthy of admiration, if not emulation. While we may quibble over particular indiscretions or character flaws in Mahatma Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Theresa, to name a few, the transformative power of their personalities and sacrifices are undeniable. So, although analyzing former U.S. president George W. Bush’s rhetoric following the devastating events of 9/11 2001 along some of the lines Nietzsche draws in On the Genealogy of Morality² might have traction, one would be hard-pressed to read King’s appeal to love as a way to overcome domination, for example, as similarly motivated.

However, one of the arguments of this dissertation is precisely that the assumption undergirding this dismissal of Nietzsche misreads his critique of the ascetic ideal and its attendant morality. It is true that Nietzsche holds contempt for slave morality because, in his

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¹ Although differences abound between nations and cultures, globalization has rendered the world much more connected than ever before. So much so, that while the pronoun—our—is not free of potential problems, it still operates to name something.

view, it originates in *ressentiment*; and this origin renders it problematic for numerous reasons.

It is crucial to him to point out that our moral categories originated out of human all-too-human motivations, for example, because doing so, he finds, undermines the claim that they are absolute, eternal, and revealed to us by god. But, upon closer inspection, one finds that Nietzsche’s main argument against the ascetic ideal is that it enervates the human spirit; hence his worry about the specter of nihilism. Nietzsche says as much. After introducing his argument concerning the origin of our moral categories in the first four sections of his preface to *GM*, Nietzsche transitions in the fifth section saying,

> Even then [when he began his foray into providing a genealogy of morality] my real concern was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering… on the origin of morality…. What was at stake was the *value* of morality…. I understood the ever spreading morality of pity that had seized even on philosophers and made them ill, as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that had itself become sinister, perhaps as its by-pass to a new Buddhism? to a Buddhism for Europeans? To—*nihilism*?3

Recognizing that the assumption buttressing easy dismissals of Nietzsche is misguided, I attempt to give him a fairer reading as I interrogate his interlocking criticisms of Christianity, Enlightenment thought, and democracy.

> Given my own suspicion of the metaphysical underpinnings of justifications that begin with a preconceived notion of the good, my ultimate aim in the dissertation is to provide a justification for holding democratic commitments that does not need to begin with moral categories—hence Nietzsche. I proceed in this manner, because in order to explain better what I am ultimately after, I find it critical to demonstrate the depth and insight of Nietzsche’s position. For example, though Nietzsche’s antipodal positions regarding democracy are well known, how do they relate to his criticisms of the western metaphysical tradition generally, and of the problems of modernity more specifically? Are his views on these issues consistent throughout

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his authorship, or do they change as he matures as an author? And, how do the answers to these questions pertain to the way those of us committed to democracy read, and learn from, Nietzsche?

My primary contention is that Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy do not stem from his radical anti-egalitarian stance as is often assumed. Despite his worry that egalitarian theories either mis-describe human beings empirically, or make problematic ontological claims, his main concerns are that the worldview underwriting many modern egalitarian theories leads to the enervation of the instincts most likely necessary for our species to thrive in the future; but even more sinister yet, that egalitarian theories obfuscate ideological maneuvering for power.

Nietzsche criticizes modern philosophy’s tendency toward foundationalism as an extension of a particular religious impulse (what we may loosely call the Judeo-Christian worldview), and attempts to provide solutions towards overcoming the limits he finds with this view. Nietzsche worries that democracy is merely a socio-political extension of Christian morality. In rejection of its worldview, Nietzsche hopes for an era of self-creation in which particular types of individuals can emerge and overcome the hegemonic stranglehold of the modern (Christian/democratic) ethos. However, as Robert Pippin has noticed, at this point Nietzsche’s narrative runs into problems because, if Nietzsche’s description is correct about our inability to account for the emergence of autonomous individuals due to the pervasiveness of the Christian ethos in the modern world, he too fails to account for how these higher types can emerge. I conclude, perhaps surprisingly, that it precisely is democracy that allows us to

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4 Although, of course, even this is too narrow because, as we will see most clearly in chapter 3, Nietzsche even accuses Buddhism of sharing significant aspects of this worldview.

5 Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999 2nd ed.). I read Nietzsche’s pseudo dialectical history about the self-overcoming of Christian morality as one of his attempts to imagine how the conditions for their emergence can come about.
account for the generation of the conditions for the possibility of genuinely autonomous individuals.

In chapter one, I account for Nietzsche’s views on metaphysics—as well as his own metaphysical position—in his early writings. This account compels us to spend some time discussing the nature of his relationship with Arthur Schopenhauer during this period of his development. Beginning here helps set the stage for rendering Nietzsche’s commitments more clearly, as well as helps to keep track of the moves he makes later with regard to his criticisms of Christianity and democracy.

Although some scholarship has questioned the extent to which Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer’s philosophy in his early writings,\(^6\) not enough has been done to provide a precise account of the matter. I show that Nietzsche’s similarity to Schopenhauer in *The Birth of Tragedy* (*BT*) is primarily, though not entirely, linguistic.\(^7\) Rather than accepting Schopenhauer’s philosophical pessimism, Nietzsche assumes Schopenhauer’s terms in order to reject his conclusions. I argue that there are two major moves being made in this regard. The first is that we can view *BT* as the beginning of Nietzsche’s “reversal of Plato” (*à la* Martin Heidegger).\(^8\) The second move we see is Nietzsche’s employment of Schopenhauer’s terms and

\(^6\) Walter Kaufmann is among the first to recognize that as early as in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1967, original 1872) Nietzsche attempts to differentiate his position from Schopenhauer. Two other notable treatments are Martha Nussbaum, “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. by Christopher Janaway, (1999), and Aaron Ridley, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Art*, (2007). For an extended discussion of Nietzsche’s rejection of Schopenhauer see Bernard Reginster *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). However, Reginster focuses primarily on Nietzsche’s *Nachlass*, especially *The Will to Power*, and does little to account for the differences in Nietzsche’s positions between the early and later writings.


categories in order ultimately to reject his metaphysical pessimism. However, despite Nietzsche’s attempt to reject Plato’s and Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, his use of Schopenhauerian categories induces Nietzsche into maintaining one significant feature of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, namely the indestructibility of being (i.e. the suffering at the core of nature, or the heart of the Dionysian).

This is a commitment with which Nietzsche still struggles when writing the *Untimely Meditations* (*UM*), especially in “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life.” I spend chapter two evaluating this essay as background for some of the more important shifts we find in Nietzsche’s later works; shifts which play a role in accounting for one of the more vital texts in his authorship, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (*GM*). In chapter three, I turn to *GM* and examine the complexity of Nietzsche’s response to the specter of nihilism, his view of the danger in which humanity finds itself, and the crucial question of whence comes Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy.

Chapter four takes on squarely a contemporary challenge to Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy. While I spend much of the chapter responding to criticisms (and hopefully changing the perception) of what’s at stake in Nietzsche’s anti-egalitarianism, I also introduce one of the main limitations I find in Nietzsche’s work—namely his inability to account for the emergence of Übermenschen. It is here that my endorsement of democracy is made explicit.

Finally, in chapter five, building on Nietzsche’s criticism of the morality of compassion, I explain why, in my view, accounts which place moral categories at the center of their justifications for democracy fail. Arguing against the directive to place compassion—particularly the emphasis on the necessity of empathy—as a central discourse in the justification of democracy, I engage Hilary Putnam’s account of John Dewey’s justification of democracy. I
agree with Putnam’s assessment that Dewey provides an “epistemological justification of democracy,” in which democracy is not merely one form of political organization among others, but rather “is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems.”\(^9\) Thinking about democracy on these terms allows us to respond to the question, “Why democracy?” without having to import an indefensible notion of the good. Furthermore, providing a justification for holding democratic commitments along these lines at once evades Nietzsche’s criticisms, while accounting for how the conditions could be set for the emergence of his higher types.

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Chapter 1:

The Early Nietzsche: Inverting Plato and Overcoming Metaphysics

If the immediate and direct purpose of our life is not suffering then our existence is the most ill-adapted to its purpose in the world: for it is absurd to suppose that the endless affliction of which the world is everywhere full, and which arises out of the need and distress pertaining essentially to life should be purposeless and purely accidental. Each individual misfortune, to be sure, seems an exceptional occurrence; but misfortune in general is the rule.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Nietzsche’s philosophy, according to his own testimony, is inverted Platonism.

Martin Heidegger

Ostensibly, the question about Nietzsche’s relationship to democracy and democratic theory is closed. He is a vehement critic, who maintains an order of rank among human beings, and advocates a form of “spiritual” aristocracy. But what exactly is Nietzsche criticizing? In other words, what is democracy in his view? And, could one provide a justification for holding democratic commitments that evades the salient features of Nietzsche’s criticisms? This dissertation answers the latter question affirmatively by responding to many of the implications of the former. This chapter focuses on Nietzsche’s first book, The Birth of Tragedy.

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10 Arthur Schopenhauer, Essays and Aphorisms, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, § 1, 41.
12 I emphasize that his version is “spiritual” because, unlike other visions of aristocracy, Nietzsche’s is not based on consanguinity and thus is not hereditary. For some discussions of these issues see Bruce Detwiler, Nietzsche and the Politics of Radical Aristocratism, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); George J. Stack, Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity, (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1992); and Fredrick Appel, Nietzsche contra Democracy, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). For some classic interpretations that recognize the possibility of reconciling some of Nietzsche’s claims with a democratic vision see Lawrence Hatab, A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy, (Chicago, IL: Open Court Press, 1995); Tracy B. Strong, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000, expanded ed.); and William E. Connolly, Identity/Difference, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, expanded ed.).
13 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), cited henceforth as BT. Although I focus on the development of the relevant themes between the early writings and Nietzsche’s mature thought, I will occasionally refer to some of the middle works. Being mindful of the way many
Not only does looking at this early text allow us to begin seeing more clearly the differences between Nietzsche’s earlier and later positions, but more importantly it also allows us to note the continuities between earlier and later formulations of specific themes. The most pertinent themes, for my purposes, will be Nietzsche’s early rejection of pessimism and the way that concern develops into his account and rejection of nihilism. Charting these continuities will allow us to clarify what is at stake for Nietzsche in his criticisms of democracy, and explain why, and how, we ought to respond to the challenges they pose.

Scholars often distinguish between Nietzsche’s early, middle, and later writings. Even within this periodization, however, most emphasis is placed on the distinction between the early and the “mature” writings. This division is usually accounted for in terms of Nietzsche’s break with Wagner and his repudiation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. The suggestion is that in the early writings Nietzsche is straightforwardly Schopenhauerian, and that it is in, and through, his

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14 In The Nietzsche Reader, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large, (2006), the editors present a fairly standard periodization of Nietzsche’s writings, in which the works from The Birth of Tragedy (BT) through The Untimely Meditations (UM) (roughly 1871-1876) comprise the early period (they refer to the unpublished writings that precede BT as Nietzsche’s “Beginnings”); they mark the middle period as beginning with Human, All Too Human (HAH), running through the first four books of The Gay Science (GS), and Thus Spoke Zarathustra (TSZ) (roughly 1877-1885); finally, they designate the period in which we get Beyond Good and Evil (BGE) and the fifth book of GS until Nietzsche’s mental breakdown (roughly 1886-Jan. 1889) as his mature period. Interestingly Ansell-Pearson and Large also include one of Nietzsche’s “Dionysian” letters written after his collapse on Jan. 3, 1889 (i.e. Nietzsche’s famous Jan. 6, 1889 letter to Jacob Burckhardt). Julian Young divides Nietzsche’s writing career into four periods, based on his account of Nietzsche’s changing views on art: in Julian Young, Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a different periodization see Tamsin Shaw, Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism, (2007) for whom the middle period refers “to the Untimely Meditations (1873-1876), and all further writings up to and including the first four books of The Gay Science” Shaw, 2 fn.6.

15 On the one hand, when scholars focus on Nietzsche’s earlier works they recognize, in the words of Daniel Breazeale, “discussions of such essential ‘Nietzschean’ subjects as the relationship between life, art and philosophy,” along with “the inescapable historicity of human existence” and an affirmation of “the creative capacity of human beings to overcome themselves and their past… a project that, by the time of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-5), will come to occupy the very center of his attention” (“Introduction” to Nietzsche’s Untimely Meditations, ed. by Breazeale, vii, xv). On the other hand, many interpreters turn to the later works because they represent Nietzsche’s “mature” position. As Maudemarie Clark says regarding the Genealogy, “it is one of Nietzsche’s most important books, a work of his maturity that shows him at the height of his powers both as a thinker and as an artist in the presentation of his ideas” (“Introduction” to On the Genealogy of Morality trans. by Clark and Alan Swensen, xv). Raymond Geuss also makes this division in his essay “Art and Theodicy” in Morality, Culture, and History, (1999). Many interpretations, in turn, disclose an adherence to this division.
break with Schopenhauer’s thought that Nietzsche begins developing his own position.\textsuperscript{16} As Julian Young says,

In two ways, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy} stands in Schopenhauer’s shadow. First, the metaphysical framework on which it is constructed is Schopenhauer’s version of Kantian idealism: Schopenhauer’s view that the manifest world is mere ‘appearance’,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{16} Although this has been perhaps the primary way of understanding Nietzsche’s progression as a thinker, Walter Kaufmann acknowledged limits to this view, as early as 1966. For instance, in the introduction to his translation of \textit{BT}, Kaufmann responds to Richard Oehler’s claim that “the early Nietzsche ‘was completely under the influence of Schopenhauer,’” saying, “In fact, however, Nietzsche’s very first book, \textit{The Birth}, constitutes a declaration of independence from Schopenhauer” (\textit{BT}, “Translators Introduction,” 11). In his footnotes to the text, Kaufmann often comments on when and where, in his view, “Nietzsche returns to Schopenhauer’s perspective,” though (for instance, \textit{BT}, 62 fn. 2). A similar acknowledgment made more recently comes from Ansell-Pearson and Large in their introduction to the section dedicated to Nietzsche’s early writings in \textit{The Nietzsche Reader}. Referring to Nietzsche’s unfinished essay on Schopenhauer from 1868, they note that the essay “shows that Nietzsche’s reception of Schopenhauer is an astutely critical one from the outset, and recognition of this suggests that the view that Nietzsche’s early period can be characterized as straightforwardly Schopenhauerian is in need of some revision” (\textit{The Nietzsche Reader}, ed. by Ansell-Pearson and Large, 4). One recent account that has made significant progress with regard to this revision is Aaron Ridley’s \textit{Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Art (RPG)}, (2007). In the text, Ridley problematizes readings of \textit{BT} that presuppose Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. Although Ridley reads \textit{BT} as presupposing a weak metaphysics, he still thinks that it is not Schopenhauerian: “It is… [a metaphysical level intermediate between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, which comprises ‘the essence of things’] that Nietzsche might have quite plausibly have thought of as ‘Dionysian’, and have had in mind, given the strong continuities between ‘On Schopenhauer’ and ‘Truth and ‘Lies’, when writing \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}. And, if so, this makes a weak version of the metaphysical thesis a genuine interpretive possibility… but which still stops short of the full blown Schopenhauerism of the strong version of the metaphysical thesis, a thesis that Nietzsche can be assumed to have rejected” (\textit{RPG}, 27). While I agree with aspects of Ridley’s argument here, mostly that Nietzsche is attempting to reject Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in \textit{BT}, there are two points on which I would distinguish my reading. On the one hand, as we shall see, there is a tripartite structure to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, similar to the view that Ridley attributes to Nietzsche here. In this regard, if we keep Ridley’s terms, the argument can be made that where he sees Nietzsche’s “weak metaphysics” as being un-Schopenhauerian it is actually an instance in which Nietzsche is most consistently Schopenhauerian—that is, because Schopenhauer’s attempt to bridge Plato and Kant commits him to thinking of the Ideas as obtaining in a metaphysical level intermediate between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. In some ways, this is what Nietzsche is picking up on in his conception of the Apollinian and Dionysian, while simultaneously trying to reject the Platonic notion that the Real is the un-apparent (for lack of a better term). Having this in mind will allow us to see more precisely where Nietzsche indeed tries to overcome Schopenhauer’s system. Cf. Béatrice Han-Pile, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics in the Birth of Tragedy,” \textit{European Journal of Philosophy}, 14:3 pp. 373–403, 2006. On the other hand, the other issue complicating things for Ridley is that while he reads \textit{BT} as rejecting the strong Schopenhauerian metaphysics in favor of a weak one because it helps to situate \textit{BT} between “On Schopenhauer” (1868) and “Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense” (1873), he accepts the standard view that \textit{HAH}’s emphasis on science represents a break with Nietzsche’s earlier position about art. The irony is that in accepting this view of \textit{HAH}, Ridley has then to account for Nietzsche’s return to emphasizing the importance of art. So on the one hand, \textit{BT} is not Schopenhauerian because it has to be continuous, but \textit{HAH} gets to be drastically discontinuous. I think more work needs to be done on what Nietzsche’s emphasis on science is doing in \textit{HAH}, especially in relation to art. For a fascinating discussion of \textit{HAH}, see the exchange in \textit{The Review of Politics}, between Paul Franco and Ruth Abbey, beginning with Franco’s, “Nietzsche’s \textit{Human, All Too Human} and the Problem of Culture,” Vol.69, #2, (March 2007), pp 215-243; Ruth Abbey’s critique of Franco in “Bricks and Stones: A Response to Paul Franco,” Vol.70, #2, (March 2008), pp 272-277; and Franco’s rejoinder in “Nooks and Hunched Backs: A Reply to Ruth Abbey,” Vol.70, #2, (March 2008), pp 278-283. Though I find Franco’s emphasis on the question of culture in \textit{HAH} compelling, both he and Abbey maintain the standard view of the text—namely that \textit{HAH}’s emphasis on science represents a break with Nietzsche’s earlier emphasis on art.
\end{footnotesize}
ultimately a ‘dream’, behind which stands the metaphysically real, the ‘thing in itself’. Second, it assumes the truth of Schopenhauer’s pessimism.\(^{17}\)

This chapter undermines both of these assumptions. Specifically, I show that in BT, Nietzsche employs Schopenhauerian terms in order 1) to begin his project of inverting Plato,\(^ {18}\) including Schopenhauer’s attempt to resolve the discrepancies between Plato and Kant, precisely 2) to reject Schopenhauer’s pessimism and metaphysics. Gaining clarity on these points will help us to understand better the structure of Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy,\(^ {19}\) which in turn puts us in a position to respond appropriately to his charges.

Although the notion of Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato is influential,\(^ {20}\) what it implies is quite controversial. The two main questions in this regard are: First, what does this reading entail about Nietzsche’s relationship to the “Western metaphysical tradition”? And, second, what is the relationship between this “inversion” and his “project” (does he even have a project)?

In other words, does Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato get him beyond metaphysics? And, what

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\(^{17}\) Julian Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2006), 14; henceforth *NPR*. Cf. Young’s claim in his earlier book, “The Birth of Tragedy, I shall argue (in ch. 2), was (not just cosmetically but fundamentally) influenced by in particular, Schopenhauer’s metaphysics and his philosophy of art. And on the crucial question of pessimism, the Schopenhauerian assessment of the worth of human existence is endorsed.” Julian Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

\(^{18}\) In one of his early sketches for BT, Nietzsche writes “My philosophy an inverted Platonism: the farther removed from true being, the purer, the finer, the better it is. Living in semblance as goal”; quoted in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, I, 154 (KSA, 7: 199: „Meine Philosophie umgedrehter Platonismus: je weiter ab vom wahrhaft Seienden, um so reiner schöner besser ist es. Das Leben im Schein als Ziel“). Although it might be argued that Nietzsche’s explicit target is Socrates in the text, I believe that reading BT as beginning his project to invert Plato helps to illuminate aspects of his argument—including his attempt to overcome Schopenhauer’s pessimism using Schopenhauer’s terms—that are otherwise missed.

\(^{19}\) In its simplest form, Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy can be articulated as: if democracy is merely a politicizing of slave morality, then democracy is pernicious to life. Much of our journey in the first four chapters will be spent trying to render clearly all of the relevant assumptions and moves underlying that formulation.

\(^{20}\) While many interpretations of Nietzsche assume this premise, and I think correctly, problems remain. Many of these interpretations proceed as if ‘Nietzsche’ is either a unitary phenomenon, or they focus primarily on the later writings. On the one hand, when advancing the former strategy, interpreters draw from Nietzsche’s works at different moments in his development to establish their position as if the works are all of one piece. This is not to deny that Nietzsche often says similar things throughout his career, but rather to insist that what the similarities are matter. For instance, it is not enough to refer to Nietzsche’s invocations of Dionysus in BT (1872) when interpreting *The Anti-Christ* (1888); if there are similarities in Nietzsche’s invocations of the Greek god, they need to be demonstrated. On the other hand, there are those who focus exclusively on the later works. Although I agree that any evaluation of Nietzsche’s most considered positions will have to rest on the later works, I believe that many interpretations miss small but important points as they do not account for how some of Nietzsche’s later claims have specific inflections because of the way they assume, nuance, or challenge earlier positions.
aspect of his philosophy do we privilege as providing the key to answering this question?\textsuperscript{21} In some ways, many of the controversies over these issues have emerged in response to Martin Heidegger’s conclusions. Though most of my concerns go beyond these controversies, my contention—that in \textit{BT} Nietzsche is already engaging in his attempt to invert Plato’s metaphysics—implies me within them, nonetheless. Therefore, it will be important for me to distinguish my position from Heidegger’s before turning to \textit{BT}.

In his famous lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger views his philosophy as an “Overturning of Platonism.”\textsuperscript{22} To begin, in many regards, we can view Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche in terms of his own conception of “thinking.”\textsuperscript{23} In his view, the most distinctive feature of \textit{Dasein} or human being, quite literally the type of being that the human is, is reflected in its thinking. To Heidegger, the human being is \textit{Da-sein} (being-there) in two important senses. The first is that human beings find themselves born into specific circumstances in the world, circumstances in which they are required \textit{implicitly} to think about the very nature of their being in order to make sense of their environments.\textsuperscript{24} But, not only do humans find themselves, in their everydayness,

\begin{itemize}
\item This also raises the question about which text(s) in Nietzsche’s \textit{Nachlass} is/are the most important.
\item Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, I, Chapter 24. See Hans Sluga’s brief criticism of David Krell’s rendering of Heidegger’s phrase \textit{Umdrehung des Platonismus} as overturning of Platonism. Though I agree that Sluga’s rendition of \textit{Umdrehung} here as inversion is more appropriate, given that Nietzsche uses the verb \textit{umgedrehten}, I believe that he, like Heidegger, misreads Nietzsche on this point. As I hope to show, Nietzsche intends both implications precisely because his inversion dissolves the dualism that underwrites Plato’s metaphysics. Hans Sluga, “Heidegger’s Nietzsche,” in \textit{A Companion to Heidegger}, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 102-120.
\item While Heidegger’s lectures, \textit{What is Called Thinking}?, are written and published well after his lectures on Nietzsche, his concerns with thinking are already present, often implicitly, in his earlier works. Further, despite agreeing with Glenn Gray, that “In… [Heidegger’s] intellectual development this book [\textit{What is Called Thinking}?] proves to be something of a turning point,” with regards to Nietzsche, I want to emphasize that it is only “something of a turning point.” Although Heidegger emphasizes different themes in his writings after the Second World War, Nietzsche’s thought remains central to Heidegger’s concerns about art, language, metaphysics, and technology as he matures. Martin Heidegger, \textit{What is Called Thinking}?, trans. by J. Glenn Gray, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), vii. See Hans Sluga’s “Heidegger’s Nietzsche.”
\item This is an important aspect of what Heidegger refers to as our thrownness. To be clear, \textit{Dasein} being thrown into a world does not entail speculative reflection or imply that human beings arrive thinking about our Being explicitly; rather, the processes by which human beings develop the capacity to become participants within a culture—as we develop instincts, attitudes, moods, and dispositions—require us to draw on pre-speculative impressions on what we are (and \textit{crucially} on the fact \textit{that} we are): “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence” Martin
\end{itemize}
thrown into a world and relying on their implicit pre-reflective intuitions about their being, they soon begin to formulate explicitly the question about what conditions their being. Secondly, not only does Dasein begin to reflect on the nature of its Being, but also such reflection is itself an indispensable feature of its being. Dasein, for Heidegger, is the being for whom the question of Being constitutionally must arise. For instance, when attempting, in Being and Time, to demonstrate why Dasein is the appropriate being to formulate properly the question of Being, he says,

Dasein accordingly takes priority over all other entities in several ways. The first priority is an ontical one: Dasein is an entity whose being has the determinate character of existence. The second priority is an ontological one: Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it. But with equal primordiality Dasein also possesses within – as constitutive for its understanding of existence – an understanding of the Being of all entities of a character other than its own. Dasein has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies.

Because existence is the prerequisite condition for Dasein to begin comprehending itself as a being, and a notion of its being is already presupposed, in some form, in its inquiry, when Dasein questions its being in the world it also implicitly raises the question of the Being of all entities.

Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1962), 33 {German page, 12}. Another crucial issue to note with regard to our thrownness is its unavoidable temporal dimension. It is for this reason, Heidegger maintains, that “time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being” 39 {17}.

25 I use the capital Being when referring to Heidegger’s discussion of what it is that conditions that beings are, and the lowercase being when talking about things that exist.
26 Hedegger says, “Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue.” Heidegger, Being and Time, 236 {191}. To be clear though, only philosophers of the highest order are ever able to formulate the question of Being in a manner that is consistent with Being’s own unconcealment. In other words, as Being reveals itself, or comes to presence, only philosophers of the first order can formulate the question about Being (I will avoid pronouns to be consistent with what I take Heidegger’s point to be) in a way that captures something of Being’s nature. And of course that is before Being retreats into concealment and is forgotten. I jump forward a bit here; what I mean though will become clearer as we proceed (especially see notes 20-24 below).
27 Ibid., 34 {13}.
28 By inquiry I simply mean here a readiness to encounter, deal with, learn from and respond to one’s environment.
29 So far my framing of Heidegger’s concern has been regarding “the question of Being.” Although this is not necessarily incorrect, it may be a bit misleading. For Heidegger, the fundamental question of Being regards the
For Heidegger, though this is a central feature of *Dasein’s* being, the moment the question of Being is raised philosophically Being itself is forgotten. Heidegger’s narrative goes something like this: Originally, when the Greeks (especially Heraclitus and Parmenides) began to formulate the question of Being explicitly, they insightfully responded that it is *physis*, which Heidegger renders as emergence and unfolding. He contends:

Now what does the word *phusis* say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway…. This emerging and standing-out-in-itself-from-itself may not be taken as just one process among others that we observe in beings. *Phusis* is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.  

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meaning of Being [*Die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein*]. Following Franz Brentano, Heidegger shifts the question from simply that of Being to that of its meaning. This shift, in his view, returns the question to the problematic raised by Aristotle; and returning it to this context allows us to discover the ways in which the Western philosophical tradition has devalued Being by formulating the question metaphysically. The main difference between the accounts lies in the assumption implicit in the traditional formulation. Conceiving of it as the *question* of Being has come to imply that Being is a singular thing, thus reducing it to something akin to an entity, whereas, the question of the meaning of Being recognizes that things *are*, and present themselves to us, in numerous ways (this formulation also reveals Husserl’s influence on Heidegger, and Heidegger’s own phenomenological approach). In other words, if things *are* in numerous ways, and their being means several things, why presume that the Being of their being will be singular? Rather than emphasizing a singular/plural distinction here, another way to think about it is in terms of a transcendence and/or substance ontology. For instance, the notion, in Heidegger’s view, that Being is something which transcends the world, but is still related to the things in the world (often described in terms of resemblance) renders Being itself as a sort of thing. In other words, the onto-theological assumption that the Being of beings has a character similar to beings (entities) seems to reduce it to the status of an entity. So Heidegger asks in *On Time and Being*, “If being [*Seiende*] is predicated with manifold significance, then what is its leading, fundamental signification? What does Being [*Sein*] mean?” Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper &Row, 1972), 74. It is this recognition, along with these questions, that compel Heidegger to begin his inquiry with an emphasis on how appropriately to formulate the question of Being. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*; David Farrell Krell ed., *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall eds., *A Companion to Heidegger (ACH)*; “Introduction,” by Dreyfus and Wrathall; Sluga, “Heidegger’s Nietzsche”; and especially “Dasein,” by Thomas Sheehan, who discusses these issues in more detail than I can here (although I am not convinced that Heidegger saw the questions about *Sein des Seienden* as distinct from *Anwesen des Anwesenden* as Sheehan suggests). Heidegger seems, in my view, to think of both as asking the same thing: the problem is that the classical formulation of the question about *Sein des Seienden* imported onto-theological assumptions that ultimately reduce Being to the status of a being, or entity).  

*30* Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics (IM)*, trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 15 (11). However, while thinking of Being as *physis* the Greeks began conflating Being with beings as a whole: “In the age of the first unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning about beings as such and as a whole received its true inception, beings were called *phusis*” (14 {10}). It is here, he argues, that the metaphysical tradition commences.
Despite the insightfulness of their answer, however, Heidegger maintains that the Greeks still identified this unfolding too closely to entities and, as such, soon after the question of Being was raised explicitly, the meaning of Being was forgotten.\(^{31}\) To be clear though, Heidegger’s point is not to say that the Greeks simply made a category mistake by interpreting Being as *physis*; rather, his point is that as Being presents itself to us (literally makes itself present), it also conceals something of itself from us.\(^{32}\) In fact, part of Plato’s brilliance is that he also glimpses this point. However, rather than thinking of Being in terms of emergent self-unfolding which both comes to and retreats from presence, Plato interprets the hiddenness, the concealment, of Being in terms of transcendence.\(^ {33}\)

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\(^{31}\) For Heidegger, while the Greeks initially glimpse the meaning of Being in *physis* they then conflate the question of the Being of beings with the question of beings as a whole (especially with Platonism), and begin compartmentalizing the way they think of their experience and knowledge of the world with the introduction of the notion of *techne*—“the knowing disposal over the free planning and arranging and controlling of arrangements” (Heidegger, *IM*, 18 [13]). *Physis*, in its initial iteration, “means the emerging sway, and the enduring over which it thoroughly holds sway. This emerging, abiding sway includes both ‘becoming’ as well as ‘Being’ in the narrower sense of fixed continuity,” and, “is the event of *standing forth*, arising from the concealed and thus enabling the concealed to take its stand for the first time” (16[12]); with the introduction of the notion of *techne*, the notion of *physis* gets carved up into specific spheres to study, something over which human knowledge can exert mastery. It is with this compartmentalizing that the question of Being as *meta ta physika* emerges (18 [13]). Being is further forgotten, in Heidegger’s view, when the Greek term, *physis*, gets translated into Latin. He says: “This translation of Greek into Roman [of *physis* into *natura*] was not an arbitrary and innocuous process but was the first stage in the isolation and alienation of the originary essence of Greek philosophy” (14 {10-11}).

\(^{32}\) After thinking about the many permutations in the “grammar and etymology” of the term Being, Heidegger says in a couple of passages that capture much of this: “What grounds and holds together all the determinations of Being we have listed is what the Greeks experienced without question as the meaning of Being, which they called *ousia*, or more fully *parousia*. The usual thoughtlessness translates *ousia* as ‘substance’ and thereby misses it entirely. In German, we have an appropriate expression for *parousia* in our word *An-wesen* «coming-to-presence». We use *Anwesen* as a name for a self-contained farm or homestead. In Aristotle’s times, too, *ousia* was still used in this sense as well as in its meaning as a basic philosophical word. Something comes to presence. It stands in itself and thus puts itself forth. It is. For the Greeks, ‘Being’ fundamentally means presence….. “What we have said helps us to understand the Greek interpretation of Being that we mentioned at the beginning, in our explication of the term ‘metaphysics’—that is, the apprehension of Being as *physis*. The later concepts of ‘nature,’ we said, must be held at a distance from this: *physis* means the emergent self-upraising, the self-unfolding that abides in itself. In this sway, rest and movement are closed and opened up from an originary unity. This sway is the overwhelming coming-to-presence that has not yet been surmounted in thinking, and within which *that which* comes to presence essentially unfolds as beings. But this sway first steps forth from concealment—that is, in Greek, *aletheia* (unconcealment) happens—insofar as the sway struggles itself forth as a world.” *IM*, 64 {46-47}.

Cf. Sheehan, “Dasein,” in *ACH*.

\(^{33}\) Also, as suggested in footnote 28 above, transcendence, like substance, in Heidegger’s view, renders Being as akin to beings, thereby missing the point discovered in the originary moment of Being’s unconcealment with the pre-Socratics.
It is precisely this notion, of Being as transcendence, that Heidegger sees Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power as attempting to overturn. In his first lecture on Nietzsche Heidegger says, “But we can never succeed in arriving at Nietzsche’s philosophy proper if we have not in our questioning conceived of Nietzsche as the end of Western metaphysics and proceeded to the entirely different question of the truth of Being.” For Heidegger, Nietzsche is the end of Western metaphysics in, at least, two important senses. On the one hand, Heidegger says, “Nietzsche’s procedure, his manner of thinking in the execution of the new valuation, is perpetual reversal.” Heidegger suggests that from his account of art as the “stimulans of life” to his notion of truth as “the kind of error without which a certain kind of living being could not live,” Nietzsche “can be grasped only in terms of his fundamental position in opposition to all Western philosophy since Plato.”

However, given Heidegger’s own account of philosophy’s implication with metaphysics, he contends that Nietzsche’s reversal of Western metaphysics is itself metaphysical. Heidegger views Nietzsche’s philosophy as metaphysics because he sees his notion of the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same as concerned with Being and beings as a whole. Here Nietzsche is a metaphysical thinker because he thinks one single thought about Being, but does

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34 Heidegger says, “What is needed is neither abolition of the sensuous nor the abolition of the nonsensuous. On the contrary, what must be cast aside is the misinterpretation, the deprecation, of the sensuous, as well as the extravagant elevation of the supersensuous” (Heidegger, Nietzsche I, 209).
35 Heidegger, Nietzsche I, 10.
37 Heidegger, Nietzsche I, 29.
38 As mentioned above, Heidegger suggests that as we, Dasein, attempt to deal with our existence we begin to formulate the question of the Being of beings explicitly. However, as Being discloses itself to us, it also retreats into concealment. In turn, we forget Being. Yet, we continue to attempt to formulate the question. Historically, as we have done so Being has made itself present to philosophers of the first rank, who have been able to think Being, albeit limitedly (i.e. metaphysically); thus constituting the Western philosophical tradition. Regarding these first order philosophers’, and Nietzsche’s place in this philosophical tradition, Heidegger says: “Nietzsche belongs among the essential thinkers. With the term thinker we name those exceptional human beings who are destined to think one single thought, a thought that is always ‘about’ beings as a whole. Each thinker thinks only one single thought” (Heidegger, Nietzsche III: 4). In the first lecture course Heidegger says, “[T]he reference to the fact that Nietzsche moves in the orbit of the question of Western philosophy only serves to make clear that Nietzsche knew
so through a concern with the whole of beings—that is, his thought asks the question of Being as *meta-ta-physika.* For example, Heidegger says that while Nietzsche characterizes his philosophy as inverted Platonism, “the inversion does not eliminate the fundamentally Platonic position. Rather, precisely because it seems to eliminate the Platonic position, Nietzsche’s inversion represents the entrenchment of that position.” Rather than undermining the Platonic questioning of Being by way of beings, Heidegger sees Nietzsche’s inversion as bringing this metaphysical form of raising the question of Being full circle. As such, while reading Nietzsche’s “Heraclitean” aphorism, the one labeled “Recapitulation” by Nietzsche’s longtime friend Peter Gast (Johann Heinrich Köselitz) as an attempt to reverse the onto-theological implications that have become central to the history of Western philosophy, Heidegger still views it as representing Nietzsche’s metaphysical thought. In fact, for Heidegger, this aphorism not only encapsulates Nietzsche’s metaphysics but exemplifies the second way in which it is simultaneously metaphysical and the end of metaphysics.

Heidegger ultimately contends that Nietzsche’s metaphysics is the consummation of the Western metaphysical tradition. He says,

To what extent is Nietzsche’s thinking the end? ... Precisely to the extent that Nietzsche argues that being *is* as fixated, as permanent; and that it *is* in perpetual creation and destruction. Yet being is *both* of these, not in an extrinsic way, as one

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what philosophy is. Such knowledge is rare. Only great thinkers possess it. The greatest possess it most purely in the form of a persistent question. The genuinely grounding question, as the question of Being, does not unfold in the history of philosophy as such; Nietzsche too persists in the guiding question” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, 4). And also: “Every true thinking lets itself be determined by what is to be thought. In philosophy the Being of beings is to be thought. For philosophy’s thinking and questioning there is no loftier and stricter commitment.... Because in philosophical thought the highest possible commitment prevails, all great thinkers think the same. Yet this ‘same’ is so essential and so rich that no single thinker exhausts it” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, 35-36). As we will see, Heidegger changes his position on this last point by the time of the final *Nietzsche* lectures.

39 See note 30 above.
40 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 205.
41 “To stamp Becoming with the character of Being—that is the supreme will to power.” Nietzsche, *WP*, § 617, 330. Note that Kaufmann and Hollingdale translate *dem Werden* and *des Seins* with lowercase b’s as becoming and being, whereas Krell translates them with capital B’s to maintain Heidegger’s emphasis. Nietzsche writes: „Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins aufzuprägen—das ist der höchste Wille zur Macht“ (KSA, 12: 312). See Heidegger’ discussions of this aphorism in Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, 19; *Nietzsche II*, 201-203; *Nietzsche III*, 156-157.
beside another; rather, being is in its very ground perpetual creation (Becoming), while as creation it needs what is fixed. Creation needs what is fixed, first, in order to overcome it, and second, in order to have something that has yet to be fixated and be transfigured. The essence of being is Becoming, but what becomes is and has Being only in creative transfiguration. What is and what becomes are fused in the fundamental thought that what becomes is inasmuch as in creation it becomes being and is becoming. But such becoming-a-being becomes a being that comes-to-be, and does so in the perpetual Becoming of what has become firmly fixed and inflexible, fixated by way of a liberating transfiguration.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche II}, 200-201.}

Because of his idiosyncratic concerns with the question of Being, rather than reading Nietzsche’s attempt to overturn the Platonic dualism between the Real and the Apparent in “Recapitulation” as a demand that becoming be viewed as the real, Heidegger interprets the claim as reproducing the onto-theological impulse at the center of the Western philosophical tradition by importing the notion of permanence.\footnote{In other words, he reintroduces the very notion that Nietzsche sees as unnecessary, namely that of Being. Heidegger writes: “Why is this [the imposition of Becoming with the character of Being] the supreme will to power? The answer is, because will to power in its most profound essence is nothing other than the permanentizing of Becoming into presence. “In this interpretation of Being, the primordial thinking of Being as \textit{physis} advances through the extreme point of the fundamental position of modern metaphysics, thus coming to its completion. Rising and appearing, becoming and presencing, are in the thought of \textit{will to power} thought back to the unity of the essence of ‘Being’ according to its initial and primordial meaning, not as an imitation of the Greek but as a transformation of the modern thinking of being to its allotted consummation” (Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche III}, 156).}

In Heidegger’s view, Nietzsche’s movement from a concern with the whole of beings to providing an account of the Being of beings in the form of will to power and the eternal recurrence allows him to think Being in terms similar to the originary context in which it was first disclosed in philosophy. However, he does so on novel terms, precisely by incorporating the notion of permanence into Becoming. It is here that Heidegger contends:

This means that the primordial interpretation of Being as the permanence of presence is now rescued by being placed beyond question. The question as to where the truth of this first and last metaphysical interpretation of Being is grounded, the question as to whether such a ground is ever to be experienced within metaphysics, is now so far away that it cannot be asked at all. For now the essence of Being appears to be so broadly and essentially grasped that it is also equal to whatever becomes, to “life,” indeed as its concept.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche III}, 157.}
In other words, for Heidegger, in rendering Becoming as permanent, Nietzsche is able to gain a fundamental insight into the truth of Being while still devaluing Being by thinking of Being in terms of beings. It is precisely because of this confluence of events\(^{45}\) that Nietzsche is able to exhaust the metaphysical questioning of Being.\(^{46}\) As such, Heidegger suggests that the question of Being can no longer be asked in metaphysical terms without merely repeating Nietzsche’s consummation. So he proposes in *What is Called Thinking*: 

> We must learn thinking because our being able to think, and even gifted for it, is still no guarantee that we are capable of thinking. To be capable, we must before all else incline toward what addresses itself to thought—and that is that which of itself gives food for thought is what we call most thought-provoking. Our answer to the question what the most thought-provoking thing might be is the assertion: most thought-provoking for our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.\(^{47}\)

In other words, it is up to us who come after Nietzsche’s consummation to prepare ourselves to think Being differently than it has been thought before when it discloses itself to us.

While Heidegger is correct to emphasize the centrality of Nietzsche’s desire to invert Platonism, many of his conclusions about Nietzsche are predicated on his idiosyncratic concerns about metaphysics and the question of Being.\(^{48}\) Furthermore, these notions seem untenable once

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\(^{45}\) It is important to think of the factors coming together in terms of events, for Heidegger, because they are all predicated on Being’s self-disclosure in coming to presence in Nietzsche’s thought. In other words, while we begin to formulate the question of Being partly because it helps us to understand ourselves in our worlds, the question can only be formulated because of Being’s self-unconcealment. Because of our limited natures—we have limited cognitive capacities, the contexts in which we are born generate and constrain the possibilities for our understandings of the world, and death limits how much we can know as well as the sorts of things that draw our attention—we have been devaluing Being by thinking of it in terms of beings. But, this is also an effect of Being’s self-disclosure. Heidegger says, “The overshadowing of Being by beings derives from Being itself” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche III*, 157). So the coming together of these separate factors, in the thought of a thinker, is best thought of as events related to Being’s coming to presence and its withdrawal back into concealment. Hence time is the horizon within which Being can be thought. 

\(^{46}\) Heidegger has changed his position from the first two lectures here. See note 38 above. 

\(^{47}\) Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 17. 

\(^{48}\) See also Richard Rorty’s discussion of Heidegger’s idiosyncratic language in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115. For a recent treatment which acknowledges Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato, but also disagrees with Heidegger’s “metaphysical” reading, see Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). For instance, Pippin says, “Nietzsche is much better understood not as a great German metaphysician, or as the last metaphysician of the West, or as the destroyer or culminator of metaphysics, or as very interested in metaphysics or a new theory of nature at
questioned: Why is the guiding question of all philosophy the question of Being? Why not, for instance, what is the good life, or how do I live well? Given the shifts in Nietzsche’s thought, why contend that he has one single thought (not to mention the questions around Heidegger’s own ‘kehre’)? Why contend that any thinker has one single thought? In what follows I show how reading Nietzsche as already attempting to invert Plato as early as in BT allows us to see, in some detail, some of the ways in which he strives to dissolve the metaphysical dualism at the heart of the Western philosophical tradition. In fact, reading him on these terms will illuminate how Nietzsche is already challenging Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in attempt to overturn the Platonic dualism between the Real and the Apparent. This, in turn, will help us to see more clearly some of the ways in which BT and Nietzsche’s second Untimely Meditation, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” presage some of his later concerns when he begins articulating his criticisms of democracy in the later writings. Now to The Birth of Tragedy.

Tragedy, Greek Cheerfulness, and the Rejection of Pessimism

In the “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” one of his prefaces written fifteen years after The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche contends that perhaps the gravest question raised in BT is: “What, seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality?” In many regards this question is all, but as one of the great “French moralists” (9). In many regards Pippin’s argument can best be understood as a response to Bernard Williams’s attempt, and challenge, to read Nietzsche as a naturalist, moral psychologist. While I agree with many of Pippin’s claims about Nietzsche’s psychological approach, especially reading him along the lines of the French moralistes, my concern here is less about the implications of how we categorize Nietzsche’s contributions—that is, about which -ism best captures him. And although I think there are many merits to Pippin’s arguments, one difference that I find decisive about my reading in this chapter, is the way I demonstrate, in detail, how early in his career Nietzsche began developing his inversion of Plato.

49 Friedrich Nietzsche, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” (ASC) in BT, ASC §4, 22.
anachronistic given Nietzsche’s lack of explicit focus on morality in *BT*; but, if the claim is taken as a heuristic device, it opens up an insightful way to approach the text.\(^5^0\)

In the “Preface to Richard Wagner” Nietzsche contends that it was when Wagner’s *Festschrift* “on Beethoven came into being, amid the terrors and sublimities of the war that had just broken out, that I collected myself for these reflections.”\(^5^1\) This is the first clue for readers of the text. In part, some of the arguments in *BT* reflect his meditations on the ‘terror and sublimities’ that humans experience in life, war being an extreme example in this regard. Simultaneously, many of these thoughts also reflect Nietzsche’s struggling with Wagner’s thought and music, and especially with Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. As is generally accepted, there are numerous points of agreement with Schopenhauer in the text. Perhaps, the firmest agreement is that, at bottom, suffering is primary to the nature of existence. Following a formulation advanced by Matthew Meyer in his review of Tobias Dahlkvist’s *Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism*, I will refer to this point as descriptive pessimism.\(^5^2\) It is true that Nietzsche adopts Schopenhauer’s language and imagery of the will, but he employs it to

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\(^5^0\) While I will not enter into debates about whether any reading of a text can avoid being somewhat anachronistic, I am going to use Nietzsche’s insight to provide a reading of what I think *BT* performs, on the one hand, and the way it provides a helpful context within which to interpret Nietzsche’s later writings, on the other.

\(^5^1\) *BT*, PW, 31. Nietzsche is referring to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871.

\(^5^2\) In his review, Meyer raises a concern with one of Dahlkvist’s distinctions, saying, “I think that Dahlkvist’s attempt to subsume [distinction] (3) [the view that our world is the worst of all possible worlds] under [distinction] (4) [the view that existence cannot be justified and thus non-existence is preferable to existence] leads to a misreading of the role pessimism plays in *BT*. This is because one can only understand the pessimism of Nietzsche’s first work by clearly distinguishing between what I will call factual pessimism and evaluative pessimism. Whereas factual pessimism either directly asserts or indirectly entails the ineluctable fact of human suffering, evaluative pessimism states that non-existence is preferable to existence. Dahlkvist needs this distinction when reading *BT* because Nietzsche’s originality lies in the fact that he accepts factual pessimism but nevertheless rejects evaluative pessimism.” Matthew Meyer, Review Essay in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Ed. Christa Davis Acampora, [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/jns/reviews/tobias-dahlkvist,-nietzsche-and-the-philosophy-of-pessimism,-a-study-of-nietzsche2019s-relation-to-the-pessimistic-tradition-schopenhauer-hartmann-leopardi](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/jns/reviews/tobias-dahlkvist,-nietzsche-and-the-philosophy-of-pessimism,-a-study-of-nietzsche2019s-relation-to-the-pessimistic-tradition-schopenhauer-hartmann-leopardi). While I find this distinction eminently helpful, I will refer to descriptive rather than factual pessimism in my discussion. I do so because the notion of descriptive pessimism eschews some of the problems that can emerge with reliance on the term ‘factual’ pessimism. Although he does not yet begin problematizing it in *BT*, I think that the phrase descriptive pessimism better captures the general direction in which Nietzsche’s thought is moving as he develops his perspectival skepticism regarding the notion of “facts.” Cf. Tobias Dahlkvist, *Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism*, (Uppsala, SE: Uppsala Universitet, 2007).
challenge the very nature of the Reality/Appearance dualism central to both Plato’s and Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. For instance, although he accepts many of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic categories, Nietzsche’s view of Greek tragedy challenges Schopenhauer’s evaluation of its importance. In fact, Nietzsche’s turn to Greek tragedy can be read as a direct assault on Schopenhauer’s evaluative pessimism.

So what clue does Nietzsche’s “gravest question of all,” provide for reading *BT*? When Nietzsche asks “what, seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality?” he uses the verb “bedeuten” which also implies a question of purpose. Not only is he asking what does it mean, he is also asking what is its point, what purpose does it serve, is it significant, when viewed from the perspective of life? I take Nietzsche here to be questioning the way morality operates as a discourse of legitimation. The question is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, if human beings had recourse to ahistorical moral absolutes, moral conflicts would easily be resolved; we would simply appeal to them and adjudicate between good and evil. However, when evaluated in the midst of war, morality seems impotent at best, or at worst, pernicious. On the one hand, morality, with its claims about absolute rightness and wrongness, is impotent to solve the conflict. On the other hand, both sides in war often make claims justifying their rightness on moral terms. The implication, from this perspective, is that morality is insignificant. Secondly, Nietzsche’s question also challenges the claim, at least implicitly, that

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53 Ultimately, in his later works, Nietzsche will recognize that the implication of inverting this dualism is that as we think of the Real as the Apparent, we must think of Appearance as the Real.

54 Although in its specificities Nietzsche refers to European Christian, and post-Christian, moral categories, he often uses the term morality in a pejorative sense referring to a rubric that proclaims itself as absolute and that is supposed to have a single standard for all human beings. For a sustained discussion of some nuances in Nietzsche’s use of the term morality see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*.

55 Nietzsche writes: „Was bedeutet, unter der Optik des Lebens gesehen – die Moral?“

56 I am thinking here of how Jean-Francois Lyotard describes meta-narratives as grand discourses used to legitimate particular forms of knowledge, in *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

57 This is not to say that the terrors of war are essentially bad in Nietzsche’s view; he also finds sublimities in it. The problem, here, is that if both sides are supposedly (absolutely) morally correct the appeal to morality is superfluous.
morality can be a justification for existence—that is, that it provides an affirmative response to the question, “is life worth living?” So immediately, he presents his alternative. Instead of morality, Nietzsche is “convinced that art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life.” The question here, however, is what does this shift entail? In other words, what does Nietzsche mean when he says that it is “only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified”?

Nietzsche’s position suggests that choosing a particular mode of behavior is similar to making artistic decisions. Not to suggest that our commitments are merely questions of taste, but that decisions of conduct themselves derive from impulses that emerge from the fact that we are interpreters of existence. This reflects Nietzsche’s conception of art and the nature of the world. He begins BT with the assertion:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollinian and Dionysian duality—just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.

Implicitly here, Nietzsche challenges the Platonic notion that art is inferior to the Socratic method. He does this by presenting aesthetics itself as a science and talking about tragedy’s

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As Walter Kaufmann argues, “Nietzsche’s basic problem is whether a new sanction can be found in this world for our values…” Nietzsche, 122. I will say more about Nietzsche’s view of life in chapter two.

58 This connection will become clearer as we proceed.
59 BT, PW, 31-32.
60 BT §5, 52; §24, 141. In many respects, this formulation itself is a clue regarding Nietzsche’s challenge to Schopenhauer’s pessimism; for the notion that existence is justified contrasts with Schopenhauer’s suggestion that non-existence is preferable to existence. See Tobias Dahlkvist’s, Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism, for a discussion of Schopenhauer’s brand of pessimism.
61 BT §1, 33.
62 Later on Nietzsche says, “Indeed, Plato has given to all posterity the model of a new art form, the model of the novel—which may be described as an infinitely enhanced Aesopian fable, in which poetry holds the same rank in relation to dialectical philosophy as this same philosophy held for many centuries in relation to theology: namely, the rank of ancilla [handmaid]…. Here philosophic thought overgrows art and compels it to cling close to the trunk of dialectic” (BT §14, 91).
63 Remember here that the term Wissenschaft encompasses both the social and natural sciences. In the mean time, the book also “dares” to “look at science in the perspective of the artist, but art in that of life” (ASC, §2, 19).
historical development in terms of the dialectical relationship between the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* artistic impulses.\(^{64}\) This, in turn, helps Nietzsche set up his argument about the nature of the world and human beings.

Nietzsche presents his account of the two artistic impulses in analogy to dreams and intoxication. He uses these analogies to account for his view regarding the centrality of suffering in the world.\(^{65}\) Nietzsche likens the *Apollinian* impulse to the beautiful illusion of the dream world, which soothes and prophesies. He says,

> [The] joyous necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in their Apollo: Apollo, the god of all plastic energies, is at the same time the soothsaying god. He, who (as the etymology of the name indicates) is the “shining one,” the deity of light, is also the ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy. The higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping in sleep and dreams, is at the same time the symbolical analogue of the soothsaying faculty and of the arts generally, which make life possible and worth living.\(^{66}\)

Because he maintains descriptive pessimism,\(^{67}\) Nietzsche conceives of dreams and the plastic arts as healing faculties that make life bearable. However, he warns that Apollo, even in his most soothing form, is still merely a beautiful illusion.\(^{68}\) When the *Apollinian* illusion collapses,

\(^{64}\) Although it would be easy to read Nietzsche’s talk about the art impulses springing from nature in a straightforwardly metaphysical way, I agree with Martha Nussbaum when she argues that these references are Nietzsche’s way of alerting us that “cognitive activity is itself thoroughly practical, and can only be explained as answering a practical need” Nussbaum, “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. by Christopher Janaway, (1999), 359. This is not to argue that Nietzsche’s position is entirely free of metaphysical import, but to suggest that this aspect of his argument does not need be seen as any more metaphysical than claims about the animating norms that influence our dispositions.

\(^{65}\) For example, in reference to Raphael’s painting, Nietzsche says the *Transfiguration* “shows us the reflection of suffering, primal and eternal, the sole ground of the world” (*BT*, §4, 45). Also, when discussing the tragic chorus Nietzsche says, “sharing his [Dionysus’s] suffering it also shares something of his *wisdom* and proclaims the truth from the heart of the world” (*BT*, §8, 65).

\(^{66}\) *BT*, §1, 35.

\(^{67}\) See note 51 above.

\(^{68}\) Kaufmann argues that in *BT*, “Nietzsche did not extol one at the expense of the other; but if he favors one of the two gods, it is Apollo” (Nietzsche, 128). To develop this argument, Kaufmann focuses on the destructive aspects of Dionysus’s nature, and identifies the difference between the Dionysus of the early writings and the Dionysus of the later works. Kaufmann is right to note differences between the two conceptions of Dionysus in Nietzsche’s thinking, but if Nietzsche were to favor one god over the other there is enough evidence in the text to suggest that it would have to be Dionysus—that is, because it is through Dionysian revelry, in Nietzsche’s view, that our creative
“we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian.” The Dionysian impulse, Nietzsche suggests, is best represented by the analogy of intoxication. Similar to the ways in which intoxication loosens inhibitions and allows normally dormant or suppressed facets of one’s personality to emerge, the Dionysian places us in touch with those features of ourselves and others. It releases us from the shackles of illusion—particularly the illusion that we are autonomous individuals living in an ordered universe—by reaffirming the natural relationship between human beings as sufferers in the world.

It is at this point that Nietzsche’s subversion of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics begins to crystalize. In The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer tries to read the Kantian dualism between noumena and phenomena alongside the Platonic dualism between Idea and Appearance. It is in his attempt to accomplish this reading that Schopenhauer argues that Will is the thing-in-itself (Will also turns out to be primarily the will-to-live), and objects of knowledge (i.e. concepts and objects of perception) are representations that our intellects organize in terms of time, space, and causality about the things that we experience. In other

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69 BT, §1, 36.

70 We can just visualize the formal Protestant context in which Nietzsche writes this.

71 Schopenhauer contends that “All representation… is phenomenon. But only the will is thing-in-itself” Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation vol. 1, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, §21, 110. Henceforth, WWR, 1.

72 Schopenhauer writes, “and as what the will wills is always life… it is immaterial and a mere pleonasm if, instead of simply saying ‘the will,’ we say ‘the will-to-live’ WWR. 1 §54, 275.

73 We still ought not think of “the objects of our perceptions” (“OP”) as “things” prior to our experiences, because everything is undifferentiated will. The “OP” only become “things” after we experience them—that is in our experiences they appear to us as individuated. Simultaneously, of course, in good Kantian fashion, Schopenhauer suggests that the conditions for the possibility of experience result because our rational faculties (while in struggle with the other aspects of the will) interpret the world (which is also undifferentiated Will) through the categories of
words, things as they are in themselves have no identity—they are not differentiated—and it is only in the phenomenal realm that they become individuated. As Christopher Janaway explains:

“Space and time are the principle of individuation, or in [Schopenhauer’s] favored Latin version, the *principium individuationis*; and there can be no individuals on the ‘in itself’ side of the line.”

However, the question here is, if *Will* as the thing-in-itself is undifferentiated (and we are *will* as well) *how* does the world, and ourselves in it, appear to us in the form of objects of perception? Schopenhauer responds,

For the purely knowing subject as such, this body is a representation like any other, an object among objects. Its movements and actions are so far from known to him in just the same way as the changes of all other objects of perception; and they would be equally strange and incomprehensible to him, if their meaning were not unraveled for him in an entirely different way…. [T]he answer to the riddle is given to the subject of knowledge appearing as individual, and this answer is given in the word *Will*. This and this alone gives him the key to his own phenomenon, reveals to him the significance and shows him the inner mechanism of his being, his actions, his movements. To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known to everyone, and is denoted by the word *will*. Every true act of his will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body. The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in entirely two different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for the understanding…. Therefore, in a certain sense, it can also be said that the will is knowledge *a priori* of the body, and that the body is knowledge *a posteriori* of the will.

Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer argues that we can know the thing-in-itself; but this knowledge is different from the knowledge we have of objects differentiated through the categories of space, time, and causality (as concepts or objects of perception). This special type of knowledge is possible only if the thing-in-itself is *Will*, and we, as *will*, know ourselves directly—that is, with

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75 Schopenhauer, *WWR*. I §18, 99-100.
immediacy—as acts-of-will. In this sense, we know ourselves as undifferentiated will that also differentiates itself through action (i.e. willing), which subsumes us to the principium individuationis (space, time and causality), and turns us into objects of perception for the understanding. However, the question remains: how do we know ourselves directly as will?

The answer to this question, for Schopenhauer, regards suffering. It is here also that Schopenhauer’s reading of Plato comes to the fore. For Schopenhauer, suffering is the major byproduct of willing, and it is with the cessation of willing that human beings can escape from misery. Or, as Christopher Janaway notes,

To this hidden nature [the thing-in-itself, Schopenhauer] gave the name will, and with it he now associated the ‘misery’ which ordinary life had to offer. By contrast, if only he could cease being this will, and cease imposing all subjective forms of connection, the same world would take on a wholly different aspect, revealing itself spread out before him in timeless objective glory as a panoply of Platonic Ideas. 

However, the cessation of the will occurs primarily in aesthetic experience. Schopenhauer puts all of these points together as follows:

In the aesthetic method of consideration we found two inseparable constituent parts: namely, knowledge of the object not as individual thing, but as Platonic Idea, in other words, as persistent form of this whole species of things; and the self-consciousness of the knower, not as individual, but as pure, will-less subject of knowledge. The condition under which the two constituent parts appear always united was the abandonment of the method of knowledge that is bound by the principle of sufficient reason…. All willing springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfillment brings this to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied…. No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which reprieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of our desires with its constant hope and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace…. When, however, an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thralldom of will, the attention of will, the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but

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77 Janaway, Schopenhauer, 21-22.
comprehends things free from their relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively… Then all at once peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us. 

But this is just the state that I described above as necessary for knowledge of the Idea, as pure contemplation, absorption in perception, being lost in the object, forgetting all individuality, abolishing the kind of knowledge which follows the principle of sufficient reason, and comprehends only relations. It is the state where, simultaneously and inseparably, the perceived individual thing is raised to the idea of its species, and the knowing individual to the pure subject of will-less knowing, and now the two, as such, no longer stand in the stream of time and of all other relations. 

In all these remarks, I have sought to make clear the nature and extent of the share which the subjective condition has in aesthetic pleasure, namely deliverance of knowledge from the service of the will. 

Schopenhauer views the thing-in-itself as Will, and it is only in aesthetic contemplation—when knowledge itself is liberated both from willing and experiencing through the categories of space and time—that we attain objective knowledge of it (Will). This knowledge of Will, Schopenhauer contends, corresponds with the Platonic notion of the Form or Ideas. In this sense, then, the Platonic Idea is both the thing-in-itself (Will) and our most objective knowledge of it:

“Therefore, it [the Idea] alone is the most adequate objectivity possible of the will or the thing-in-itself; indeed it is even the whole thing-in-itself, only under the form of representation.”

The Idea is the Will, but because it is the Will’s Form, it is a representation of the Will-itself. In short, the Idea is the thing-in-itself in the form of the thing-in-itself.

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78 Schopenhauer, WWR I §38, 195-199.
79 Ibid. §32, 175.
80 Two points to note here. The first is that although aesthetic contemplation is important precisely because it opens up the possibility for the cessation of willing, it ultimately is not enough to save us. It is only if the knowledge attained through aesthetic contemplation is carried through to a denial of the will-to-live that the salvation of humanity is possible. This form of denial, however, requires ascetic acceptance of the knowledge gained through aesthetic contemplation; more on this when I discuss Schopenhauer’s pessimism. The second point is that early on in his development, Schopenhauer thinks that he can demonstrate that the thing-in-itself and the Platonic Ideas “are one and the same” (See Janaway, Schopenhauer, 13). By the time of WWR, however, he acknowledges that there is a distinction between the two, but believes that he demonstrates how they are related. Whether or not Schopenhauer’s characterization of the thing-in-itself as Will, and his attempt to read Plato’s dualism alongside Kant’s, are ultimately successful is beyond the scope of this chapter.
There are three points here in particular that Nietzsche challenges in BT. The first concerns what is at stake in the dissolution of the *principium individuationis*. For Schopenhauer, when the *principium individuationis* is traversed we view the thing-in-itself, an undifferentiated Will beyond the categories of space and time; whereas to Nietzsche, in contrast, the way things are is not beyond space and time. In his view, when the *principium individuationis* is dissolved “we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian” and see ourselves as we really are, namely related as sufferers in the world.\(^{82}\)

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man…. Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or “impudent convention” have fixed between man and man are broken.\(^{83}\)

Even the “Apollinian Greek” learned, Nietzsche continues, that “his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian.”\(^{84}\) In this regard, like Schopenhauer—who holds that the greatness of art lies in its ability to take us to a state of pure contemplation, which gives us an Idea of things-in-themselves—Nietzsche holds that the Dionysian artistic impulse gives us insight into the nature of things. However, it is at this point that Nietzsche’s views diverge from Schopenhauer’s. When describing the process of aesthetic contemplation Schopenhauer contends that not only does art give us a glimpse of the

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\(^{81}\) It is perhaps on this point that I am most in disagreement with Clark’s account of *BT*, in which she holds that Nietzsche claims “to know the transcendent character of reality—contradictory, outside of time and space, beyond individuality and plurality—a character clearly quite different from its empirical character.” Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 90.

\(^{82}\) I use the phrase “as we really are” deliberately to illuminate the fact that Nietzsche’s use of the notion of the real is in contrast to the notion of the real as transcendent and “different from its empirical character.”

\(^{83}\) *BT* §1, 37.

\(^{84}\) *BT* §4, 46.
Idea, it also places us in a state beyond willing.\textsuperscript{85} Nietzsche, on the other hand, argues that it is precisely the insight into the nature of things that incites life.

To make this move Nietzsche diverges from Schopenhauer on a second point. Although Schopenhauer views his system as dualistic, his attempt to read Kant’s and Plato’s dualisms together actually presents a tripartite picture: the thing-in-itself, the Idea of the thing-in-itself, and phenomena.\textsuperscript{86} While, ostensibly, Nietzsche paints a similar type of picture, he challenges the terms of Schopenhauer’s arguments by inverting the Platonic dualism. Instead of viewing the metaphysical dualism as being between the “Real” and “Appearance,” Nietzsche suggests that “Appearance” is the real. This inversion, then, takes the Platonic “Real” as an epiphenomenal appearance; or as Nietzsche says in his discussion of the need for Apollinian redemption after our glimpse into the Dionysian:

\begin{quote}
If, for the moment we do not consider the question of our own “reality,” if we conceive of our empirical existence, and that of the world in general, as a continuously manifested representation of the primal unity, we shall then have to look upon the dream as a \textit{mere appearance of a mere appearance}…. And that is why the innermost heart of nature feels that ineffable joy in the naïve artist and the naïve work of art, which is likewise only “mere appearance of mere appearance.”\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{85} To Schopenhauer this is “the painless state, prized by Epicurus as the highest good and as the state of the gods; for that moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing: the wheel of Ixion stands still” (\textit{WWR} 1 §38, 196). There is an implicit tension here with Schopenhauer’s conception of the thing-in-itself (including us) as \textit{Will} and pure contemplation of the thing-in-itself as an Idea releasing us from willing. In many respects, this tension leads Schopenhauer to many of his arguments about death and pessimism. For a more detailed account regarding his pessimism and his views on death see Dale Jacquette “Schopenhauer on Death”; Christopher Janaway “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism”; and Martha Nussbaum “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer}, ed. by Christopher Janaway.

\textsuperscript{86} Here one must remember that \textit{phenomena} is the Kantian term for the world as it is known to the subject through the categories of time, space, and causality. Schopenhauer’s notion of the Idea, in turn, corresponds to an objective—non-categorical—form of Knowledge of the thing-in-itself. This differs from Plato’s distinction between Knowledge and \textit{doxa} because Knowledge is still \textit{only} knowledge of the Forms, whereas for Schopenhauer the Idea is \textit{both} pure Knowledge of the thing-in-itself (knowledge beyond time, space, and causality) and simultaneously \textit{is} the thing-in-itself. In other words, the thing-in-itself and the Idea are, in Schopenhauer view, supposed to be two sides of the same thing. Julian Young makes a similar point in his \textit{Willing and Unwilling}, (Dordrecht, DE: Nijhoff, 1987), chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{BT} §4, 45. In the German Nietzsche uses the phrase “Schein des Scheins,” which could be rendered simply as “appearance of appearance.” Kaufmann translates it as “mere appearance of mere appearance,” it seems, because of his own philosophical views regarding tragedy. In \textit{Tragedy and Philosophy}, he writes, “To do justice to a work of art, one should not view it as an \textit{imitation}; neither should one think of it as being on the same level as ordinary
Nietzsche temporarily displaces the question of our own “reality” to show that the “Real” is the appearance of which the Apollinian dream is a mere appearance. Here we can begin to see more clearly why the Dionysian truth is analogous to intoxication—for when intoxicated we often become more in touch with qualities that are hidden even from ourselves. Furthermore, this account also makes sense of Nietzsche’s claim that the “Dionysian musician is, without any images, himself [both] pure primordial pain and its primordial re-echoing.”

Dionysian music breaks down the *principium individuationis* and the artist becomes the primordial unity while simultaneously representing the primordial unity. Nietzsche maintains Schopenhauer’s privileging of music but he does so on different terms.

Schopenhauer views music “as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself,” which “never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself, of every phenomenon, the will itself.” Although Nietzsche upholds a similar privileging of music as coming from and granting insight into the primordial ground/unity of the world, he undermines the notion of immediacy upon which Schopenhauer’s arguments are predicated. On the one hand, upon referring to Wagner’s greatness Nietzsche says, “According to the doctrine of Schopenhauer, therefore, we understand music as the immediate language of the will, and we feel our fancy stimulated to give form to this invisible and yet so actively stirred spirit-world objects or events…. [I]t has its own distinct level of reality…. [W]hatever remains imitation is not art.” Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), §18, 78. It seems that, because Kaufmann views Nietzsche as saying that the problem with naïve art, and with the Apollinian in general, is that it never rises above imitation—that is, it never presents us with an aspect of reality—that it is merely an imitation of our empirical existence, he translates “Schein des Scheins” as “mere appearance of mere appearance.”

Without endorsing Kaufmann’s views of art, I maintain his translation because it captures the view Nietzsche depicts about the nature of reality: Appearance, for Nietzsche is the real, the world we live in, and how we know it, whereas the Real refers to notions that pose as having truth-abolute status—like the Platonic Forms—which are projections. The importance of the Dionysian in this regard, is that it allows us to see through the processes that obfuscate our ability to recognize the type of creatures we are (an example of the type of processes to which I refer would be what Marxians call ideology or Foucauldians call discourses). However, even this insight is not outside of appearance, as we shall see.

88 *BT* §5, 50.
89 *WWR* 1 §52, 257, 261.
which speaks to us, and we feel prompted to embody it in an analogous example.”

On the other hand, Nietzsche argues that “music, according to its essence, cannot possibly be will” because, in his view, that would place music outside the realm of art. Nietzsche suggests that viewing music as will places music outside the realm of the aesthetic because according to Schopenhauer the will is the thing-in-itself—or as Nietzsche says it, “the will is the unaesthetic-in-itself.” The issue here for Nietzsche is that the thing-in-itself cannot have a symbolic relationship with itself because it is itself. As already observed, it is for a similar reason that Schopenhauer is forced to accept a distinction between the thing-in-itself and the Platonic Idea. In other words, for Schopenhauer, while the Platonic Idea is the thing-in-itself, it is only so in the form of representation, which, in part, is why it is through aesthetic contemplation that we acquire the Idea of things as they are in themselves.

However, Schopenhauer contends that music is the privileged art form because in its universality it is an immediate objectification of the will. Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer’s privileging of music because of its universality coupled with the notion that, of all the arts, music provides the most profound insight into the heart of nature. But Nietzsche rejects the notion that music can be a direct copy of the thing-in-itself because music must still communicate the insight regarding the nature of things to us, and all communication requires symbols. It is for this reason that even the passage quoted above in which Nietzsche seems to be most in

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90 BT §16, 103. Schopenhauer says that “if regarded as an expression of the world, [music] is in the highest degree a universal language” which is “like geometrical figures and numbers, which are the universal forms of all possible objects of experience and are a priori applicable to them all…” WWR 1 §52, 262. Also quoted in BT §16, 101-103.  
91 BT §6, 55. 
92 Ibid. The irony is that even when Nietzsche seems to use Schopenhauer’s conceptions most faithfully, he does so to come to an entirely contradictory conclusion. I will elaborate further in my discussion of Nietzsche’s response to Schopenhauer’s pessimism. 
93 I do not mean to imply that Nietzsche accepts the thing-in-itself formulation, but merely that music could not both be itself and a symbolic representation of itself.
agreement with Schopenhauer, he says that “music allows the *symbolic* image to emerge in its *highest significance*.”

The main difference here is that when Schopenhauer refers to music as “a universal language,” he suggests that it merely *expresses* aspects of the will, which is why he says that “when music suitable to any scene, action, event, or environment is played, it seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning.” In contrast, however, when Nietzsche refers to music as “the immediate language of the will,” he suggests that music also functions to *communicate* the Dionysian insights from the heart of nature—hence music’s capacity to “give birth to [tragic] myth.” In short, for Nietzsche, music’s power lies in its ability to communicate the fundamental truths about us as sufferers, symbolically; where, for Schopenhauer, music’s power lies in the fact that it is a direct, non-symbolic, expression of the will.

One might object, noting Nietzsche’s suggestion that “music in its absolute sovereignty does not *need* the image and the concept” because of its immediacy to the primordial ground. He contends:

> Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena. Rather, all phenomena, compared with it, are merely symbols... language, in its attempt to imitate it, can only be in superficial contact with music.

The objection here could be that Nietzsche views language and music as mutually exclusive because music itself is *noumenal*. As Maudemarie Clark suggests, not only is it clear that Nietzsche is straightforwardly Schopenhauerian in his *noumenal/phenomena* dualism in *BT*, but

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94 *BT* §16, 103. Bold type is mine, italics in the original.
95 *WWR* I §52, 262.
96 *BT* §16, 103.
97 *BT* §6, 55-56.
that music, in his view, gives us direct knowledge of the thing-in-itself. In response to this objection, however, I propose that Nietzsche indeed views language as inferior to music because of the former’s need of images and concepts, but music is itself also in a symbolic relationship to the heart of nature. It is for this reason that language cannot “adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music.” In other words, music is the language of the heart of nature, but it symbolically communicates its message to us without images or concepts.

While, for Nietzsche, the world we know in and through our languages is the real, our grammatical habits and conceptuality keep us imagining ourselves primarily in supra-naturalistic terms. Music, in contrast, opens us up to the realization that, as parts of nature, we are related as sufferers in the world; in Nietzsche’s words: “Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.” However, despite music’s privileged status, Nietzsche maintains its symbolic function because he believes that even the knowledge we garner through and from music about the nature of things does not correspond to something like the Platonic Real. In fact, the implication for Nietzsche’s argument seems to be that if there is a way things really are it is appearance in the Platonic sense. More to the point, Nietzsche’s position implies that even if there is a “way things really are” it could not be on either Platonic or Kantian terms. Rather, his view suggests that the “way things really are” would always be implicated in the process of providing descriptions of “things.” For example, what a rock “really” is in itself, on these terms, is neither about the unchanging essence of the rock’s ‘rockness’ nor of what a rock is in some universe/realm independent of all perception, conception, or description of rocks, but instead it is about how powerful (whether philosophical,

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98 Clark, *Nietzsche*, 90.
99 *BT* §1, 37.
poetic, or scientific) our descriptions are of rocks. In this regard, if there is a “way things really are” it is *appearance*.100

So while this account still seems similar to Schopenhauer’s epistemological notion that the principles of reason are limited to *phenomena*, and that aesthetic contemplation provides us with a special type of insight, Nietzsche is suspicious of Schopenhauer’s attempt to posit an ontological divide between *phenomena* and *noumena*, in which *noumena* is some realm equivalent to the Platonic “Real.” For Nietzsche, the world of appearances in which we live and suffer is real, and, in contrast, the notion of the world of Ideas is an Apollinian illusion—that is, a mere appearance of appearance. Furthermore, this inversion is also tied to the third point on which Nietzsche disputes Schopenhauer.

This third point also illuminates not only Nietzsche’s originality, but his position regarding pessimism. Schopenhauer views tragedy as the

[H]ighest poetical achievement… [because of its profound] description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are all here presented to us.101

These depictions render tragedy the highest poetic art-form because they illuminate “the guilt of existence”—or, as he says using the words of Calderón, “‘For man’s greatest offence/ Is that he

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100 This seems to mirror a claim Friedrich Lange makes: “No thought is so calculated to reconcile poesy and science as the thought that all our ‘reality’—without any prejudice to its strict connexion, undisturbed by any caprice—is only appearance” (Friedrich Lange, *The History of Materialism*, (New York: The Humanities Press, 1950 [Three volumes in One edition]), vol. II, 234). However, where Nietzsche ultimately differs from Lange is in his developing conclusion that this formulation implies that appearance is reality and that it is precisely in inverting the Real/appearance distinction that the dualism is actually dissolved. This is not to say, for instance, that there are no things in existence which predate our knowledge of them, but that their “predating our knowledge” is itself a descriptive claim. In other words, rather than reading this as a form of idealism, the suggestion is that, for humans, questions about existence are necessarily implicated with questions about knowledge—that is, ontology necessarily implicates epistemology. The notion that they can be separated does not make sense, on Nietzsche’s view. While he is only gesturing to this point in *BT*, in many respects, Nietzsche’s view here already anticipates it (I take this to be the upshot of his perspectivism). For a view that mirrors the implication of Nietzsche’s position here compare Jacques Derrida’s discussion on *mimesis* in “The Double Session” in *Dissemination*.

101 *WWR*. 1 §51, 253.
has been born.”¹⁰² In other words, Schopenhauer claims that tragedy’s greatness lies in its discernment that, for human beings, it would be better not to have been born. However, even while recognizing the insights that tragedy offers, he contends that it is in the pure aesthetic contemplation of music that people experience the highest form of knowledge possible. But Schopenhauer takes the argument further still, suggesting that despite the profundity of the insight garnered through aesthetic contemplation,

[I]t does not become for him [in this case the artist] a quieter of the will, as we shall see… in the case of the saint who has attained resignation; it does not deliver him from life forever, but only for a few moments. For him it is not the way out of life, but only an occasional consolation in it, until his power, enhanced by this contemplation, finally becomes tired of the spectacle, and seizes the serious side of things.¹⁰³

In the end then, according to Schopenhauer, the importance of the aesthetic insight lies in the fact that it points the way to the true answer to all our suffering and the problem of existence generally. For Schopenhauer, once the aesthetic insight is gained one learns not only that existence is not justified and thus life is not worth living, but more importantly that the only real option open to us as reprieve is a total ascetic denial of life:

[T]he denial of the will-to-live, shows itself when willing ends with that knowledge, since the particular phenomena known then no longer act as motives of willing, but the whole knowledge of the inner nature of the world that mirrors the will, knowledge that has grown up through apprehension of the Ideas, becomes the quieter of the will, and thus the will freely abolishes itself.¹⁰⁴

It is precisely this pessimistic conclusion that Nietzsche disputes.¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰² Ibid., §51, 254.
¹⁰³ Ibid., §52, 267.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., §54, 285.
¹⁰⁵ This is the point on which I most disagree with Young’s reading of BT. Furthermore, regarding the centrality of the negativity or impossibility of happiness and of the positive nature, or permanence, of suffering to Schopenhauer’s pessimism see Christopher Janaway, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” and Bernard Reginter, The Affirmation of Life. See also Martha Nussbaum, “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus” for a discussion of Schopenhauer’s view of desire and the body in connection with these issues.
Nietzsche’s rejection of Schopenhauer’s pessimism becomes visible with his treatment of tragedy. Although, like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche treats music as the privileged art-form, his view of its relation to tragedy differs significantly. One important feature that makes tragedy crucial, in Nietzsche’s view, is that it emerges out of the most Dionysian of elements, music. Yet, it requires the Apollinian to take the form of tragedy. The significance of tragedy being born from the reconciliation of the artistic impulses is that while it maintains the Dionysian insight into the nature of existence, simultaneously, through Apollo, it incites life. In large measure, the point of BT can be seen as Nietzsche’s attempt to demonstrate that even if (especially if!) we take the insights of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics seriously, namely, descriptive pessimism, we can still reject his conclusions—that is, evaluative pessimism. So where Schopenhauer sees “that the very will-to-live must be denied if salvation is to be attained from an existence like ours,” Nietzsche acknowledges that the Greeks found salvation through tragedy because it provided them with the existential nourishment to face the wisdom of Silenus (and by extension Calderón) and reverse it. Nietzsche says,

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106 Nietzsche’s account of the origin of tragedy is pretty much as follows: Within the particular mythico-religious context of ancient Greece, in which Dionysian religious celebrations were prevalent, the revelers originally came together as a chorus. It is only after form was given and poetry added to the chorus that tragedy was born. However, it is quite significant to Nietzsche that tragedy begins through an eruption of Dionysian music. He says that the ancient tradition “tells us quite unequivocally that tragedy arose from the tragic chorus, and was originally only chorus and nothing but chorus” (BT §7, 56).

107 I admit that in this rendition I simplify part of Nietzsche’s narrative. For Nietzsche, even with all of its destructiveness “Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence” (BT §17, 104). Nietzsche adds this claim, it appears, for three reasons. The first is that when we get a glimpse of the terror that is at the heart of existence, we recognize that despite the terror we are, fundamentally, united as sufferers in the world, and, secondly, that there is nothing, ultimately, we can do about it; suffering is just an ineluctable aspect of finitude (BT §7, 59). The former provides a sense of meaning to the suffering by rendering us as central to the drama of existence itself; while the latter, Nietzsche seems to hope, can comfort us because the suffering endemic to existence is not our fault. This insight is then supposed to release us from our fears. Thirdly, Dionysian art, and the insight garnered, seduces us to life by exciting in us a surge of creative energy that in itself forces us to live in order to see our creative endeavors through. However, Nietzsche also recognizes that, often, the second of the three Dionysian incitements actually has the opposite effect (in part, that is precisely the point undergirding Schopenhauer’s pessimism), and that accounts for the necessity of the Apollinian.

108 WWR 1 §70, 405.

109 Sophocles has Silenus say in Oedipus at Colonus: “‘What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is—to die soon.’” Quoted in BT (§3, 42). Nietzsche
With [the satyric] chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him and through art—life.  

Although he finds Schopenhauer’s investigations insightful, Nietzsche sees in “Greek cheerfulness” a more profound response to the truths regarding the nature of existence revealed in music and tragedy, and uses it to reverse Schopenhauer’s pessimistic conclusions. Once this reversal of Schopenhauer’s pessimism is recognized, the thread that runs through Nietzsche’s writings from BT to On the Genealogy of Morality becomes discernable.

When read in this light, we can see a rehearsal of Nietzsche’s criticism of Schopenhauer in GM—in short, that he says ‘no’ to life—already present in BT. We see this, for instance, in Nietzsche’s criticism of the consequences of Euripides’s Socratism. Nietzsche says that with Euripidean Comedy, “the Hellene had given up his belief in immortality; not only his belief in an ideal past, but also his belief in an ideal future.” It is precisely this relinquishment of belief in an ideal future to which much of Nietzsche’s works attempt to respond.

It is here also that we can make sense of Nietzsche’s phrase that the existence of the world is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. When Nietzsche employs this phrase he seems to be making two related claims. The first relates back to the claim that because the Dionysian insight shows us that Appearance is the real, it simultaneously undermines the phenomenal/noumena dualism. If Appearance is the real, then the formulation concerning things-in-themselves is untenable. We can read the implication here as being that all things are phenomena—not because things only exist as a result of our thinking about them, but because

writes, in turn: “Existence under the bright sunshine of… [the Olympian (i.e. under the influence of Apollo)] gods is regarded as desirable in itself… so that now, reversing the wisdom of Silenus, we might say of the Greeks that ‘to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worst—to die at all’” (BT §3, 43).

10 BT §7, 59.
11 BT §11, 78.
12 See ASC §5, 22; BT §5, 52; and BT §24, 141.
everything that exists, as far as we know, does so in our experienceable universe. This is not to deny that there are objects about which we know nothing, but only to say that these objects are still part of the universe we describe and about which we conjecture, albeit a part about which we do not know. The notion that appearance is the real does not imply that things outside of our descriptions are necessarily non-existent, but rather, that there is no thing-ness to them that is beyond our possible descriptions of them.

To put it more formally: the issue for Nietzsche seems to be that objects which exist without our knowledge of them, let’s call them E, only become things, T, when they enter into the world of our experiences and descriptions. To ask then what T is like in its state of E does not follow. A thing, T, could not have the status of E if it is the thing about which we have some knowledge. Meanwhile the question about E in the state of E either begs the question or is simply tautological. We already know the answer to the question—it would be something that exists about which we know nothing. We can rephrase the question: what is an existing object about which we know nothing, when it is outside of our frames of consideration? The answer is simple, we do not know! And, of course, this is not to contend that E only comes into existence when we reflect upon it, but rather to say that there is no moment independent of our reflection upon the thing, T, in which we can reflect on it as E qua E.\footnote{In relation to this point, I take it that when Nietzsche seems to forward a “falsification” thesis he is not claiming that there are things-in-themselves about which our claims are necessarily erroneous, but that all of our descriptions of the world are interpretations which are bound with the way we would have the world be.} With this being the case, then, existence is justified as an aesthetic \textit{phenomenon}.

The second implication of this phrase, in turn, is tied to the role the artistic impulses play in seducing us to life.\footnote{See \textit{BT} §17 and §18, 104-114. Also see footnote 106 above.} Because the art impulses compel us to live through the exertion of our creative energies, Nietzsche views our existence itself, in large measure, as an aesthetic
enterprise. Insofar as this is the case, according to Nietzsche, existence is justified as an aesthetic phenomenon.

This progression brings us back to Nietzsche’s anachronistic observation about the relationship between the phrase, our existence is justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, and the gravest question of all—what, seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality? In Nietzsche’s account, the Apollinian and Dionysian impulses emerge within nature itself. In turn, we never make artistic decisions ex nihilo. With this shift, Nietzsche also suggests that we have a place to begin reflecting on how decisions of conduct are made. However, this account does not provide us with moral guarantees. Nietzsche’s position here emphasizes contingency to rebut Schopenhauerian pessimism, while proposing that people continue to act in a risk laden world. After contending that existence is justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, Nietzsche says,

Insofar as the subject is the artist… he has already been released from his individual will, and has become, as it were, the medium through which the only existent subject celebrates his release in appearance…. [For] the entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this true art world.

The implication is that human beings are never more than the co-authors of our destinies; once released from the principium individuationis we begin to see our lives as part of the drama of existence. Not only are our lives implicated in the doings of other lives, we enter into particular stories that are already being told. In this sense we actually create each other, as we are created, like artists fashioning the nature of existence.

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115 On this point I am sympathetic with Alexander Nehamas’s argument in Nietzsche: Life as Literature, that central to Nietzsche’s perspectivism is what he (Nehamas) calls an aestheticism. Nehamas recognizes here that Nietzsche “looks at the world in general as if it were a sort of artwork” (Nehamas, Nietzsche, 3).

116 It is because of this notion that Nietzsche contends that art becomes the “truly metaphysical activity of” humanity and “not morality” ASC §5, 22.

117 BT §5, 52.

118 We each become “at once subject and object, at once poet, actor, and spectator” (BT §5, 52). Compare to a passage by Alasdair MacIntyre, “We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live the story we please…. We enter upon a stage we did not design and we find ourselves
From this vantage-point, one understands human life as contingent. The point of life then, amidst this contingency, is not the promise of a happy ending, but to recognize the sublimity of existence and to exercise our creative energies in the face of this recognition. It is here that we comprehend Nietzsche’s emphasis on the notion of “Greek cheerfulness.” He says,

> When after a forceful attempt to gaze at the sun we turn away blinded, we see dark-colored spots before our eyes, as a cure, as it were. Conversely, the bright image projections of the Sophoclean hero—in short, the Apollinian aspect of the mask—are necessary effects of a glance into the inside and terrors of nature; as it were, the luminous spots to cure eyes damaged by gruesome night. Only in this sense may we believe that we properly comprehend the serious and important concept of “Greek cheerfulness.”

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Nietzsche finds in the “cheerfulness” of Greek tragic culture the courage to create and make decisions of conduct in a world where there is no immutable or inevitable happy ending to the human drama. Rather than responding to the terrible destructiveness of history and the cruelty of nature with paralysis or resignation, the Greeks responded creatively. For these reasons Nietzsche views Greek tragedy as presenting the highest response to the sufferings of the world.

The tragic poet, according to Nietzsche, shows the world that:

> [T]hough every law, every natural order, even the moral world may perish through [the noble human being’s] actions, his actions also produce a higher magical circle of effects which found a new world on the ruins of the old one that has been overthrown.

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Though suffering is the rule, action is still meaningful.

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119 BT §9, 67. We must recall here that, although the Apollinian aspect acts as a balm, 1) it comes into play because of the Dionysian (BT §4, 47) and 2) that the “healing” is not to erase the insight gained from the injury, but rather to allow us to be able to reopen our eyes for future (in)sights. Regarding the union of the deities, Nietzsche says, “In the light of this insight we must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images…. In several successive discharges this primal ground of tragedy radiates this vision of the drama which is by all means a dream apparition and to that extent epic in nature; but on the other hand, being an objectification of a Dionysian state, it represents not Apollinian redemption through mere appearance but, on the contrary, the shattering of the individual and his fusion with primal being. Thus the drama is the [Apollinian*] embodiment of Dionysian insights and effects and thereby separated, as by a tremendous chasm, from the epic” (BT §8, 65) *Kaufmann translated the German “die apollinische Versinnlichung” as “the Dionysian embodiment.” I alter that here.

120 BT §9, 68.
While recognizing, along with Schopenhauer, that we have no recourse to moral meta-narratives, Nietzsche takes a different lesson from tragedy. Where morality fails, art provides a context from which people can respond to their predicaments. It provides a space from which new worlds can be created. This is Nietzsche’s point when he expresses, first, the dual nature of Aeschylus’ Prometheus, which is simultaneously *Apollinian* and *Dionysian*, in the conceptual formula: “All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both.”121 And, secondly, when he continues with the line from Goethe’s *Faust*: “That is your world! A world indeed!—”122

However, one can still raise the question about what this view actually entails regarding the evaluation of human conduct. Given Nietzsche’s emphasis on the priority of the individual, the question might go, does this not run into the subjectivist’s problem? That is, can Nietzsche’s aesthetic vision account for individuals ever engaging in activity that does not seem simply to satisfy their immediate interests? There are at least two sorts of approaches with which Nietzsche, in *BT*, leaves us to respond to this question. On the one hand, we can interrogate what he means when he contends that the art impulses spring from nature. One might read this as suggesting that the ways in which we are capable of interpreting the world are delimited by nature itself, similar to arguments about how our intuitions shape our moral responses to things. It could be argued that this is why Nietzsche suggests that art is the true metaphysical activity of humanity. On the other hand, one of the fundamental gains that comes from looking closely at the early writings, in my view, is that it problematizes how we conceive of Nietzsche’s individualism.

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121 *BT* §9, 72. I take this formulation to be an indication of Nietzsche’s disbelief in the feasibility of moral absolutes.
122 *BT* §9, 72.
While I disagree with many of Julian Young’s main premises in *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, I think he is correct to view Nietzsche, especially in his early thinking, as committed to a form of religious communitarianism. Young says,

Two features distinguish this early thinking. First, it is *communitarian* thinking in the sense that the highest object of its concern is the flourishing of the community as a whole. And second, it is *religious* thinking in that it holds that without a festive, communal religion, a community – or as Nietzsche prefers to call it, a ‘people’ – cannot flourish, indeed cannot properly be said to be a community.¹²³

I agree almost entirely with Young’s assessment here. As we will see more clearly later, in chapter four, some of the more influential objections to Nietzsche’s individualism begin with the premise that he views the role of society as simply “a support-system for the production of [the] *übermenschlich* types.”¹²⁴ In contrast, I agree here with Young’s contention that this reading “gets things the wrong way”: “[It] is not the case that the social totality is valued for the sake of the higher types. Rather, the higher types are valued for the sake the social totality.”¹²⁵

However, I disagree strongly with some of Young’s central claims. Firstly, while I think it correct to read Nietzsche’s early writings, especially *BT*, as primarily concerned with generating the possibility for a transfigured ‘German’ community (*Volk*), his concern in the later writings is with the survival of the species. And, while I think that Young provides an important corrective to typical readings when he reverses the order of significance with regard to the individual and the species, I worry that he underplays the later Nietzsche’s suspicion of community. Although he recognizes the differences in Nietzsche’s position as he matures, Young maintains that Nietzsche was committed to some form of religious communitarianism

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¹²³ Young, *NPR*, 1.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 3.
¹²⁵ Ibid. This aspect of my argument will be rendered more explicitly in the following chapters.
It strikes me, however, as a bit of a stretch to equate the later Nietzsche’s concern for the flourishing of the species with communitarianism.

Furthermore, I also disagree with the terms on which Young grounds his argument, particularly as they pertain to Nietzsche’s early writings. Because Young does not recognize the ways in which Nietzsche is already critical of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in *BT*, he argues that Nietzsche shares Schopenhauer’s evaluative pessimism. Young contends in a footnote,

Schopenhauer’s pessimism teaches resignation from human life. And that is precisely what *The Birth* teaches as, in Silenus’ words, ‘the best thing’. That pain and death are indispensable to life as an entertainment for the primal unity sitting back comfortably in its padded seat in the cosmic movie theater does nothing at all to justify life to those who – like Christians in the Roman arena – have the misfortune to have to be parts of the entertainment. As I have already suggested, to the question of whether life as a human individual is worth living, *The Birth* replies with the same ‘No’ as does Schopenhauer. The ‘romantic’ Nietzsche is, in short, every bit as much a ‘resignationist’ as are Schopenhauer, Tristan, and Isolde.127

However, this contention generates a problem for Young’s interpretation of Nietzsche. On the one hand, Young argues that, like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche maintains Silenus’s pessimistic conclusion that death is better than life. Yet, on the other hand, he has to account for Nietzsche’s advocating a rebirth of tragedy. Young discusses this latter point in terms of a distinction between a “pure Dionysianism” and a “modified Dionysianism.” The “pure Dionysianism,” he notes, leads “towards worldly ‘apathy’, towards a Buddhistic ‘longing for nothingness’.”128 But, Young is forced to admit Nietzsche’s desire for a “tragic effect” which “is not a pure Dionysian feeling.”129 The tension here is why would Nietzsche call for a modified Dionysianism if he agrees that death is better than life?

126 In fact, one of Young’s main premises is that, in the final writings, Nietzsche returns to the views he held in the early writings.
127 Young, *NPR*, 24 n.8.
128 Ibid., 25.
129 Ibid.
Young tries to account for this by suggesting that it is only life as a human *individual* that Nietzsche, and by extension Schopenhauer, want to relinquish. He suggests that the problem for both thinkers, at bottom, is individuality. While I think this account captures the significance for Schopenhauer’s insistence on renouncing the will-to-live, it fails to explain Nietzsche’s turn to tragedy. Although I agree that individuality is especially problematic for Nietzsche in his early thought, he turns to tragedy precisely to reject Schopenhauer’s pessimistic conclusion. Nietzsche actually wants to provide an account that at once opens us up to the Dionysian insight that we are unified indistinguishably as sufferers in the world while bringing us right back into the world in which our individuality matters. In other words, like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche wants for us to see ourselves beyond the *principium individuationis*, but, unlike Schopenhauer, he rejects Silenus’s wisdom. Instead, Nietzsche turns to tragedy because it allows us to see the Dionysian truth about ourselves, while simultaneously recognizing that it is only as individuals that we can engage meaningfully with each other as we deal with the terror of existence. In this regard, Nietzsche’s ‘aestheticism’ evades the worry about the subjectivist’s problem, without relying on a notion of some absolute arbiter to resolve our dilemmas.

In sum, although Nietzsche maintains Schopenhauerian language in *BT*, he does so to reject Schopenhauer’s pessimistic conclusions. Nietzsche recognizes the centrality of suffering to our existence, yet he attempts to provide Promethean fire for humanity by calling for a rebirth of tragedy. Contra Schopenhauer then, he proposes that despite the lack of any ultimate moral

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130 While I agree that it is in individuality that suffering is experienced, in Schopenhauer’s view, he finds the main problem to be that the will-to-live’s incessant desire for satisfaction keeps us suffering. Even when we glimpse beyond the *principium individuationis* in aesthetic contemplation, the will-to-live regains control, not simply because we fall back into individuality, though that happens too, but because we respond to its demands. What the ascetic saint, the true knight of resignation for Schopenhauer, is able to do is ignore the call of the will-to-live; he is able to wither away without giving in to the demands for satisfaction that life itself requires. This also accounts for Schopenhauer’s argument against suicide. In short, suicide is itself an expression of the will-to-live’s incessant desire for satisfaction, and suicide as an option, in Schopenhauer’s view, places one back onto the Wheel of Ixion. Cf. Bernard Reginster’s *The Affirmation of Life*. 
meaning in the world, people can still hope for better tomorrows.\textsuperscript{131} However, although he has already begun his inversion of Plato in \textit{BT}, part of the text’s difficulty is that Nietzsche’s reliance on Schopenhauerian categories obfuscates how un-Schopenhauerian he already is.

\textsuperscript{131} I do not think that Nietzsche has to prescribe any particular view of what would constitute a better tomorrow here. The point is that, unlike Schopenhauer for whom tomorrow is hopeless, Nietzsche wants to provide an account that allows us to hope.
Chapter 2:  
Perspective, History, and the Inversion of Plato

Let us not be ungrateful to it, although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist error—namely, Plato’s invention of the pure spirit and the good as such. But now that it is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after this nightmare and at least can enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, whose task is wakefulness itself, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered by the fight against this error. To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying perspective, the basic condition of all life, when one spoke of spirit and the good as Plato did.

Friedrich Nietzsche\textsuperscript{132}

In the previous chapter we saw how Nietzsche’s turn to Greek tragedy in \textit{BT} was an attempt both to begin overcoming Platonism and Schopenhauerian pessimism, and to establish, what Julian Young termed, a type of religious communitarianism that can help German culture escape the malaise from which he thought it was suffering.\textsuperscript{133} In this chapter I focus on another of Nietzsche’s early works to emphasize two important points to keep in mind when we encounter his later writings in the following chapters—namely, his historicism along with his perspectivism.

Though there were numerous developments in Nietzsche’s thought as he matured as a writer and thinker, there remains throughout a consistent focus on history with a particular emphasis on its use.\textsuperscript{134} In this chapter, I focus on the second of Nietzsche’s \textit{Untimely Meditations}, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life.”\textsuperscript{135} This is a critical


\textsuperscript{133} See Young \textit{NPR}; and Tamsin Shaw’s \textit{Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism}, especially chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{134} This is not to say that Nietzsche sticks to the methodological strictures of the historian, but rather to stress the importance of history, both as discipline and subject matter, for the way Nietzsche develops his arguments throughout his entire corpus.

\textsuperscript{135} Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” trans. by Peter Preuss, cited henceforth as \textit{ADH}. 
essay, for not only do we begin to see the development of Nietzsche’s perspectivism but we see in its nascent stages his foray into the historical approach that eventually becomes genealogy.

His main targets in this essay are historians who “demand that history be a science.”

Nietzsche views this demand as a symptom of the type of “Socratism” that finally killed tragedy, which, he also finds to be deleterious to life. However, there are also two other reasons why Nietzsche rejects this view of history. The first is that it does not create values. Secondly, Nietzsche maintains that this view of history makes some teleological assumptions based on a metaphysics that denies the importance of perspective.

The point of the essay then is to present an alternative to the “scientific” approach to history. Rather than approaching the study of history as simply the fulfillment of a demand for knowledge, which merely turns us (moderns) into encyclopedias that are either too weak or too afraid to generate our own stories, Nietzsche proposes a notion that is also prospective—that is, he offers a vision in which studying whence we came is used as stimulus for the future exploitation of our creative energies. Beginning with this premise allows Nietzsche to argue that the purpose of history is to aid in the creation of new values. To Nietzsche, knowledge, especially historical knowledge, should have one purpose, namely, to serve life. This assessment further reflects the tragic world-view he put forth in *BT*. Since existence is shot through with

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136 Nietzsche, ADH, 23.
137 In *BT*, he contends that Greek tragedy suffered its final death when Euripides imported the Socratic dictum, “Knowledge is virtue,” into the tragic drama, in the formula: “To be beautiful everything must be intelligible” (*BT* §12, 83-84). For Nietzsche there are at least two issues here that bring about the death of tragedy. The first is that “Euripides brought the spectator onto the stage,” which interrupted the reception of the Dionysian insights (*BT* §11, 77). Nietzsche suggests that by bringing the “spectator” onto the stage and attempting to use the spectator’s language to communicate his views, Euripides blocks the communication of Dionysian wisdom—recall that the Dionysian insight is communicated through the music of the chorus. As such, the *principium individuationis* is never transcended and the Dionysian insight that we are united as sufferers in the world, and that in the drama of life we are both artists and performers, is never attained. Secondly, this problem is compounded with the fact, in Nietzsche’s view, that with the emphasis on intelligibility Euripides transforms the chorus by training them to sing and evaluate the drama as spectators. This move, in turn, Nietzsche says, “drives music out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms” (*BT*, §15, 92). In short, the emphasis on intelligibility forces art to serve the intellect, which does not allow for the music to arise naturally from the chorus (whence the Dionysian wisdom springs), but rather makes the music mechanical and artificial, again impeding on the flow of Dionysian insights.
terror, people must do the best they can to make life bearable—perhaps even happy. It is in this vein that Nietzsche praises the Greeks for their ability to create in spite of their proximity to the horror of existence. As he says in *BT*,

> That he might endure this terror at all, [the Greek] had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians…. [T]hat entire philosophy of the sylvan god… all this was again and again overcome by the Greeks with the aid of the Olympian *middle world* of art…. It was in order to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a profound need…. How else could this people, so sensitive, so vehement in its desires, so singularly capable of *suffering*, have endured existence, if it had not been revealed to them in their gods, surrounded with a higher glory?138

While there are potentially many questions regarding Nietzsche’s conception of *life*, at the very least, in his view, it requires the exploitation of our creative energies in the face of limits (especially limits such as those posed by the terror of existence);139 hence his reference to Goethe in response to scientific history: “I hate everything which merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity.”140 Furthermore, as we will see, approaching history in the perspective of life is also tied to Nietzsche’s attempt to invert Plato, “so as to make the Real consist in that with which Plato had identified Appearance,” to use Richard Rorty’s description.141 Central to his inversion of Plato, is the proposal that truths can be understood perspectivally, with the emphasis on life becoming the highest perspective in which they are to be judged.

Alexander Nehamas’s understanding of Nietzsche’s perspectivism is helpful here. Nehamas argues for the centrality of perpectivism to the interpretation of Nietzsche’s stylistic pluralism. He concedes that one of the greatest problems philosophers face when interpreting

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138 *BT*, §3, 42-43.
140 ADH, Preface, 7.
Nietzsche’s work is the way his potential self-contradictions seem to be self-refuting. On the one hand, in advocating his various positions, Nietzsche appears to assert his views as true; why else are we to take them seriously? While, on the other hand, he often claims that all we have are interpretations, and that his positions are merely his interpretations of the world. The problem here is that either Nietzsche contradicts himself by making a truth claim while denying the validity of truth claims, or refutes his own position about the primacy of interpretations by actually saying something true about the world. However, Nehamas argues in response to this problem that it is precisely Nietzsche’s perspectivism that resolves the impasse.

To show how Nietzsche’s perspectivism evades the problem, Nehamas makes two related points. The first illuminates the importance of Socrates to Nietzsche’s view of his own project, and the second points to the centrality of the aesthetic dimension, especially of the stylistic pluralism, to Nietzsche’s presentation of his project. Nehamas contends, “It is… within the context of the confrontation between Nietzsche and Socrates… that we shall find the answers to the questions we have asked.” He suggests that insofar as Nietzsche took Socrates to be his vital contender, and influence, he recognized his inability to resolve the problematic impasse between presenting his view as if true and denying claims to truth on standard philosophical grounds. Nehamas estimates:

Nietzsche, I think, is afraid that he may not have finally resolved this difficult problem. This is why he suspects that his task may not after all be so very different from the task of Socrates. And since these are attitudes he has toward himself, they account not only for his irreparably divided feelings toward Socrates but also to his own equivocal relation to philosophy, and for the irreducible ambiguity of his own position within it.

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142 There are two types of apparent self-contradictions that Nietzsche interpreters face. The first is the more straightforward fact that at times Nietzsche seems to hold contrasting views on the same topic. The second, and more important for our purposes, apparent self-contradiction is that he appears to be making truth claims about perspective and interpretation, while rejecting the notion of truth. I elaborate on the latter below.

143 Nehamas, Nietzsche, 24.

144 Ibid., 36.
By following Nehamas’s lead regarding Nietzsche’s confrontation with Socrates, we can account simultaneously for Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato through his promotion of perspectivism as well as for the importance of his stylistic pluralism. Nehamas continues, “Nietzsche’s… solution is to try to avoid this dilemma by turning his attention to the manner in which he presents the views he considers his own interpretations and which he wants his readers to recognize as such.”

Nietzsche’s stylistic pluralism and perspectivism are his ways of suggesting that unlike the assumption of philosophical discourse—tied as it is to the notion of truth as being independent of perspective—“there is no single, neutral language in which his views, or any others, can ever be presented.” His stylistic pluralism and perspectivism, then, are not only “means of reminding his readers that what they are reading is always Nietzsche’s own interpretation of life and the world,” but also an attempt to present in anti-philosophical language “an interpretation that demands to be believed even as it says that it is only an interpretation.” This explanation at least minimizes the impasse because it presents Nietzsche’s views not as true in terms of being independent of perspective, but rather as compelling given its success to make sense of things when observed from many different positions. Despite his disagreements with Nehamas, Richard Schacht makes a supporting claim regarding Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Schacht says,

At least partially motivating and warranting [Nietzsche’s] “perspectival” methodology was his emerging conviction that the phenomena that concerned him were themselves conditioned and engendered by complex relations. This circumstance makes a perspectival approach at once necessary and possible. For we can gain insight into the relationally constituted natures of phenomena only by learning to look at them from perspectives attuned to these relations, with eyes become sensitive to them.

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145 Ibid., 36-37.
146 Ibid., 37. This is a view that we will see more fully developed in Nietzsche’s GM.
147 Nehamas, Nietzsche, 40.
148 Richard Schacht, “Nietzsche’s Kind of Philosophy,” in The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche, ed. by Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, 164. Henceforth NKP. While, as I have already asserted, I am sympathetic with Nehamas’s employment of the category of “aestheticism” as a tool to understand Nietzsche’s perspectivism, Schacht has a point when he worries that: “In singling out literature and literary characters of a certain sort… it seems to me that Nehamas goes astray in two respects. First, Nietzsche avails himself at least as much of models and metaphors
Not only do I agree with Nehamas and Schacht on this point, but I would go a bit further. While problematizing the notion of truth, Nietzsche simultaneously extols the virtue of honesty, or truthfulness.  For instance, Nietzsche concludes ADH on a note reminiscent to his discussion of Greek cheerfulness in BT, contending:

There have been centuries in which the Greeks found themselves in a danger similar to the one in which we find ourselves, namely of being swamped by what is alien and past, of perishing through “history.” Never have they lived proudly untouchable: for a long time their “culture” was rather a chaos of foreign, Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian and Egyptian forms and concepts, and their religion a veritable battle of gods of the whole orient: similarly perhaps, as “German culture” and religion is now an internally battling chaos of all foreign countries, of all antiquity. And nevertheless Hellenic culture became no aggregate, thanks to that Apollinian motto [Know thyself]. The Greeks learned gradually to organize chaos by reflecting on themselves in accordance with the Delphic teaching [Know thyself], that is by reflecting on their genuine needs, and letting their sham needs die out.

Most important for our purposes, however, is what Nietzsche says a few lines later: “This is a parable for each one of us: he must organize the chaos within himself by reflecting on his genuine needs. His honesty, his sound and truthful character must at some time rebel against secondhand thought, secondhand learning and imitation.”

from other parts of the artistic-aesthetic domain as he does from this one. And second, this is only one of a fair number of domains upon which he draws in undertaking his perspectival experiments, and it is by no means exclusively privileged among them” (Schacht, NKP, 164-165). However, I still lean on Nehamas’s notion because of his emphasis on the centrality of an art-of-life philosophy to Nietzsche’s project. I agree that this is a vital aspect of Nietzsche’s project with which any thorough interpretation must deal; although I think that in dealing with this aspect of Nietzsche’s project much more attention would have to be paid to the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson upon his thinking than is done in the scholarship. Furthermore, despite the force of Schacht’s worry that Nehamas may overextend the centrality of Nietzsche’s literary aestheticism, I disagree with his down-playing of the importance of the artistic-aesthetic domain to Nietzsche’s thought. Even when Nietzsche uses other models and metaphors (for example his “biologism”), his ur-model for thinking about how we interpret those models and metaphors is still aesthetic. Engaging in a detailed exposition of this position, however, would take us too far afield and would require too much space to be more fully pursued at this point.

In one instance in ADH, for example, Nietzsche uses the phrase “wie es seine Instincte und damit seine Ehrlichkeit wiederfinden könne.” Although Preuss translates the German as “how it may recover its instincts and therewith its integrity” seine Ehrlichkeit is more appropriately translated as “its honesty.” ADH, §4, 25. Cf. Hollingdale’s translation in Untimely Meditations in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, ed. by Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1997), 80.

149 ADH, §10, 64.
150 ADH, §10, 64, emphasis added.
the notion of truth continues to import Platonic baggage, his reliance on the notion of honesty implies that people can still get things right. This is the case, not because what we think ultimately conforms to the way things are in themselves, or to some point beyond perspective. But rather, because the norms we generate, or as Nietzsche would put it, our interpretations, allow us to evaluate numerous aspects of our surroundings in ways that allow for those dimensions to make sense in relation to the way we hold other aspects of our surroundings to be. Of course this never allows for any datum to be true in some aperspectival sense, which is precisely why we can, and often do, change our minds on notions that were held to be true for generations! But, it allows us to speak confidently about the things we know without having to resort to, what Nietzsche sees as, deliberate self-deception—especially about things that much of the rest of our knowledge tells us cannot be true. It is for these reasons that Nietzsche eventually suggests that the inversion of Plato requires the reestablishment of perspective.152

And the generalized perspective best suited to ensure the thriving of humanity is that of life itself. Thus, Nietzsche contends that life must be the perspective from which history is viewed. He states:

Certainly we need history. But our need for history is quite different from that of the spoiled idler in the garden of knowledge, even if he in his refinements looks down on our rude and graceless requirements and needs. That is, we require history for life and action, not for the smug avoiding of life and action, or even to whitewash a selfish life and cowardly, bad acts. Only so far as history serves life will we serve it…153

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152 See BGE, Preface.
153 ADH, Preface, 7.
History serves life, Nietzsche suggests, when it is a prerequisite for generative action. In this view, the study of history becomes ethical work.\footnote{54} It has less to do with knowledge for its own sake and everything to do with the way that the discipline informs conduct.

But, the question remains, what does doing history in the perspective of life actually entail? Nietzsche claims that for history to serve life, people must be able to find a balance between living as historically conscious creatures and forgetting. He asserts that:

Cheerfulness, clear conscience, the carefree deed, faith in the future, all this depends on there being a line that distinguishes what is clear and in full view from the dark and unilluminable; it depends on one’s being able to forget at the right time as well as to remember at the right time; on discerning with strong instinctual feelings when there is need to experience historically and when unhistorically. Precisely this is the proposition the reader is invited to consider: \textit{the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture}.\footnote{55}

To know how to discern “when there is need to experience historically and when unhistorically,” life itself must be the goal; and, history “so far as it serves life, serves an unhistorical power.”\footnote{56}

In order to demonstrate what all of this entails, and present his alternative to “scientific history,” Nietzsche introduces three ways in which history can be studied in the perspective of life: the \textit{monumental}, the \textit{antiquarian}, and the \textit{critical}.

The purpose of \textit{monumental} history, Nietzsche contends, is to give the “man of action” examples of great deeds. The “man of action” then learns:

That the great moments in the struggle of great individuals form a chain, that in them the high points of humanity are linked throughout millennia, that what is highest in such a moment of the distant past be for me still alive, bright and great—this is the fundamental thought of the faith in humanity which is expressed in the demand for a \textit{monumental} history.\footnote{57}

\footnotetext{54}{What I mean by this is that driving Nietzsche’s \textit{art-of-life} philosophy is a question about how the individual’s engagement with the world can lead to a better future. In this regard, Nietzsche’s inquiries share features with the classical notion of ethics—as questions concerning the good life—though, of course, we already know of Nietzsche’s rejection of the notion of “the good” as such. See \textit{BGE}, Preface.}
\footnotetext{55}{Ibid., §1, 10.}
\footnotetext{56}{Ibid., §1, 14.}
\footnotetext{57}{Ibid., §2, 15.}
Monumental history places the “man of action” within the story of the “great individuals” of the past. Once he becomes part of that story, the man of action can also be inspired to perform great deeds of his own. He becomes a master in this story, is positioned to create new values, and by extension serves life. In short, according to Nietzsche, the advantage of doing monumental history results from “the knowledge that the great which once existed was at least possible once and may well be again possible sometime.” This possibility will motivate the man of action to attempt great feats as well.

However, there is also a disadvantage to monumental history. Nietzsche contends that “whenever the monumental view of the past rules over the other ways of looking at the past…the past itself suffers damage.” This occurs, in Nietzsche’s view, when monumental history is no longer used in its “proper soil”—that is, when it is no longer deployed by the man of action; when, as it were, the historian becomes too enamored with the greatness of the past and fails to attempt great deeds of his own. Excessive canonization occurs and the great achievements of the past become the oppressive standard by which all activity is judged, which inadvertently stifles future expenditures of creative energy. Here monumental history stifles creativity, and thus, ceases to serve life. Nietzsche suggests that this results from a fear of superseding the greatness

158 I will maintain the masculine pronoun here because Nietzsche was clearly referring specifically to the man of action [der Thätige] and not to the generic formulation of Man as humanity.

159 This is one of the few places that I think both Martin Heidegger and Gilles Deleuze 1) agree and 2) are right. They both acknowledge the centrality of values to Nietzsche’s thinking and, albeit in their different ways, contend that for Nietzsche the creation of values is a fundamental condition for the possibility of living. Heidegger says, “The essential means are the conditions of itself posited by the will to power itself. These conditions Nietzsche calls values. He says, ‘In all will there is valuing...’ To value means to constitute and establish worth. The will to power values inasmuch as it constitutes the conditions of enhancement and fixes the conditions of preservation” (Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche” in The Question of Technology, trans. by William Lovitt, 80). According to Deleuze, on the other hand, the question of values, which he sees Nietzsche as having re-introduced into philosophy, is tied to the problem of critique. “The problem of critique” he writes, “is that of the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their creation” (Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche & Philosophy, 1). Deleuze then acknowledges that since critique is not a form of ressentiment, in Nietzsche’s view, the values implicit in its (critique’s) evaluations have to act as the ground for the creation of future values. This is a significant agreement between these authors that I find compelling.

160 ADH, §2, 16.

161 Ibid., §2, 17.
of the past. Consequently, the historian denies the importance of the future. To clarify this point, Nietzsche provides an example,

If… the use of the popular vote and numerical majorities were transferred to the realm of art and the artist required to defend himself before a forum of the aesthetically inactive, you may bet your life that he would be condemned: not despite, but just because of the fact that his judges have solemnly proclaimed the canon of monumental art.162

The “aesthetically inactive,” Nietzsche continues, use the great moments of the past to hide their indignation toward those whose lives are generative. This type of resentment smothers the present by overburdening it with the achievements of the past. Nietzsche describes this use of monumental history saying that “they act as though their motto were: let the dead bury the living.”163

Nietzsche argues that there is also a second way of studying the past, namely, antiquarian history. This type of historicism venerates and preserves the past. He states: “In the second place, then, history belongs to the preserving and revering soul—to him who with loyalty and love looks back on his origins; through this reverence he, as it were, gives thanks for his existence.”164 When in the right hands, or as Nietzsche says, soil, the advantage of antiquarian history is evidenced in the way the past is treated: “by tending with loving hands [to] what has long survived [the historian] intends to preserve the conditions in which he grew up for those who will come after him—and so he serves life.”165 However, like monumental history, there are also disadvantages to antiquarian history. The disadvantages begin when “the historical sense no longer preserves life but mummifies it.”166 Nietzsche observes that “antiquarian history

162 Ibid., §2, 18.
163 Ibid., §2, 18. It is important to note that Nietzsche’s criticism of this type of historian is not that he lacks creativity, but that he uses an oppressive standard to stifle the creativity of those who possess it. As we will see in the following chapters, Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy is quite similar.
164 Ibid., §3, 19.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid., §3, 21.
itself degenerates the moment that the fresh life of the present no longer animates and inspires it.”\footnote{Ibid.} This results from an over-protectiveness of the past. When this occurs the and historian fails to create—because creative action involves change which often destroys aspects of our traditions—yet again history ceases to serve life.

It is at this point that Nietzsche introduces the notion of critical history. He suggests that critical history is the necessary companion to the two former approaches. In fact, without critical history the others quickly cease to be advantageous and become inimical to life. Nietzsche says, “Here it becomes clear how badly man needs, often enough, in addition to the monumental and antiquarian ways of seeing the past, a \textit{third} kind, the \textit{critical}: and this again in the service of life as well.”\footnote{Ibid.} Critical history is needed precisely because all new creation requires a destruction of something old. As Nietzsche affirms:

\begin{quote}
[The historian] must have the strength, and use it from time to time, to shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live: this he achieves by dragging it to the bar of judgment, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it; every past, however, is worth condemning…\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

Critical history incites the man of action to judge the great deeds of the past, to condemn them either for not being great enough or for not being done by him, and to attempt greater feats himself.

Though Nietzsche suggests that the critical is the most important of the three approaches to history, it must be tempered by the other forms. Rather than being paralyzed by the greatness (or injustices) of the past, or being so enamored with one’s ancestors that anything new is viewed as a threat to their memory, the critical historian is always compelled to act, but often to the potential detriment to his own roots, life, or projects. Nietzsche describes the employment of
critical history as “always a dangerous process, namely dangerous for life itself: and men or ages which serve life in this manner of judging and annihilating a past are always dangerous and endangered men and ages.” However, it is still with the use of critical history that Nietzsche locates our highest potential. In describing the man of action, Nietzsche writes:

[T]he man of action looks back and interrupts the course to his goal for once to breathe freely. His goal, however, is some happiness, perhaps not his own, often that of a people or of all mankind; he flees resignation and uses history as a means against his resignation.

To create, the man of action must recognize the greatness of the past and yet act against it.

As I have already suggested, Nietzsche views all creative acts as simultaneous acts of interpretation and evaluation; so the act of creation itself entails the creation of values. But this process also requires that we engage in re-interpretation and simultaneous re-evaluation of our values. Along these lines Richard Schacht notes:

In the course of dealing [with his philosophical problems, Nietzsche] arrived at his conception of philosophy in terms of the twin tasks of interpretation and evaluation. He took these tasks to involve the assessment of received interpretations and evaluations, but also reinterpretation and a basic “revaluation of values.”

These tasks are quite evidently not only “deconstructive,” but also, and more importantly, constructive for Nietzsche. Justice is not done to his kind of philosophy if the former dimension is stressed to the neglect or exclusion of the latter.

It is precisely this ability to condemn the past in order to create new values—what I take to be the primary claim that Nietzsche endorses in the essay—that allows the man of action to perform, what I will refer to, as Nietzsche’s kind of historicism. To perform Nietzsche’s type of historicism, the historian must be able to reinterpret and reevaluate the values of the past. This entails having the ability to cut, carve and reshape, as well as preserve, values in ways that enhance the present hopefully to maximize potential in the future. It is in this sense that

170 Ibid., §3, 22.
171 Ibid., §2, 15. Note both Nietzsche’s consideration of others, what Young refers to as his communitarianism, and his explicit rejection of Schopenhauer’s pessimism here.
172 See note 159 above.
173 Schacht, NKP, 161.
Nietzsche’s formulation of critical history foreshadows his conception of genealogy, for which cutting, to borrow Michel Foucault’s apt metaphor, is a central aspect.\(^{174}\) Although I am not advocating Foucault’s notion of genealogy,\(^{175}\) I think that he is right about it having a normative dimension—which, in my view, is tied to the cutting aspect central to critical history. In this regard, I would augment Nehamas’s cautionary note about Foucault’s argument, when he contends: “My only reservation about Foucault’s essay is that, perhaps inadvertently, it may give the impression that genealogy is a discipline with independent rules and principles that determine the objects with which it is concerned…. Nietzsche does not, as Foucault does, contrast genealogy with history but insists that genealogy simply is history, correctly practiced.”\(^{176}\) As I see it, Nietzsche demonstrates in ADH that there are numerous approaches to doing history: the questions for him then are 1) is whatever approach employed sufficiently complemented by critical history (is the superhistorical appropriately countered by the unhistorical), and 2) is it being done in the perspective of life? So while being “history, correctly practiced,” genealogy is, more specifically, the history of emergence and descent (Entstehung and Herkunft), correctly practiced. Although I agree with Nehamas that genealogy as the practice of doing history correctly is not dogmatically committed to any “principles that determine the objects with which it is concerned”—a point that Raymond Geuss makes well—it does seem to have some methodological presuppositions, as we will see.\(^{177}\) One such presupposition is that for genealogy to be history done right it must be sufficiently critical. For this reason I take it, genealogy begins with a suspicion toward the unity of value or meaning in the originary moments of the

\(^{174}\) Michel Foucault employs this imagery when presenting his account of “Effective” history in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, 154.

\(^{175}\) Foucault talks about genealogy in terms of parody, systematic dissociation, and sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.

\(^{176}\) Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 245-246 fn.1.

phenomena it studies. In this regard then, we may say, genealogy is “a discipline with independent rules.” However, without a balance between both cutting and preserving, all creativity, and thus life, is threatened.178

In this view then, it becomes clear that one of the markers that distinguishes Nietzsche’s historicism from scientific history is its normative or ethical dimension. However, this claim places in in conversation with some of Peter Berkowitz’s arguments about Nietzsche’s “ethics of history.” Berkowitz argues,

Critical history closely resembles the familiar scientific and scholarly study of history. A crucial difference is that critical history, like monumental and antiquarian history, has an explicitly ethical dimension. Critical history is properly deployed to dissolve the claims that the past makes on the present so as to free the “man of action.”…

Critical history mercilessly lays bare the violence and weakness, the errors and aberrations and atrocities in which all human action is rooted.179

I agree with Berkowitz’s claim that one of the distinguishing features of Nietzsche’s historicism from the “scientific and scholarly study of history” is its ethical element. But, central to that ethical dimension, in my estimation, is Nietzsche’s attempt to reject the legacy of the Platonic view of truth as being aperspectival—a point Berkowitz misses because of his insistence that Nietzsche’s view of history “serves life well only on the basis of true knowledge of metaphysics and human nature.”180 Berkowitz’s contends that

alongside and in constant tension with Nietzsche’s weighty cluster of opinions affirming that the world lacks a rational, natural, or divine order, that morality is artifice and pathology, and that the will is sovereign, is a rival and equally weighty cluster of his opinions asserting that the cosmos has an intelligible character, that there is a suprahistorical ethical order, and that knowledge of these matters brings health, liberates, and ennobles. It is the unresolved antagonism between these sets of fundamental convictions that animates and orders Nietzsche’s thoughts.181

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178 In some regards, this may be precisely where genealogy is, to Nietzsche, an improvement over critical history.
179 Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, 33-34.
181 Ibid., 26.
While in *BT* there are moments which seem to commit Nietzsche to a view that maintains there being a suprahistorical ethical order, the interpretation that I have been providing resolves the tension between the two “weighty clusters of opinions.” I take it that when Nietzsche suggests that the world lacks a rational, natural, or divine order, what he is arguing is that there is no *intrinsic* rational, natural, or divine order. This is simply to suggest that we, human beings, are the ones who order the world. This recognition then makes sense of the second “weighty cluster” of Nietzsche’s opinions. When Nietzsche suggests that the world is intelligible, all he is saying is that as human beings have ordered, and continue to order the world they infuse it with meaning; as such the world *is* intelligible.

In fact, according to Nietzsche, the biggest problem with the scientific approach to history is that it ultimately leads to a view of the future as fixed, and therefore, that there is no need for action. Nietzsche states,

> despite the most powerful beat of its wings knowledge has been unable to tear itself loose and attain freedom, a deep feeling of hopelessness has remained and has taken on that historical colouration by which all higher education and culture is now surrounded in melancholy darkness. A religion which, of all the hours of a human life, takes the last one to be the most important, which predicts an end to life on earth as such and condemns the living to live in the fifth act of the tragedy surely stimulates the deepest and noblest powers, but is hostile to all new planting, bold attempting, free desiring; it resists every flight into the unknown because it does not love there, does not hope there… In this sense we still live in the Middle Ages and

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182 Perhaps the closest Nietzsche comes to making claims that sound as if he is referring to a “suprahistorical ethical order,” are in his account of the Dionysian insight into the primordial ground of existence in *BT*, and in his account of the “suprahistorical” man who loses the will to live once he recognizes “the essential condition of all happenings,” in ADH §2. As I argue in the previous chapter, although Nietzsche is already critical of Schopenhauer while writing *BT*, his reliance on Schopenhauer’s language and categories keep him caught between holding the metaphysical position that he can gain insight into the core of existence—namely, that suffering is primordial and that it, this core of existence, is indestructible—and simultaneously attempting to reject Schopenhauer’s pessimism as well as Plato’s conception of the Real. However, even here, I contend, we can see him arguing that what we actually learn about ourselves as a species is that we are contingently related as sufferers in the world. So even in *BT*, where there are remnants of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical system, he is attempting get away from the view of existence that posits a “suprahistorical ethical order.” As such, the claim about the centrality of suffering to existence operates as a historically grounded, empirical claim about our condition as finite creatures living in a world of flux. Regarding the claim from ADH, while he still holds a view that there is a fundamental fact about existence that can be gleaned from enough historical study, it is still a historically grounded, claim that accords with our experiences. Cf. Clark on this point. Also, see fn80 above (in chapter 1).
history is still a disguised theology: just as the reverence which the layman accords
the scientific caste is a reverence inherited from the clergy.\textsuperscript{183}

Like Euripidean drama, the scientific study of history arrests the will, stifles our creative
energies, and destroys our “belief in an ideal future.”\textsuperscript{184} Overburdened by history we suffer “the
historical malady”\textsuperscript{185}—the insomnia, fever, and nausea caused by the excesses of history.

Nietzsche presents his type of historicism as the antidote for the historical malady. He
says, “do not be surprised, they bear the names of poisons: the antidotes to the historical are
called—the unhistorical and the superhistorical.”\textsuperscript{186} In combining the superhistorical sensibility
with that of the unhistorical, the man of action is able to master the past, hold the burden of
history at bay, and create values that serve life—that is, he is able to use the appreciative
approaches to history in perfect balance with the critical, all in the perspective of life.\textsuperscript{187}

In the end, Nietzsche leaves us with a historian who views the value of history in its
relation to the present and future. He states,

[History’s] value is just this, to describe with insight a known, perhaps common
theme, an everyday melody, to elevate it, raise to a comprehensive symbol and so let
a whole world of depth of meaning, power and meaning be guessed in it.\textsuperscript{188}

On this level history becomes art: “Only if history can bear being transformed into a work of art,
that is, to become a pure art form, may it perhaps preserve instincts or even rouse them.”\textsuperscript{189} Only
then does the historian:

have the strength to recast the well-known into something never heard before and to
proclaim the general so simply and profoundly that one overlooks its simplicity
because of its profundity and its profundity because of its simplicity.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{183} ADH, §8, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{184} BT, §11, 78.
\textsuperscript{185} ADH, §10, 62.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{187} In many ways this response typifies Meyers’s insight that Nietzsche accepts descriptive pessimism and rejects
evaluative pessimism. See chapter 1, fn 51.
\textsuperscript{188} ADH, § 6, 36.
\textsuperscript{189} ADH, §7, 39.
\textsuperscript{190} ADH, §6, 37.
At this point one may ask again: What about truth? Nietzsche begins to answer this question when he discusses the dangers of critical history. He says,

At best we may bring about a conflict between our inherited, innate nature and our knowledge as well as a battle between a strict new discipline and ancient education and breeding; we implant a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature so that the first nature withers away. It is an attempt, as it were, *a posteriori* to give oneself a past from which one would like to be descended: – always a dangerous attempt because it is difficult to find a limit in denying the past and because second natures are mostly feeble than the first. Too often we stop at knowing the good without doing it because we also know the better without being able to do it. Yet here and there a victory is achieved nevertheless, and for the fighters who use critical history for life there is even a remarkable consolation: namely, *to know that this first nature also was, at some time or other, a second nature* and that every victorious second nature becomes a first.  

The critical historian discovers that truth, whether about the past or otherwise, is never aperspectival; he finds that it is an interpretation that has imposed meaning upon other interpretations. This is a position that Nietzsche develops further as he matures as a thinker.

As we see in the Preface to *BGE*,

> Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached the truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman’s heart?

This, I think, is the point that Nietzsche is making as early as ADH: the way that scholars have approached truth is wrong-headed. As long as they adhere to the Platonic error and approach truth as a metaphysical Ideal, as needing to be beyond perspective, they will never win its heart. By inverting Plato and approaching truth perspectively, we can see that truths are contingent

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191 Ibid., §3, 22; Emphasis added.
193 *BGE*, Preface, 1.
upon their efficacy for life.\textsuperscript{194} They depend, in large measure, on what provides best for the future. But, simultaneously, the future relies on our ability to condemn many of the things we already hold to be true.

Although Nietzsche’s position is not yet fully formed, we see him working through several themes for which his mature works will be recognized. And while I have barely touched upon many of these themes here, reading Nietzsche as already engaging in his attempt to invert Plato in the early writings has illuminated several points. First, I have been able to challenge, in detail, the view that Nietzsche was straightforwardly Schopenhauerian in these works. But more importantly it has allowed me to focus on two themes that will be crucial to understanding what is at stake in Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy. These two themes are the centrality of his rejection of pessimism to his attempt to overcome metaphysics, along with his advocacy of perspectivism. He views pessimism and metaphysics as tied to a view of human existence that is inimical to our ability to achieve future greatness. Finally, with this in mind I hope we begin to see what is at stake for Nietzsche; that by the time he articulates his criticism of democracy, it is out of a concern for the future and not out of a blanket anti-egalitarian, elitism. However, we must now turn to the ways in which these themes develop in Nietzsche’s mature writings.

\textsuperscript{194} This is not to suggest that Nietzsche is a utilitarian. To be clear, some of these truths are painful and may even be pernicious to an individual’s, a culture’s, or even an entire generation’s life. Furthermore, given what I take Nietzsche’s position to be, the question about whether these truths are “really” true in a Platonic sense is nonsensical, because that question presupposes a non-perspectival perspective.
Chapter 3:
Overcoming Nihilism and the Criticism of Democracy

Only as creators!—This has given me the greatest trouble and still does: to realize that what things are called is incomparably more important than what they are. The reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for... all this grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body. What at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is effective as such. How foolish it would be to suppose that one only needs to point out this origin and this misty shroud of delusion in order to destroy the world that counts for real, so-called “reality.” We can only destroy as creators.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The great accomplishment of the Genealogy is the demonstration that morality in general and asceticism in particular are indeed subjects of interpretation, that they can be added to our interpretive universe.... [A]s Nietzsche emphasizes throughout this work, morality itself is an interpretation to begin with.

Alexander Nehamas

Genealogy and Overcoming Nihilism

In the previous chapters, I argued that if we read Nietzsche in the early writings as having already begun his attempt to invert Platonism, not only do we provide a fuller account of what is at stake for him at that point in his development as a thinker, but also the ways in which Nietzsche walked a tight-rope trying to maintain fidelity to many of Schopenhauer’s commitments while attempting simultaneously to reject his metaphysics—especially his philosophical pessimism. Rendering these themes more clearly, I argued, allows us to account

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for some of the important shifts in Nietzsche’s works as he matured as a thinker. In this chapter, I turn to some of his later works, though most of the emphasis will be given to On the Genealogy of Morality,\textsuperscript{197} to highlight some of the implications of those shifts. One shift in particular to which I will pay attention is the way Nietzsche’s early rejection of pessimism develops into his account and rejection of nihilism. Not only does this endeavor help us better understand the general issues surrounding these themes, but it also points us to a specific concern that will be central to understanding Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy—namely, his worry about the problems around the ascetic ideal and slave morality. I argue that if we grasp the implications of these notions we will 1) better appreciate what is at stake for Nietzsche when he criticizes democracy, and thus respond to a particular anxiety in the scholarship about whether there are any resources in his thought for those of us with democratic commitments,\textsuperscript{198} and 2) be in a position to begin formulating a justification for holding democratic commitments in light of his criticisms.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Nietzsche presents an account that holds human existence to be highly contingent and thoroughly implicated in processes of interpretation. However, while putting forward this vision, he simultaneously rejects Schopenhauer’s pessimistic conclusions. Though Nietzsche is primarily concerned with the problem of pessimism in his early writings, he eventually begins to view pessimism as a symptom of a larger historical and philosophical problem, namely that of nihilism. Or as

\textsuperscript{197} For a discussion of some of the difficulties in translating the prepositional article Zur in the title see Bernd Magnus, Jean-Pierre Mileur, and Stanley Stewart, “Reading Ascetic Reading,” (RAR) in NGM, 423-424 n.2.

\textsuperscript{198} For proponents on both sides of this debate see, for example, William E. Connolly especially, Identity/Difference, Expanded Ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), and Lawrence Hatab, A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy, (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1995), who find tools, in Nietzsche, that help them advance their democratic positions; and Bruce Detwiler, Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), and Fredrick Appel, Nietzsche Contra Democracy, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), who suggest that there are no such tools.
Lawrence Hatab puts it: “Nietzsche came to see Schopenhauer’s philosophy as the secret code to the entire Western tradition.”

But the question remains, why nihilism? As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Nietzsche was attracted to Schopenhauer’s intellectual honesty. He saw in Schopenhauer’s criticism of optimistic philosophies a rebuke against both intellectual and existential cowardice. Schopenhauer in Nietzsche’s view, along with Emerson, called humanity to accept responsibility for its role in the redemption of existence. However, Schopenhauer concludes ultimately that there is no redemption, and, as such, we need to resign ourselves in ascetic self-denial to be freed from the clutches of the will to life. As I have demonstrated earlier, even as early as BT Nietzsche was dissatisfied with this conclusion. He wanted to have his cake (anti-optimism) and eat it too (anti-pessimism); or to use Matthew Meyer’s helpful distinction, Nietzsche maintained aspects of a descriptive pessimism while rejecting evaluative pessimism. As Nietzsche’s views developed, along with his criticism of decadence, he came to believe that Schopenhauer’s attempt at honesty simply revealed the other side of the same coin. Hatab’s summation is helpful:

Nietzsche then concluded that Schopenhauer’s pessimism was the hidden truth of Western thought, that all the rectification projects in the name of truth, knowledge, salvation, justice, and so on were in fact esoteric, concealed forms of pessimistic life-

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201 In this connection we see the precise correlation of Nietzsche’s break with Wagner and the shift in Nietzsche’s tone toward Schopenhauer—from immanent criticism to polemic.
202 For instance, when discussing problems with providing a rational foundation for the injunction to hurt no one, Nietzsche says in a well known passage, “Schopenhauer did not succeed either—and whoever has once felt deeply how insipidly false and sentimental this principle is in a world whose essence is will to power, may allow himself to be reminded that Schopenhauer, though a pessimist, really—played the flute.” He then asks, “a pessimist, one who denies God and the world but comes to a stop before morality—who affirms morality and plays the flute—the laede neminem morality—what? is that really—a pessimist?” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989 Edition), §186, 99. Cited henceforth as *BGE*. 
denial. Schopenhauer, then, exemplified the Western tradition without all the false ornamentation.\textsuperscript{203}

Although I am not convinced that Nietzsche came to view “all the rectification projects” as “forms of pessimistic life-denial”—in fact, I believe that is an important part of why he shifts from the language of pessimism to that of nihilism—Hatab is partly right here. Nietzsche does indeed come to view Schopenhauer’s pessimism as revealing the underlying impetus of such projects. He found that both the optimistic and pessimistic responses to the question of the justification of existence share a fundamental assumption, namely that unless there is some grand provider of meaning behind the universe, human existence is pointless. Underpinning the question of its justification, Nietzsche found, is an impulse to condemn existence, which is shared by both the Western philosophical tradition’s onto-theology as well as Schopenhauer’s pessimistic atheism. Neither position could imagine existence and its terrors without initially condemning it, and then calling for its justification. So where Nietzsche challenges Schopenhauer’s pessimism in \textit{BT} and suggests that the redemption of existence lays squarely on human shoulders, it was not until he saw clearly that Schopenhauer’s philosophy shared many assumptions to the religious and philosophical views they both, supposedly, rejected that Nietzsche viewed pessimism as a symptom of nihilism—that implicit impulse to condemn existence.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{203} Hatab, \textit{NGM}, 31.

\textsuperscript{204} For an insightful discussion of the relationship between pessimism and nihilism in Nietzsche’s development see Tobias Dahlkvist, \textit{Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism}, (Uppsala, SE: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), 220-233; cited henceforth as \textit{NPP}. In the text, Dahlkvist contends that Nietzsche’s move in concern from pessimism to nihilism reflects a shift from a worry about the justification of existence, a question of value, to one about its bearableness, a question of meaning. Dahlkvist also suggests that although these were two distinct concerns in Nietzsche’s development, the questions between value and meaning only became blurred after Nietzsche. Dahlkvist says, “It is, I believe, correct, that the question of the meaning of life on the whole came to replace the question of the value of life. But we should not take for granted that the two questions can be regarded as synonyms. Or rather: they became synonyms after Nietzsche” Dahlkvist, \textit{NPP}, 225. Although I think that there is much to commend in Dahlkvist’s account, I have reservations about his description here. For instance, though the questions are separate in Nietzsche’s development, and he views pessimism as a symptom of nihilism, he ultimately views a version of the question of value, and justification, as implied in the question of meaning. It is not just that one question replaced
Yet there remains some ambiguity as to what precisely Nietzsche’s stance is toward nihilism. If nihilism is the devaluing of the highest values, as he suggests in *The Will to Power*, what does it mean to propose a plan to reevaluate all values? Furthermore, if nihilism’s central tenet is that existence is meaningless, then ultimately, given that he says as much, it makes sense that thinkers continue to accuse Nietzsche of being a nihilist. For example, in a recent essay, Nadeem Hussain argues that Nietzsche is “in one sense of the word, a nihilist.” Hussain makes two main claims. The first is that when attempting “to explain how Nietzsche’s free spirits are supposed to engage in a practice of valuing,” one faces “an interpretive puzzle.” The second is that one “can solve the interpretive puzzle by taking Nietzsche’s free spirits to be engaged in a fictionalist simulacrum of valuing.”

The other, and that they came to be regarded as synonyms after Nietzsche. Rather, Nietzsche finds that they imply/entail each other. How else do we make sense of Nietzsche’s response to the question: What does nihilism mean? When he says, “That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why’ finds no answer”? Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1968), §2, 9; cited henceforth as *WP*. The question “why?” itself conflates value and meaning. In Nietzsche’s view, humanity’s entire existence is constituted on providing valuable meanings so that existence might be worth it. Said differently, the question of meaning (why do it?) implies affirmation (a response to the question of value, or justification, i.e. it is worthwhile). The problem is that both optimists and pessimists have provided deleterious answers to the value/meaning question by mis-ordering our values, so that no justification ever counts as one. It is up to a particular type of future genealogist to succeed in revaluing all values in a manner that is healthy for the future of the species. While this final claim, *healthy for the future of the species*, may be considered controversial, because of Nietzsche’s aristocratism, I believe the argument of this chapter and the next will bear it out.

Perhaps the most notable of these readings are Martin Heidegger’s and Arthur Danto’s. Heidegger’s accusation is twofold. On the one hand, Heidegger, following the implication of the notion of complete nihilism that Nietzsche raises in *The Will to Power*, suggests that Nietzsche’s revaluation of values entails a form of nihilism. On the other hand, Heidegger maintains that despite Nietzsche’s diagnosis and attempt to overcome the problem of nihilism, he ultimately fails because his misdescription of Being devalues it (Being) in precisely the manner consistent with the nihilistic tradition of Western metaphysics. Insofar as this is the case, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche is the last great metaphysician—that is, because he (Heidegger) has emerged to formulate the question of Being in a way that opens the possibility to get us beyond metaphysics. For Danto, in turn, Nietzsche is a metaphysical nihilist for whom “the world has no value… [because] there is nothing in it which might sensibly be supposed to have value” (Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 15). Richard Schacht has illuminated many problems with Danto’s argument, which I will not rehearse here, in *Making Sense of Nietzsche*. This, however, is not to say that I endorse Schacht’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s views on truth.


Hussain, HI, 158.
In Hussain’s view, there are four interpretive constraints which make Nietzsche’s position regarding these issues puzzling: first of all, he contends that in Nietzsche’s account, free spirits and new philosophers are supposed to effect “the creation and revaluation of values,” and secondly, to conceive of “‘reality as it is.’” However, the problem here comes into focus given Nietzsche’s “nihilism”—thirdly, “Nietzsche claims that nothing has value in itself and therefore all claims of the form ‘X is valuable’ are false.” The fourth interpretive constraint, for Hussain, is the relationship “between art, the avoidance of practical nihilism, and the creation of new values,” but this piece is unique given that it is also part of the puzzle’s solution.

Hussain states the puzzle most clearly,

Given interpretive constraint (1) it seems as if Nietzsche’s free spirits are supposed to engage in valuing and create values. However, given interpretive constraint (3), there do not seem to be any values. We might think that perhaps Nietzsche’s free spirits are simply supposed to have false beliefs. They are supposed to think that things are valuable in themselves even though such beliefs are false. This would, perhaps, be an achievement, since after all, intentionally getting oneself to have false beliefs is, as we know, a delicate business that requires, so to speak, much skill. But I think this interpretation runs into interpretive constraint (2), namely, that Nietzsche’s free spirits and higher men are distinguished by their ability to face up to reality. I take a systematic holding of false beliefs to be a failing in this regard. If there is another

208 Regarding issue (1), Hussain qualifies that “The task is not to create new objects, actions, states of affairs, and persons that are valuable given existing values. This would be merely to create more value but not to create new values.” Hussain, HI, 158.

209 Hussain, HI, 159. To develop this aspect of his argument, Hussain contends that Nietzsche advances an error theory about morality. He does so, to circumvent the objection that Nietzsche is merely a subjective realist about morality (i.e. that he holds some moral claims to be true, and that we have some cognitive role in their being true). But it is not very clear on what grounds Hussain wants to maintain this reading. On the one hand, Hussain admits that, traditionally, an error theory is a conjunction of a ‘cognitivist’ semantic claim (i.e. that moral claims are truth-apt—that is, they are about beliefs and, as such, are candidates for truth or falsity) and a substantive claim that moral claims are false. However, recognizing Brian Leiter’s contention that 1) there is insufficient evidence to conclude as to whether Nietzsche was either a cognitivist or non-cognitivist, and that 2) it would be anachronistic to pronounce judgment on historical figures any way, Hussain says that if the traditional description is eschewed, a non-cognitivist (i.e. one who views moral claims as conative and therefore not as truth-apt, in that they don’t express beliefs) could still maintain an error theory by maintaining the substantive claim that moral claims are false. At this point the obvious questions are, does an error theory require a cognitivist semantic claim or not? And if not, how does one make the substantive judgment that a claim is false without simultaneously holding some, at least implicit, notion that the claim is a candidate for falsity? Even if moral claims in general are primarily conative, it is not clear how the evaluation of specific claims, especially with regard to their falsity, does not express beliefs, at least implicitly. How, for instance, are inferences to be made and evaluated? In this regard, it is still unclear how a non-cognitivist could maintain an error theory.

210 Hussain, HI, 164.
way to manage to do something we might want to call creating values that avoids buying into an ideology, then surely Nietzsche’s free spirits would take this option. So the interpretive puzzle is how can we make sense of the importance of values and valuing in Nietzsche’s higher men and free spirits—including, importantly, himself—while staying within our interpretive constraints?\footnote{Ibid., 165.}

I find a few of the assumptions in this passage questionable.

Premise (1) the creation of values seems to follow from premise (3) that there are no values. If values inhered in things, it is not clear how valuing would be \textit{creating} value. The value intrinsic to an object would determine, or at least influence, our valuing it. As we will see, it is precisely the assumptions undergirding Hussain’s worry that Nietzsche finds to be nihilistic. Further, Nietzsche says repeatedly that he is not very concerned with the veracity of beliefs.\footnote{See for instance the famous passage in \textit{BGE}: “The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even self-cultivating.” Nietzsche, \textit{BGE}, §4, 11.}

This is consistent with his view that reality is created through the codification of interpretations. In this sense, precisely because our interpretations create reality, Nietzsche beckons his higher men to face meaninglessness and create values, which will, in turn, become reality. As Nietzsche says in a passage to which Hussain refers,

\begin{quote}
It is here and nowhere else that one must make a start to comprehend what Zarathustra wants: this type of man that he conceives, conceives reality \textit{as it is}, being strong enough to do so; this type is not estranged or removed from reality but is reality itself and exemplifies all that is terrible and questionable in it—\textit{only in that way can man attain greatness}.\footnote{Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1989), “Why I Am a Destiny,” §5, 331.}
\end{quote}

Nietzsche’s, and Zarathustra’s, desired type creates reality itself. Even if someday in the distant future, post-dating Nietzsche’s higher men, another strong type were to emerge and interpret existence differently and, thereby, falsify their beliefs, it is still unclear that Nietzsche’s higher men failed to face reality—premise (2).
However, Hussain reads Nietzsche’s notion of “art, in which precisely the lie is sanctified and the will to deception has a good conscience,”\textsuperscript{214} as the solution to his interpretive puzzle. He contends:

Thus my solution to the interpretive puzzle is that Nietzsche’s recommended practice for his free spirits is a simulacrum of valuing. Nietzsche’s recommended practice is a form of make-believe or pretense. Nietzsche’s free spirits pretend to value something by regarding it as valuable in itself while knowing that in fact it is not valuable in itself.\textsuperscript{215}

The immediate difficulty here, in my view, is that despite his best efforts in the conclusion, Hussain fails to account for how pretending something squares with facing reality. Furthermore, though I think Hussain is right to see art as the way out of his interpretive puzzle, the puzzle is founded on faulty assumptions. Part of Nietzsche’s entire point, as I take it, is to show that we literally create values. The problem for him, as we shall see, is that we have been slaves to the values created by people who share a particular type of psychological view of the world (i.e. the weak) and we continue to reproduce these values, which are deleterious to life.\textsuperscript{216} The problem with Hussain’s argument, in turn, stems from his desire to read Nietzsche as being a fictionalist about moral claims. While it may be the case that Nietzsche holds many of “the beliefs expressed by moral judgments… [to be] false because they involve believing in moral facts when in fact there are none,”\textsuperscript{217} I disagree with the statement: “Nietzsche thinks that our evaluations of

\textsuperscript{214} Nietzsche, \textit{GM} III §25, 153.
\textsuperscript{215} Hussain, HI, 170.
\textsuperscript{216} I will spend much of this chapter explaining what I mean by this.
\textsuperscript{217} Hussain, HI, 159. I actually do not think that this is really the issue for Nietzsche though. As he contends in \textit{BGE} §4, the veracity of moral claims is not the concern. For instance, even in the passage to which Hussain refers here, Nietzsche never mentions the term “falsity”: “My demand upon the philosopher is known, that he take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment beneath himself. This demand follows from an insight which I was first to formulate: there are altogether no moral facts. Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities which are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena—more precisely a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance at which… ‘truth,’… designates all sorts of things which we today call ‘imaginings.’” Nietzsche, \textit{TI}, “The ‘Improvers’ of Mankind,” 1, (I use Hussain’s translation quoted in HI, 159, here to remain consistent with his terms). Rather Nietzsche is more concerned about the effects moral judgments have on how we comport our lives. He wants for his future philosophers to overcome the illusions associated with the good/evil moral schema, move \textit{beyond} those
things [necessarily] involve judgments that things are valuable in themselves. It is in order to undermine our evaluative judgments that Nietzsche emphasizes that things do not have value in themselves."²¹⁸ I add the term necessarily here because Hussain needs something like this for his fictionalist account to hold.

Interpretive constraint (3) is problematic for Hussain precisely because he presumes the premises of fictionalism in his effort to interpret Nietzsche as a fictionalist, especially in his unwillingness to part with a notion of things being valuable in themselves. This is not to say that Hussain does not recognize Nietzsche’s rejection of the notion; he clearly does. However, because of his commitment to reading Nietzsche as a fictionalist, Hussain maintains that Nietzsche’s higher men must value things as if they are valuable in themselves. Hence his contention that “Nietzsche’s free spirits pretend to value something by regarding it as valuable in itself while knowing that in fact it is not valuable in itself.”²¹⁹ But why the demand to value a thing as if it is valuable in itself? Why not view a thing as being truly valuable, because we view it as truly valuable? Hussain provides a potential response in a footnote, when he writes:

We could take as a premise that Nietzsche explicitly only claims that things are not valuable in themselves. We could then attempt to look for the relations between agents and objects (states of affairs, actions, etc.) that we could use to come up with a subjective realist set of truth-conditions for evaluative claims. As it turns out, it is not at all easy to see how to do this. One would normally use an agent’s pro-attitudes to construct such truth-conditions; however, Nietzsche bemoans the fact that pro-attitudes themselves are constituted by evaluative judgments. It is this that makes us ‘from the very beginning illogical and thus unjust beings… this is one of the greatest and most irresolvable discords of existence’ (HAH I:32). There is a discord because we cannot exist, so Nietzsche says, without pro- and con-attitudes. However, if having some set of pro-attitudes towards an object were sufficient to make it the case that the object is valuable, then surely Nietzsche would not speak with such a despairing tone.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Hussain, HI, 162.
²¹⁹ Ibid., 170, the emphasis is mine.
²²⁰ Ibid., 163.
Although I think Hussain is right to highlight the complex relationship between valuing and having pro-attitudes, there remain some issues in the passage with which I have concerns.

Setting aside the problems of referring to a passage from *HAH*, a difficult text to situate within Nietzsche's *oeuvre* anyway, as if it unproblematically reflects his definitive position on the issue, it is not clear that what Nietzsche bemoans here is the notion that our pro-attitudes are insufficient to bestow value on an object, but that there is a type of imperialism to our interpretations. He says,

> The impurity of a judgment lies first of all in the condition of the material to be judged, that is, very incompletely, secondly, from the way in which the sum is formed, and thirdly, from the fact that each individual piece of this material again is the result of impure recognition, and this with absolute necessity. No experience of other another person, for example, no matter how close he stands to us, can be complete, so that we would have a logical right to [claim] a total evaluation of him. All evaluations are inconclusive and must be so. Finally, the standard with which we measure our existence is not of unalterable size, we have temperaments and fluctuations, and yet we would have to know ourselves as a fixed standard to be able possibly to measure justly our relationship to a thing. Perhaps it will follow from all this that one should not judge at all; if only one could *live* without having to evaluate, without having [to have] aversions and affections!—because all disinclination [being in a state of aversion] depends on an evaluation, likewise all inclinations. A drive [or impulse] to something or away from something, without a feeling thereof that one desires the favorable or to evade the harmful, a drive without a kind of evaluation that recognizes the worth of its goal, does not exist in humans. We are from the beginning illogical and thus unjust beings and can recognize this: this is one of the greatest and irresolvable discords of existence.

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221 In fact, as I mention in note 159 above, this is one of the few issues on which Heidegger and Deleuze seem, rightly in my view, to agree.

Although by the time of *HAH*, Nietzsche has shed many of the metaphysical views he adopted from Schopenhauer aspects of the ethical commitments remain. For Nietzsche at this point, it is lamentable that knowledge of all objects, especially of persons, results from interpretation; and interpreting entails some falsification. The discord to which he refers in this passage seems to be twofold. On the one hand, we are necessarily unjust when we interpret. Not only do we necessarily project facets of ourselves unto the objects, and persons, that we interpret, but our aversions and inclinations impinge upon those interpretations. On the other hand, while all knowledge has this character, we can also know this. One way to put it is that we can recognize “objectively” that we cannot know objectively—if by objectively we mean something like having knowledge of an object without some part of our interest being involved. While significant aspects of this view will change as Nietzsche develops as a writer, especially the notion that all interpretation falsifies, one issue that will remain important to Nietzsche regards his worry about the imperialistic character of interpretation.²²³

However, despite these problems with Hussain’s argument, I think he is right that Nietzsche’s view of art is central to the project of creating values and valuing. Primarily, art remains important for Nietzsche because it instructs us on how we create value, and value things though they had no value that precedes our valuing. What it means to face reality in this view, then, is precisely to be able to relinquish the notion of things being valuable in themselves, while acknowledging that the values we create are real.

Nevertheless, while there are many points in Hussain’s argument which would be interesting to pursue, I will focus primarily on his claim that Nietzsche is a nihilist. Here I will develop a reading of *GM*, concluding that Nietzsche’s argument actually demonstrates that the

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²²³ I will elaborate on this last point further in the next chapter.
thesis of nihilism is self-refuting. In fact, I contend that accusing Nietzsche of being a nihilist only substantiates some of his major claims against nihilism and its threat.

One of Nietzsche’s main targets in *GM* is the menace of nihilism. However, rather than merely providing a straightforward criticism to its central claim—namely, that existence is valueless/meaningless—Nietzsche attempts to demonstrate that nihilism’s thesis is ultimately self-refuting. Nietzsche makes his argument in two major steps. The first is through a description and criticism of the ways in which Christianity and its post-religious moral legacy (Christian morality for short) developed; while the second focuses on some implications of that development.

To proceed with the first step, Nietzsche introduces his own notion of genealogy. Nietzsche’s type of genealogy challenges other methods primarily because it has a different point of departure. Other genealogies of morality begin with the assumption that the moral categories are fixed, universal, and valuable-in-themselves. Nietzsche, on the contrary, wants to demonstrate that many of the features of Christian morality developed from diverse backgrounds, contexts, and circumstances. To do so, as I hope to show, Nietzsche provides three

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224 This is not to say that he invents the notion of a genealogy of morality, but only to suggest that he introduces his approach to the subject-matter. Nehamas talks briefly about Nietzsche’s occasional claim at having invented genealogy versus his complaints against the “bungled” attempts of the English psychologists (Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 108, 246 fn4).

225 Nietzsche opens his study arguing against two considerations. The first is notion of the good as the selfless. The second consideration that Nietzsche immediately dismisses is the notion of the good as the useful. Nietzsche dismisses these two accounts early on because they both assume the genetic fallacy—that is, that the meaning or value, that they each attribute to the good, will also be found at the origins of a history of our moral valuations. To this assumption, Nietzsche scoffs claiming that these accounts lack “the historical spirit itself” (*GM* I §2, 25). Here we identify what can perhaps be considered the first methodological rule or principle of Nietzschean genealogy, namely, that the genealogist must avoid assuming that the meaning or value of the phenomenon under consideration will be found at the phenomenon’s emergence. Nietzsche develops this argument in his discussion of the distinction between the “origin” and “purpose” of punishment. He says, “How have previous genealogists of morals set about solving these problems? Naively, as has always been their way: they seek out some ‘purpose’ in punishment, for example, revenge or deterrence, then guilelessly place this purpose at the beginning as *causa fiendi* of punishment...” (*GM* II §12, 77). Perhaps ironically, Nietzsche often adopts the genetic fallacy, methodologically, in *ad hominem* criticisms of Christian morality. For a discussion of Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* criticisms of Christianity see Robert Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003); cited henceforth as *LN*. (Siemens, Nietzsche’s Critique of Democracy (1870-1886) 2009)
accounts of its origin. I propose that these three accounts often overlap, diverge, and overlap again precisely to prove his point.\textsuperscript{226} In this regard, not only does Nietzsche view his genealogy as an improvement on “the bungled attempts” of Paul Rée and the English psychologists, he also sees it as a crucial, and devastating, challenge to the Christian claim (and by this he includes “secular” moderns who have adopted Christianity’s moral worldview) that its moral principles are revealed from God (or derived from reason)—that is, if Christian morality developed out of contingent historical circumstances then its claim to absolute status is undermined.\textsuperscript{227}

Unlike scientific history’s demand of knowledge for its own sake, then, Nietzsche contends that for his genealogy, “What was at stake was the value of morality.”\textsuperscript{228} This question assumes a level of urgency for Nietzsche because of what he diagnoses as the threat of nihilism. He says that “the great danger to mankind [is] its sublimest enticement and seduction—but to what? to nothingness… to—nihilism?”\textsuperscript{229} He views nihilism as the most sinister symptom of modern European culture because, as he see it, Christian morality effectively seduced and turned the human will against itself, and thus life.\textsuperscript{230}

In looking at “What light… linguistics, and especially the study of etymology, throw[s] on the history of the evolution of moral concepts,”\textsuperscript{231} Nietzsche perceives that Christian morality emerged out of a shift in ethical evaluative schemes in the ancient world. For instance,

\textsuperscript{226} Bernd Magnus et al. also discuss the three essays and how they hang together, in some detail, in RAR.
\textsuperscript{227} In other words, precisely because contingency is built into the Christian moral scheme from the beginning, attempts to deploy “universal” terms like justice are always already impacted by particular motivations, and there is no way around it. In this regard, I do not find it as surprising “that Nietzsche thought the discovery of the possibility of dubious motivation behind, for example, acts of ‘kindness’ to be a count against the moral mode of valuation itself” as Philippa Foot does—that is because the dubious motivations are built in and are not simply attributable to individuals while the moral scheme, and its categories, remains pure. Philippa Foot, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism,” in Schacht \textit{NGM}, 12.
\textsuperscript{228} \textit{GM} P \S 5, 19.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{230} The relation between his rejection of Schopenhauer’s pessimism in \textit{BT}, his entreaty to adopt critical history in the perspective of life in “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” and \textit{GM}’s attempt to diagnose and overcome the threat of nihilism should begin crystallizing at this point.
\textsuperscript{231} \textit{GM} I \S 17, 55.
Nietzsche charts the shift that occurs between ancient uses of the terms “good and bad” to the development of the moral categories “good and evil.” Here he recognizes that there was a reversal in the general evaluative categories. Nietzsche labels this reversal “the slave revolt in morality,” which, he argues, “begins when ressentiment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.”

One crucial feature of the “slave revolt in morality” is that, despite its paradoxical beginning, “slave morality always first needs a hostile external world.” The “slave revolt” was only able to give birth to values in response to another mode of valuation. Nietzsche’s genealogy identifies this other mode of valuation with that of the ancient aristocrats:

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232 GM I §10, 36.

233 The paradox here rests in the fact that ressentiment refers to a reactive psychological category that Nietzsche coins in relation to the “weak.” On the one hand, one of the central features of what it means to be weak, for Nietzsche, is to be unable to create. On the other hand, creation, according to Nietzsche is only possible through an exertion of strength that is generative, whereas ressentiment is a reactive phenomenon. So, for ressentiment to give birth to values is an extraordinary occurrence within Nietzsche’s narrative. However though, it is simultaneously a bit misleading to refer to the event as the “slave revolt” in morality, because, technically, within Nietzsche’s account the revolt actually begins among a pseudo aristocratic portion of the weak. In this regard, it is only a “slave revolt,” because of the reactive nature of the emotional/psychological motivations (i.e. ressentiment) that gave birth to the values within the “good and evil” schema. However, if I’m right here, there is a potential tension with this description and Nietzsche’s criticism of the notion of a “subject” in GM I §13. In what I take to be one of Nietzsche’s most definitive anti-essentialist passages, he says, “To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it express itself as strength…. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions [den Äusserungen] of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (GM I §13, 45). In this passage we see explicitly Nietzsche’s criticism of dualistic conceptions of the world. He challenges the notion that there is a thing-in-itself behind the sum-total of a thing’s effects. The problem here though is, if the strong is the one who expresses strength, and the weak is the one who lacks it, how can there be a strong segment of the weak? The response that makes the most sense, to me, has to do with the plurality of potential expressions of strength. Nietzsche provides, at least, three criteria of strength. One is creative expression, another is the expression of fortitude, and the third physical expression. I take the line to be something like this: the strong are such because they exercise mastery over their environments, whether it is through creation (especially by generating powerful interpretations of existence), by facing existence without the aid of catholicons, and by physically completing their projects (for example, Odysseus making it home). So if one never displays the capacity of physically transforming their environment, or continually relies on existential medicants to face the terror and meaninglessness of existence (it is in this connection that we see the biggest transition between Nietzsche’s early and later views on art), by definition, at least Nietzsche’s, this person displays weakness. However, while embodying these criteria of weakness, so Nietzsche’s story seems to suggest, members of this character type were able to generate an interpretation of existence; an interpretation that was able to become hegemonic as well. I discuss this section in more detail in the next chapter.

234 GM I §10, 37.
It is the noble races that have left behind them the concept “barbarian” wherever they have gone; even their highest culture betrays a consciousness of it and even a pride in it…. This “boldness” of noble races, mad, absurd, and sudden in its expression, the incalculability, even incredibility of their undertakings…[their] profound joy in all destruction, in all the voluptuousness of victory and cruelty—all this came together in the minds of those who suffered from it, in the image of the “barbarian,” the “evil enemy.”

Historically then, Nietzsche argues, it is not until the “slave revolt” that the “moral” category of “evil” is introduced into the world. More specifically, he suggests that the slave revolt resulted when the “weak” interpreted their suffering as being the fault of the “strong,” and were able to generate opposing values to theirs.

At this point, however, one may interject with the question: even if Nietzsche is correct, what does this process have to do with nihilism, or with his response to it as a problem? The relation between the slave revolt in morality and nihilism has to do with the development of the religious dimension tied to the evolution of slave morality. There are three points in this evolution on which Nietzsche focuses. The first is that as the weak blamed the strong for their suffering, they judged expressions of strength as evil. Secondly, in order to have their interests complied with, the weak posited their “moral” interpretations as universal absolutes—as absolutely true and absolutely sovereign. The final point of the evolution of Christian morality, on which Nietzsche focuses, is the point that will eventually lead, in his view, to the overcoming of Christian morality itself, namely, the development of the ascetic ideal.

An example that illustrates Nietzsche’s point regarding the first two aspects of the development of the slave revolt is seen in his account of the conception of the legal system that emerges under the paradigm of morality. He says,

[L]egal conditions… constitute a partial restriction of the will of life, which is bent upon power…. A legal order thought of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle between power complexes but as a means of preventing all struggle in

235 *GM I* §11, 41-42.
general… would be a principle *hostile to life*, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of man, an attempt to assassinate the future of man, a sign of weariness, a secret path to nothingness.\(^{236}\)

By erecting a system in which the strong are not only disparaged for their expressions of strength, but are also made to evaluate those expressions negatively through the use of absolute categories, slave morality was able to become hegemonic;\(^{237}\) giving birth to Christianity and its *hostility against life*. This passage also illuminates other aspects of Nietzsche’s narrative. For instance, Nietzsche notices that as (European) societies developed legal systems they began universalizing both the system over the individual as well as the sovereignty of the moral interpretation of existence over the *active* valuations of the strong. In other words, the category of morality itself was used to coerce the strong into conforming to the system. These are important elements to note because they also gesture to the third point on which Nietzsche focuses.

Nietzsche observes that as people started living in more legally ordered communities, in order for the sovereignty of the moral interpretation of existence to sediment, the human animal underwent a process of transformation. He says,

> I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced—that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace…. [A]t the same time the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands![…]

\(^{236}\) GM II §12, 76.

\(^{237}\) Again, Nietzsche’s language is imprecise here and consequently a bit confusing. It is important to bear in mind that it is not the weak per se that overturn the strong mode of evaluation; rather, it is a strong segment of the weak. This formulation is problematic on Nietzsche’s terms, for if the weak are merely those who cannot express strength, how can there be a strong segment of the weak? The answer appears to be in the fact that despite their inability to achieve great deeds or create great works, this group was still able to create values—which is an expression of strength. Furthermore, bearing this formulation in mind also aids in clarifying another conundrum: how could the weak overturn the strong, and their modes of evaluation? This is one of the questions that ultimately leaves Robert Pappas disappointed: “How could weakness have come to govern strength? The answer hangs open as vacantly as traditional stories of how altruism could ever have arisen out of selfishness.” Robert Pappas, *The Nietzsche Disappointment*, (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 2.
All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward—this is what I call the internalization of man...\textsuperscript{238}

The “internalization of man” is an important moment in human development for two main reasons.\textsuperscript{239} On the one hand, the human animal becomes more profound. He develops a conscience, becoming more contemplative, and here develops “what was later called his ‘soul.’”\textsuperscript{240} However, because of their ressentiment and how they interpreted their suffering, the weak developed the “bad conscience.” Although it may be objected at this point that in his account Nietzsche implies that the “bad conscience” emerged with the development of the human being in general, and that the weak’s interpretation of their suffering through the category of ressentiment did not occur until much later in the story, I interpret this part of Nietzsche’s narrative in this way for two main reasons. The first reason is that Nietzsche actually does claim that the “bad conscience” develops with the weak. Nietzsche writes,

The active, aggressive, arrogant man is still a hundred steps closer to justice than the reactive man; for he has absolutely no need to take a false and prejudiced view of the object before him in the way the reactive man does and is bound to. For that reason the aggressive man, as the stronger, nobler, more courageous, has in fact also had at all times a freer eye, a better conscience on his side: conversely, one can see who has the invention of the “bad conscience” on his conscience—the man of ressentiment!\textsuperscript{241}

The second reason for interpreting Nietzsche’s account in this way is that it helps make sense of the narrative of GM as a whole—that is, it allows for a unified interpretation of the three

\textsuperscript{238} GM II §16, 84.
\textsuperscript{239} In Nietzsche’s narrative, the “internalization of man” occurs on two simultaneous axes. On one axis develops a “conscience” with which the human animal learns to be accountable for itself. Nietzsche describes this development as the breeding of an animal that is responsible enough to have the right to make promises (GM II §1-3, 57-62). The other axis on which the “internalization of man” occurs is in the development of what Nietzsche calls the “bad conscience.” Although Nietzsche talks about these two developments separately, we should notice that they are both aspects of the “internalization of man.” For instance, in discussing the development of the human conscience, Nietzsche says, “In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here” (GM II §3, 61). The difference between both developments is that as human animals developed a conscience, which was to render them responsible enough to be accountable for their promises, many of them simultaneously began interpreting their failings to fulfill their promises as reflecting something about themselves. In turn, where promising was initially an act of freedom, it became an invisible panopticon; and, as such, keeping promises became an obligation to avoid punishment. Thus, Nietzsche contends, “It was in... the sphere of legal obligations, that the moral conceptual world of ‘guilt,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘duty,’ ‘sacredness of duty’ had its origin” (GM II §6, 65).
\textsuperscript{240} GM II §16, 84. I maintain the masculine pronoun for the sake of consistency.
\textsuperscript{241} GM II §11, 75.
seemingly unrelated essays. Interpreting Nietzsche’s discussion of the emergence of the “bad conscience” in this way is more consistent with his claims regarding the nature of the weak and the strong, as well as of the “slave revolt” in morality, because it better accounts for how the strong could be strong, but also be eventually overcome by the “slave revolt” in morality.

Nietzsche’s story appears to proceed as something like the following: Humans were more similar to other animals until they began differentiating their social arrangements. As their social arrangements became more intricate they developed even more complex ways of interacting with each other. One important way in which they developed sprang from a reaction to pain. Though, like other animals, it is instinctual to inflict pain on one another, unlike other animals, humans learned to keep track of the things that caused them pain.\textsuperscript{242} As they began keeping track of the causes of pain, humans developed the capacity for memory as well as even more complex social arrangements. One of these arrangements was the creditor-debtor relationship. As the stronger humans learned to remember they also internalized a sense of responsibility, which justified their ability to make promises—they developed a conscience. However, as the weaker humans learned to remember they internalized something similar to a sense of responsibility (i.e. a notion of fault). But because of their inability to express strength,\textsuperscript{243} they built up a form of ressentiment against the truly strong. Not only did they feel it toward the strong, but this ressentiment also became internalized along with the sense of fault. It is at this point that the “bad conscience” developed. At this point in the story, Nietzsche recounts, the weak humans’ process of internalization also modified the direction of the blame regarding the

\textsuperscript{242} I take keeping track to be a distinctive sort of activity, not to be confused with an instinctual response to stimuli. In this sense, Pavlov’s dogs salivating to the sound of bells is more like an animal becoming house-trained in order to earn rewards or avoid punishment than erecting a penal system to classify, catalogue, deploy, and maintain instantiations of justice. Like I said, I assume that keeping track entails something more like the latter.

\textsuperscript{243} Remember that among the weak there are still some who can create values (i.e. there is a “strong” segment of the weak). Although this faction is “strong” among the weak they cannot express their strength physically, especially with regards to the other strong humans, nor can they face the terror of existence without a form of existential mendicant.
question of suffering from merely external stimuli to the *internal* aspect of the human. So while, on one level, they viewed their suffering as being the fault of the “evil” perpetrator, they also simultaneously began viewing the suffering as their own fault. It is here, Nietzsche proposes, that the concept of guilt emerged, along with the “moral” view of the world. However, *because the strong also underwent processes of internalization*, they were also vulnerable to the weak humans’ revaluations based on *ressentiment*.

Additionally, it is through an analysis of the “internalization of man” that we also begin to see Nietzsche’s response to nihilism, namely, in his discussion of perhaps the most paradoxical of all human ideals—the *ascetic ideal*. The ascetic ideal is paradoxical because, although it has been the most powerful ideal willed by humans so far, it is simultaneously the will to weakness. For example, in discussing the ascetic life, Nietzsche says,

> For an ascetic life is a 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….
> All this is in the highest degree paradoxical: we stand before a discord that **wants** to be discordant, that **enjoys** itself in this suffering and even grows more self-confident and triumphant the more its own presupposition, its physiological capacity for life, decreases.\(^{244}\)

But how is such a paradox generated and maintained? Realizing the centrality of suffering to existence\(^ {245}\) along with his insights about the meaninglessness of existence (and especially the suffering that attends it), Nietzsche argues that the ascetic ideal gains its power by providing a meaning for suffering, and thereby for existence.\(^ {246}\)

\(^{244}\) *GM* III §11, 117-118.

\(^{245}\) Although Nietzsche has fully abandoned his reliance on Schopenhauer’s language and categories and has successfully rejected the metaphysics that they entail at this point, he still maintains a view that recognizes the primacy and inevitability of suffering to living organisms—that is, he is still committed to descriptive pessimism.

\(^{246}\) In this regard, it performs a similar function to that of art in *BT*, through its creative power to provide a justification for existence. For an account of a major difference between morality and art in this regard, see Geuss’s discussion of honest versus dishonest lies in “Nietzsche and Morality,” in *Morality, Culture, and History*. 
It is at this point, when Nietzsche avows that existence is meaningless, that readers like Hussain view him as a nihilist. But Nietzsche forces us to read him differently. Although it is the case that Nietzsche views things as valueless in themselves, he also demands that we acknowledge that the most profound characteristic about the human animal is that we are value-creators. The problem with the ascetic ideal (and its concomitant, Christian morality) is that as it creates values, it denies that we are value-creators by insisting that values come from elsewhere. Implicit in his criticism of the ascetic ideal then, is also Nietzsche’s response to the question of nihilism along with his simultaneous dismissal of the charge against him.

According to Nietzsche it was Christianity’s will to truth that brought about the un-believability of belief in God. He says,

Unconditional honest atheism… is therefore not the antithesis of [the ascetic] ideal, as it appears to be; it is rather only one of the latest phases of its evolution, one of its terminal forms and inner consequence—it is the awe-inspiring catastrophe of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids itself the lie involved in the belief in God.

Nietzsche continues, “All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming…. In this way Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as morality must now perish too” (GM III §27, 161). It is also at this

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247 This is seen for instance, in his discussion of the “two aspects” of punishment: “on the one hand, that in it which is relatively enduring, the custom, the act, the ‘drama’ a certain strict sequence of procedures; on the other, that in which is fluid, the meaning, the purpose…” (GM, II §13, 79). For Nietzsche, meaning and purpose are always added to things. He says this more explicitly in The Gay Science (GS): “Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been given value at some time, as a present—and it was we who gave and bestowed it” (GS §301, 242).

248 Of course, though Nietzsche holds that we are value-creators as a species, he maintains that generally it is the greatest within the species that actually create values.

249 In the third essay of GM, Nietzsche suggests that philosophers tend to view values as inhering in the thing itself, while priests contend that values are bestowed from God. 

250 GM III §27, 160. In GS §108-125, Nietzsche provides an account of this process, along with a diagnosis of the type of despair that results from the “death of God,” while suggesting that it is because of a misrecognition of the implications of this “greatest of events” that will lead to him being accused of nihilism. See also GS §343-346. And we see clearly here why he views Schopenhauer’s pessimistic atheism as embodying the secret code of Western philosophy—i.e. nihilism; as discussed on pages 71-76 above.
point that Nietzsche’s arguments about the importance of the ascetic ideal, and his response to nihilism, are finally made explicit.

Nietzsche says that the ascetic ideal, with its moral interpretation of the problem of existence, has not found its match because it provided human existence with a goal. He contends that:

Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; “why man at all?”—was a question without an answer; the will for man and earth was lacking; behind every great human destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater “in vain!”

Just when “man was surrounded by a fearful void,” because of the recognition of the meaninglessness of suffering, and thereby, of existence, the ascetic ideal saved “him” by providing “meaning.” It is because of the ascetic ideal’s ability to give meaning to the problem of suffering that weaker natures were able to triumph over the stronger ones. As we have already seen, the ascetic ideal is implicated in the “internalization of man.”

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251 GM III §23, 146.
252 Ibid., III §28, 162.
253 Ibid. Nietzsche contends that the problem of suffering is not just that human beings suffer, but also that the suffering in itself is meaningless. He says, “the meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far—and the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning” (GM III §28, 162). In his essay, “Unbearable Suffering,” Bernard Williams reflects on what it might mean for meaning to save one from suffering. He asks, “Does ‘Sinn’ necessarily imply a purpose, as might be suggested in ‘ein Dazu des Leidens’? Or could ‘Sinn’ imply no more than an explanation or cause for suffering?” In other words, what, if anything, is it central to having meaning that can render it sufficient to make suffering bearable? Or must something else be introduced to accomplish this? Bernard Williams, “Unbearable Suffering,” in The Sense of the Past, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) 332.
254 One could object here and contend that this alignment is too strong. It may be suggested that since internalization is an inescapable effect of society, and Nietzsche believes that some people can escape the ascetic ideal then it cannot be that the ascetic ideal is implicated in the process of internalization. Rather, it could be argued that the ascetic ideal is merely an interpretation of the suffering caused by internalization. Despite my sympathies for this argument about the relationship between the ascetic ideal and the process of internalization I maintain my original claim, because it makes sense of how the strong could develop the “bad conscience.” (To be clear, this is not to suggest that the ascetic ideal is fully present in the initial moments of the process of internalization.) If the strong earned the right to promise and are always closer to justice, because when they developed an interior life it manifested in a “freer eye and better conscience” (GM II §1-11, 57-76), why would they—and how would it come about that they would—interpret their suffering in the terms of the “bad conscience”? The most likely answer seems to be that there was something implicit in the process of internalization that eventually provided a more powerful response to the fact of their suffering. So, although the ascetic ideal did not fully rear its head until it found its home in the will of the priest, it appears to have always been implicit in the process of internalization. Recall, the passage
moment that the ascetic priest “alters the direction of ressentiment,”\textsuperscript{255} and turns ressentiment inward that he paradoxically presents the grounds for the overcoming of the very threat that the ascetic ideal presents to the human will. Although the ascetic ideal attempts to annihilate the human will by attempting to locate the cause of suffering in the sufferer with the notion of guilt, the ascetic ideal simultaneously empowers humanity by making us responsible for our destinies—however circuitously. Nietzsche claims that “The old depression, heaviness and weariness [which resulted from the problem of suffering] were indeed overcome through this system of procedures [the internalization of ressentiment]; life again became very interesting.”\textsuperscript{256}

So, although Nietzsche believes that the ascetic will against will must be overcome if humanity is to have hope of health again, he acknowledges that it proves the thesis of nihilism false. He asserts that despite the degeneration which occurs from the ascetic interpretation of suffering under the perspective of Christian morality, “man was saved thereby, he possessed a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense—the ‘sense-less’—he could now will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: the will itself was saved.”\textsuperscript{257} The point here, contra Hussain, is that as long as human beings continue to will, they will continue to endow existence with value and meaning. Furthermore, if this is the case, the idea behind nihilism—that because things are valueless in-themselves existence is meaningless—is an effect of the will (i.e. an interpretation that provides existence with meaning, albeit a negative one). Therefore, the thesis of nihilism refutes itself—there is meaning in the world, whatever meanings we generate.

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\textsuperscript{255}GM III §15, 127.
\textsuperscript{256}GM III §20, 141.
\textsuperscript{257}GM III §28, 162. Cf. BGE §60-62.
In the end, Hussain’s interpretation of Nietzsche as a fictionalist, and thus as a nihilist, merely illustrates the point. Although Nietzsche claims that there is no inherent meaning to existence, he ends by saying that the will needs a goal and “man would rather will nothingness than not will.” In other words, human beings perpetually endow the world with meanings, even when we suggest that existence is absurd. Hence, the accusation itself demonstrates that Hussain reproduces the meaning generated by the ascetic ideal and its concomitant, slave morality—the very ideal that Nietzsche beseeches those capable of so doing to overcome. Although the ascetic ideal saved humanity, we need to generate meanings that eschew resignation and self-denial.

In large measure, the point of GM is to demonstrate 1) that interpretations of the world which claim to be of absolute value in-themselves are disingenuous; all value is implicated in the process of valuing, and 2) that as long as humans have existed we have been generating meanings and making the world and existence meaningful. Furthermore, when people accuse Nietzsche of being a nihilist it merely reflects that they are still presuming the epistemic assumptions of Christian morality with the expectations that values must be eternal, either given from an absolute authority or intrinsic in things themselves, for them to be valuable. Nietzsche ascertains that the universe being valueless in-itself is a tremendous discovery because it alerts us to the insight that we have generated our values to begin with, and that if we can face the existential terror of valuelessness and goallessness courageously we will discover that we have the capacity to generate even higher values than ever before—higher, that is, because these values are not disguised as either inherent in things themselves, or coming from God. Until

258 GM III §28, 163.
259 It precisely in this regard that we see the significance of Nietzsche’s, mature, emphasis on art as the genuine antagonist to the ascetic ideal, and as providing a clue as to how the philosophers of the future are supposed to value. Pace Hussain, art becomes the model, not because it teaches us how “to regard something as valuable in itself even
we have the strength to accept this challenge, however, Nietzsche reminds us that even the will to nothing is a will.

Hussain might still object that in the end Nietzsche does not evade the charge that he is a nihilist because he still leaves us in a world in which our meaning-making itself is meaningless. Though this would be a clever rejoinder, its sting still stems from the assumption that meaning has to be either inherent or impossible. But Nietzsche’s position undermines this view. I take his to be suggesting that the person who maintains that meaning is inherent is the nihilist because then our existence has no purpose. If all meaning is already in the universe, we are pointless. At least in Nietzsche’s vision the meanings that we generate matter deeply and, potentially, endurably; in reference back to GS §58, accepting the insight that meaning is generated by us does not destroy its reality.

Overcoming Nihilism and the Criticism of Democracy

...the question ever is, not, what you have done or forborne, but, at whose command you have done or forborne it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even self-cultivating.

Friedrich Nietzsche

when we know that it is not” (HI, 170), but because it undermines the very premises upon which that formulation rests—that is, art challenges the onto-theological assumptions tied to the desire for truth. Art denies the necessity of some really real, or truly valuable substratum, for our creations to be valuable. Thus the valuable object (the creation) becomes genuinely valuable without having to be such as if so in itself—this final demand becomes nonsensical on these terms. Of course though, the artist can be corrupted by the ascetic ideal’s will to truth; see GM III §25, 153-154. Hussain also recognizes this and discusses the way “Art can fail to be honest illusion” (HI, 169 n.31).

260 “How foolish it would be to suppose that one only needs to point out this origin [that we create reality] and this misty shroud of delusion in order to destroy the world that counts for real, so-called ‘reality.’” Nietzsche, GS, §58, 122.

We have now covered enough ground to begin seeing what is at stake for Nietzsche in his criticisms of democracy. As we have seen, in his early writings Nietzsche accedes to aspects of Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion. For, agreeing with Schopenhauer, he thought that it was only through shattering the *principium individuationis* and seeing one’s self as part of the unity of the Will that we escape the effects of willing, which, in turn, releases us from the shackles of illusion and reaffirms the natural relationship between human beings as sufferers in the world. But, where for Schopenhauer this is ultimately only possible if we accept asceticism and deny the will to live, Nietzsche countered and tried to theorize how tragic drama could suffice to break through the *principium individuationis* and place responsibility for the redemption of existence in our hands. Eventually however, Nietzsche found that the problem was not merely Schopenhauer’s pessimism and endorsement of ascetic resignation, but that his entire philosophical system, including the question of justifying existence, reproduced many of the assumptions of the religious and metaphysical tradition they were both challenging, and that his ethical commitments were merely extensions of its nihilistic impetus.

If life is to be affirmed then, all of the self-negating extensions of the ascetic ideal will have to be critiqued and revalued. John Walker describes the object of Nietzsche’s criticism well:

> Nietzsche’s attack on what he calls ‘metaphysics’, then, cannot be dissociated from his attack on religion and the moral and cultural imperatives to which religion gives rise. Indeed Nietzsche explicitly casts his critique of his predecessors in the German philosophical tradition as a critique of the Christian ethical consciousness which he sees as the motive force behind that tradition’s modern consciousness.²⁶³

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Although aspects of his criticisms revolve around the tenability of specific claims, Nietzsche’s main problem with most features of the modern ethical consciousness is that they are motivated and justified by a *weltanschauung* that he views as life negating (i.e. slave morality).²⁶⁴ In this regard, we see that his criticisms of democracy are not necessarily about its practices or institutions, neither are they even necessarily about many of the commitments they entail, but rather *his criticisms are about how those commitments are authorized*. As he writes in 1880, well after his break with Schopenhauer:

> It goes without saying that I do not deny – unless I am a fool – that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged – but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. We have to *learn to think differently* – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: to feel differently.²⁶⁵

The point is not that we have no reasons to be humane, but precisely the opposite, we often have good reasons to be. In Nietzsche’s view, when notions like guilt and compassion are used as reasons to justify our actions—especially when they are supposedly prescribed from an external or “absolute” source,²⁶⁶ and viewed as necessary—responsibility is removed from our hands.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Nietzsche’s perspectivism and stylistic pluralism are deliberate ways to avoid reproducing the terms and assumptions of the Christian moral worldview.

²⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), §103, 60. Keeping this passage in mind also allows us to begin accounting for how the last sane and lucid act of one of the greatest critics of compassion, Nietzsche, was to hug and shield a horse to protect it from being beaten.

²⁶⁶ I place absolute in scare quotes because this is one of the claims that Nietzsche argues has become untenable with “the death of God.”

²⁶⁷ Cf. Alenka Zupančič’s claim: “In using the word ‘slave,’ Nietzsche is referring not to the ‘oppressed,’ and ‘subordinated,’ but to a *different kind of master*. He is referring to masters who are eager to *legitimate* their mastery with some positive feature or content, to ‘rationalize’ it, to justify and ground it in some ‘empirical’ factor (knowledge, wealth, honesty…). Nietzsche finds this turn toward the legitimization (and justification) of power ‘slavish’; he considers the very idea of a ‘legitimate power’ obscene.” Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 44. Although I agree with Zupančič’s initial claim about the connotation of Nietzsche’s use of the word “slave,” as we will see more fully in the next chapter, I differ with regards to one important aspect of the subsequent claim. I do not think that Nietzsche’s problem is with the “slave’s” *eagerness* to legitimate their mastery, but rather with the notion central to Morality that such legitimation is necessary. So though Zupančič’s claim is plausible as an interpretation of the analogy of the birds of prey and lambs in *GM* I §13, discussed above (p.60-61 n.170), and it can also make sense of Nietzsche’s claim, at times, to being an “irrationalist,” it doesn’t take into account Nietzsche’s accentuation of our ability to make promises. For instance, in my estimation, one feature that distinguishes the *Übermenschen* from the ancient
It is for this reason that he continually inquires after the value of holding certain beliefs; and why his criticism of what he often refers to as “the democratic taste” begins with a call for suspicion.

Nietzsche asks his readers to be suspicious of what it is that underwrites appeals to the moral commitments which are often used to justify democracy. As he writes in *BGE*:

> After all, today at least we immoralists have the suspicion that the decisive value of an action lies precisely in what is unintentional [*nicht-absichtlich*] in it, while everything about it that is intentional, everything about it that can be seen, known, “conscious,” still belongs to its surface and skin—which, like every skin betrays something but conceals even more.\(^{268}\)

Ultimately, he worries that what is concealed in appeals to democracy are the very life-negating values advanced by the ascetic ideal. In short, he is concerned that justifications for democracy that begin with appeals to our compassion actually conceal the operation of *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche’s criticism, in this regard, has two main trajectories. On the one hand, he worries that, structurally, slave morality places all the praise elsewhere—either in the things themselves, or in God’s glory—while accepting all the blame.\(^ {269}\) As we have seen, Nietzsche calls this the will to nothingness because we effectively take responsibility for our roles in existence out of our own hands. On the other hand, not only does the democratic taste structurally project our potential outside of ourselves, it also threatens to curtail our attempts at

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\(^{268}\) Nietzsche, *BGE*, §32, 44. Although what Nietzsche means by intentionality could be an interesting line of inquiry, I am more interested here in his suspicion about what remains concealed.

\(^{269}\) The exception is the evil culprit on whom the blame is placed. While it always needs an external enemy on which to project blame, one of the fascinating turns of the ascetic ideal, as we have seen, is the way that even here the “guilty” victim shares the blame, at least psychologically, with the culprit—how often do we hear people say, “it was my fault,” when someone else caused them harm?
greatness. Before elaborating a bit on his conception of “free spirits” Nietzsche contrasts them with another type, saying:

They belong, briefly and sadly, among the levelers—these falsely so-called “free spirits”—being eloquent and prolifically scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its “modern ideas”; they are all human beings without solitude, without their own solitude, clumsy good fellows whom one should not deny either courage or respectable decency—only they are unfree and ridiculously superficial…

The concern, in this instance, is that the impulse to rely on readymade moral principles robs individuals of their ability to articulate reasons for their actions. In this regard, the self is negated and lost. Furthermore though, the problem is not simply that morality springs from ressentiment—as seen above, for instance, he is willing to concede that particular individuals can become courageous within the context of the slave morality—but that the moral schema itself renders those who conform to its explanatory authoritativeness as slaves; that is, by being conceived as absolute, and absolutely sovereign, slave morality stifles creative evaluations of our ethical lives and our role in problematic situations. The readymade principles do all the work.

In the end then, what Nietzsche condemns about the way the democratic taste is authorized is precisely that it is not pluralistic. Rather it requires a conformism that amounts to a tyranny of the fearful—those too afraid to take charge of their responsibility for existence so they revert to answers prescribed by stronger wills than theirs.

In the end, what I have argued in this chapter has affinities to many facets of Robert Solomon’s interpretation of Nietzsche as a moral philosopher. In his Living with Nietzsche, Solomon suggests “that we read him from an existential point of view.” By taking this view, Solomon shows how,

Like such existentialists as Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre, Nietzsche is a powerful defender of what one might call ‘the existentialist self,’ the individual who

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270 BGE, §44, 54.
271 Solomon, LN, 12.
‘makes himself’ by exploring and disciplining his particular talents and distinguishes himself from ‘the herd’ and the conformist influences of other people.\textsuperscript{272} While acknowledging that the notion of choice is largely absent in Nietzsche’s call to become who one is, along with his criticisms of notions such as freedom and free will, and his vehement rejection of religious otherworldliness, Solomon discusses the centrality of shaping one’s self to Nietzsche’s philosophy as an existential imperative.\textsuperscript{273} Although he is hesitant to call Nietzsche’s “affirmation of life” a thesis, Solomon argues that “The point of Nietzsche’s philosophy is how to live.”\textsuperscript{274}

I agree with this reading, but there are two points in particular on which I would like to press. The first is Solomon’s worry that Nietzsche’s “general insistence on the ‘affirmation of life’ is much too vague to count as much of a thesis.”\textsuperscript{275} Solomon suggests instead, “I have no doubt that what mainly concerned him was making sense of and ‘affirming’ his own illness-plagued, lonely, and unhappy life.”\textsuperscript{276} Initially this may appear to be a trivial point, but I push against it for two reasons. On the one hand, Solomon’s concern here reflects his reading more generally. Part of what it means, for Solomon, to read Nietzsche existentially is to view him “as a provocative writer who means to transform the way we live our lives (as he attempts to transform his own). In other words, we should take Nietzsche personally.”\textsuperscript{277} Although I think this is right, we should take Nietzsche personally, his existential imperative is a response to a broader phenomenon, namely the ascetic ideal at the heart of the Christian moral consciousness,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 176.
  \item \textsuperscript{274} Solomon, LN, 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{276} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 12.
\end{itemize}
and its nihilistic impetus. This also makes better sense of Nietzsche’s criticisms of decadence and his emphasis on transforming German culture.  

On the other hand, I challenge Solomon’s thinking of Nietzsche’s clarion call for personal transformation in terms that are too personalistic, because at the heart of his rejection of decadence, pessimism, and nihilism is Nietzsche’s affirmation of life. In this regard, I am in agreement with Bernard Reginster’s thesis in *The Affirmation of Life*. We should take Nietzsche personally, in my view, because his insistence on affirming life illuminates the height of the stakes regarding the future of human existence.

The second point against which I press Solomon regards his emphasis on the importance of ad hominem arguments to Nietzsche. He contends, “…if we loosen our demand for a unified philosophy and look ahead to Nietzsche’s ad hominem approach to a wide variety of issues, it becomes evident that he is indeed interested in some of the traditional issues that have challenged philosophers since ancient times….“ For Solomon, the key to gleaning the most philosophical import from Nietzsche’s _oeuvre_ is to focus on his ad hominem approach. He goes so far as to suggest that “Genealogy… is something of a protracted ad hominem writ large.” While I think this is correct to a certain extent—it is a polemic, after all, and Nietzsche is more concerned with the type of person who would hold a certain kind of belief, than with whether the belief is true—reading Nietzsche’s genealogy primarily on these terms, again, misses what I take

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279 I agree with Reginster when he asserts early in the text that, in his view, “Nietzsche regards the affirmation of life as his defining philosophical achievement.” Bernard Reginster, _The Affirmation of Life_, 2.

280 Solomon, _LN_, 22.

281 Solomon, _LN_, 51.
to be central to his concerns, namely overcoming nihilism. This becomes particularly visible in Solomon’s discussions about the notion of the Übermensch.

Solomon views the Übermensch primarily as a fantasy that at best can be viewed as “the ultimate projection of our virtues.” In this sense, precisely because of the difficulty implicated in achieving one’s self, the Übermensch, for Solomon, can act as an exemplar, not of a type of person to come, but an image we can all see of ourselves as we “aim to cultivate and mold our various virtues into a coherent character…” Though I find this reading enticing, it fails to make sense precisely, in my view, of what I take to be central to Nietzsche’s existential imperative. As I read him, Nietzsche views humanity as under siege and being enervated by the soporific effects of the ascetic ideal. In this regard, rather than a mere fantasy, or even metaphysical whim, the Übermensch, for Nietzsche, is a hope that one day those of us capable of facing the terror of existence on our own, might overcome the human-all-too-human in us and take responsibility for the future. As he writes in GM:

Is [great health] even possible today?—But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as if it were flight from reality—while it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration, into reality, so that, when he emerges again into the light, he may bring home the redemption of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it. This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—he must come one day.284

We will now deal with the implications of these issues in more detail in the next chapter.

282 Ibid., 174.
283 Ibid.
284 Nietzsche, GM, II §24, 96. Bold type is my emphasis.
Chapter 4: Nietzsche, Democracy, and the Possible Conditions for the Übermensch

But what is also wrong with Morality is what it hides and how it distracts us, even us ordinary citizens. By presuming an utterly minimal self and the importance of following a set of universal peculiarly “moral” rules, it removes all consideration of personal character and virtue (except, of course, as these may be redefined as the principled compulsion to follow the rules). What gets lost is the ancient concept of excellence, which is something much more than doing your duty and not breaking the moral rules.

Robert Solomon

Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality—in other words, as we understand it, merely one type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all higher moralities, are, or ought to be, possible. But this morality resists such a “possibility,” such an “ought” with all its power: it says stubbornly and inexorably, “I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality.” Indeed, with the help of a religion which indulged and flattered the most sublime herd-animal desires, we have reached the point where we find even in political and social institutions an ever more visible expression of this morality: the democratic movement is the heir of the Christian movement.

Friedrich Nietzsche

I ended the previous chapter by distinguishing my position from Robert Solomon’s in Living with Nietzsche. While I agree with much of Solomon’s reading, especially regarding his discussion on Nietzsche’s criticism of Christian morality (or Morality for short), I argued that Solomon’s emphasis on the personal misses a great deal of what is at stake for Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche is concerned with protecting the individual, and often a particular type of individual, from the tyranny of conformity, all of this is in the service, I contended, of defending the future of the species from the dangers that conformity poses to the possibility of pluralism.

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286 Friedrich Nietzsche, BGE, §202, 115-116; cited henceforth as BGE. Emphasis in bold type is mine.
287 It is crucial that we remember my claim here that, for Nietzsche, one of the most egregious aspects of the tyranny of conformity is that it is anti-pluralistic. His turn to a radical form of spiritual aristocracy is precisely his attempt to account for the possibility of pluralism.
future excellence and health, given his account of becoming. In other words, unlike Solomon, I see Nietzsche’s defense of the individual as necessarily tied to his concerns about culture and the future of the species. A strict focus on the personal, “existentialist,” aspects of Nietzsche’s thought fails, in this view, to account for his inversion of Plato, the centrality of his rejection of pessimism, and his anxieties about nihilism and decadence.

I showed in this discussion that Nietzsche’s criticism of democracy is inextricably bound to his critique of the Christian moral consciousness. Or as H. W. Siemens puts it, “To be specific, Nietzsche engages democracy within the framework of a critique of the dominant values of modernity.” In a word, Nietzsche argues that our justifications for holding democratic commitments stem from what he refers to as Christian morality’s ascetic ideal. Nietzsche is concerned that if our democratic commitments derive their authoritativeness from the nihilistic framework at the heart of Morality, then its own presuppositions will be pernicious to life; hence his worry that “the democratic movement is the heir of the Christian movement.”

However, there are interpreters who see Nietzsche as making a different, more vitriolic, claim. In this chapter, I will focus on one of the more representative condemnations of Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy, namely, Fredrick Appel’s. I will argue here, in contrast to Appel, that to understand Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy along with his hope for the emergence of Übermenschen, it is best to see him as trying to imagine a way to account for the possibility of genuine pluralism in light of what he sees as the tyranny of the Christian moral view of the world. Furthermore, building on an insight from Robert Pippin’s Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, I end the chapter by showing that if we grant Nietzsche’s main

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worries about democracy being the heir of Morality, then he cannot get his constructive project—that is, his notion of a pluralistic aristocracy of Übermenschen—off the ground. In other words, if Nietzsche’s account of the hegemony of Morality is correct he cannot account, on his terms, for how the Übermensch can emerge. I will conclude by proposing, ironically perhaps, that it is democracy which provides the conditions for the possibility of the Übermenschen.

Nietzsche’s Critique and the (Im)Possibility of Democracy

In Nietzsche contra Democracy, Fredrick Appel argues against “progressive” attempts to sanitize the implications of Nietzsche’s philosophy—particularly those which try to render it as amenable to radical democratic theory. For Appel, these readings are problematic for at least two reasons. The first is that, given what Nietzsche says, the type of maneuvering that is required to generate such a reading seems to be either too extensive to warrant the effort, or pointless given that the maneuvering reveals more about the interpreter’s commitments than Nietzsche’s. Appel states,

One obvious objection to this “progressive” reading readily comes to mind. Let us put aside the considerable textual evidence against it for the moment and assume that Nietzsche is indeed a protean thinker whose work, with some creative bending and twisting, can be appropriated in limitless ways. Why, then, would anyone interested in radical democratic theory want to expend the considerable amount of creative energy required to adapt Nietzsche’s thought for democratic purposes? Why bother making Nietzsche’s work “groan” and “protest” [à la Foucault] when there are so many other thinkers past and present with less dubious credentials who could provide ready inspiration? If all of this bending and twisting turns the end-product—call it “Nietzsche”—into a mirror image of one’s own convictions, it is hard to imagine the point of such an endeavor. A Nietzsche thus sanitized or domesticated can teach nothing that could not be learned directly from dozens of contemporary writers.290

290 Fredrick Appel, Nietzsche contra Democracy, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5; cited henceforth as ND. When read carefully, Appel’s initial premise does not seem to support his conclusion. If we do bracket what Appel views as the considerable textual evidence that disqualifies Nietzsche’s thought from even the possibility of contributing to democratic theory and see him as “a protean thinker whose work, with some creative bending and twisting, can be appropriated in limitless ways,” then I don’t see why it would require expending more energy to
The second objection, in Appel’s view, is even more significant. He says, “One of my central claims is that Nietzsche’s radically aristocratic commitments pervade every aspect of his project, making any egalitarian appropriation of his work exceedingly problematic.”\(^{291}\) Not only is the attempt to render Nietzsche amenable to democratic theory pointless, but his commitments are so radically discrepant with democracy that no sincere attempt can succeed. Appel suggests then, that if democratic theorists are to learn from Nietzsche, it may perhaps be because his alternative, radically aristocratic model of politics forces us to interrogate our own commitments.\(^{292}\)

Appel contends that even Nietzsche’s emphasis on *agonism* ultimately resists incorporation into democratic theory because of “the all-encompassing nature of [his] elitist predilections.”\(^{293}\) But what does this mean? Why can Nietzsche’s thought, despite his elitist predilections, not be helpful in articulating a democratic vision? Numerous thinkers, from Plato through Immanuel Kant to Alexis de Tocqueville, have elitist predilections but their works are still taken to contribute to the vast literature in democratic theory. Yet, Appel implies that any reading which takes seriously Nietzsche’s normative vision must recognize that, because his elitism is tied to an essentialist picture about human types, Nietzsche’s works cannot contribute in this regard. Unlike say Aristotle’s, Edmund Burke’s, or Walter Lippmann’s elitism, Appel’s narrative implies, Nietzsche’s is particularly disobliging for the purposes of democratic theory. This, Appel suggests, is because Nietzsche’s elitism is tied to an essentialist philosophical

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\(^{291}\) Appel, *ND*, 5.
\(^{292}\) Appel says, “Nietzsche’s usefulness to contemporary democratic theory may derive, paradoxically, from his uncompromising antiegalitarianism. An engagement with his ‘un timely meditations’ about rank, domination, and nobility can enliven the sensibilities of egalitarians of all stripes by forcing them to account for and defend those convictions he holds in contempt.” Appel, *ND*, 7.

\(^{293}\) Ibid., 6.
anthropology that views human beings as existing in an order of rank that locks us into types. And, given that Nietzsche’s concern is only “for the flourishing of the ‘higher,’ ‘stronger’ type of human being,” we can garner no genuine insights from him to advance a vision of an egalitarian political project. We see Appel develop this argument more fully in his discussion of Nietzsche’s position regarding science.

In this chapter, Appel argues against the conclusion that after his “positivist” phase Nietzsche “adopted a resolutely skeptical view of modern science and… prized unbounded artistic creativity over scientific discovery.” Instead, Appel contends that in his later writings, Nietzsche “bestows a central role upon science in his politico-philosophic enterprise.” Appel focuses on the passages in Nietzsche’s later writings in which science plays a role in the account of how his free spirits will view the world. For instance, referring to a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Appel says that Nietzsche “speaks in glowing terms of a new type of philosopher who would be ‘hardened by the discipline of science’ and decries traditional beliefs and practices for their ignorance of and/or contempt for scientific method.”

For Appel, what is particularly egregious about Nietzsche’s commendation of science is the way that it buttresses his view of the rank order of human types—in which he applauds the so-called higher types. Appel states,

> Rightly exercised by those with the proper instincts… and correct ‘breeding,’ sense perception allows for the attainment of real—as opposed to bogus, positivistic—scientific objectivity. The Nietzschean free spirit has the capacity for ‘delineat[ing] reality as it is’ and, like the good philologist, learns the art ‘of being able to read off a fact without falsifying it by interpretation.’

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294 Ibid., 13.
295 Ibid., 16.
296 Ibid., 17.
297 Ibid. Appel quotes from *BGE*, §230, 161.
298 Ibid. Appel quotes from *Ecce Homo (EH)*, “Why I am a Destiny,” 5; and *The Anti-Christ (A)*, 52.
This is a vital point to highlight, in Appel’s view, in part because it signals Nietzsche’s elitism, but more significantly because, contrary to postmodernist interpreters, it demonstrates that Nietzsche also maintains a fidelity to science. While, correctly, acknowledging his rejection of the metaphysical realism of the Platonic, Christian, and positivist traditions, Appel’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s references to science and reality still seem ambiguously to commit him to something remarkably close to a form of metaphysical realism. Appel writes, for instance, that “Nietzsche castigates positivism not for its goal of uncovering the true nature of reality—that is a goal he shares—but rather for an account of scientific objectivity that is both naïve and cowardly.”

But, it is the combination of Nietzsche’s elitism with a commitment to an essentialist ontology that most worries Appel. He continues,

Nietzsche’s characteristic response [to the question concerning whence the cowardice of some and the integrity of others] is to trace the intellectual and normative stances of individuals back to what he sees as their fundamental character or disposition—back, in other words, to the ‘type’ of person they really are. And human ‘types,’ as they are presented in Nietzsche’s brand of science, are ranked according to different sorts of instincts.

In other words, Appel reads Nietzsche as saying that only an elite few can see reality as it is, however, this ability is something innate about those individuals which is tied essentially to their

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299 Appel, ND, 18. Beyond maintaining that he has a one-world thesis, Appel is unclear about what is entailed by the view he attributes to Nietzsche regarding the question of realism. In fact, apart from the claim that he rejects it for its naïveté and cowardice, Appel never tells us what distinguishes Nietzsche’s position from the metaphysical realism of positivism, for instance. While determining the nature and forms of realism would require a lengthy project on its own, this strikes me as an important point for Appel to clarify as it pertains to Nietzsche, given his argument. For example, in his discussion in “Three Forms of Realism,” G. H. Merrill defines metaphysical realism as the notion that “The entities postulated by a (good or acceptable) scientific theory really exist. Alternatively: the theoretical terms of science denote actually existing entities.” If this definition stands, Appel’s Nietzsche seems to remain a metaphysical realist. G. H. Merrill, “Three Forms of Realism,” American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Jul., 1980), pp. 229.


301 If we recall from the last chapter, for the strong to conceive of reality as it is, is precisely to see that it is pure becoming—that is, there is no reality as it is. Reality for human beings is what we interpret it as. Our interpretations become reality. So the above claim, that reality is becoming, is more truthful (does not provide a false account of existence) because it better recognizes how things become real for us, not because it finds the absolute, static, unchanging, essential truth about what reality might be like without our presence. Whereas, the account of reality that posits being somewhere behind becoming falsifies reality by misdescribing how things become real for us. However, recognizing our horror vacui, Nietzsche notes that it requires a strong type of person.
natures—to reality itself and to their very being. The problem then is that the typology is so radically anti-egalitarian that no amount of maneuvering can justly produce an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought that can be amenable to democratic theory.

However, there are a couple of issues here on which I wish to challenge Appel. The first regards his reading of Nietzsche’s views of science, reality, and essential types. Secondly, I will flesh out my claim that Nietzsche is concerned about opening space for pluralism, in response to Appel’s conclusion about what can be gained from interrogating Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy. Concerning the former of the two points, it will repay dividends to look at some of the passages on which Appel’s interpretation relies. Beginning with the passage from BGE §230, we find Nietzsche saying that “the basic text of homo natura must again be recognized.”

I will quote what he says next at some length:

To translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of homo natura; to see to it that man henceforth stands before man even as today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the rest of nature, with intrepid Oedipus eyes and sealed Odysseus ears, deaf to the siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers who have been piping at him all too long, “you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!”—that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a task—who would deny that? Why did we choose this insane task? Or put it differently: “why have knowledge at all?”

While Nietzsche does speak positively of the philosopher of the future who is hardened by science, the passage seems to be making a different sort of claim from the one Appel suggests. Rather than deriding those contemptuous of “scientific method” here, as we shall see, Nietzsche...

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302 Nietzsche, BGE, §230, 161. For a noteworthy account of what Nietzsche means by homo natura see Clarence Mark Phillips, “The Tempt of ‘Homo Natura’: The Effect of Emersonian ‘Nature’ in the Determination of Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power,’” History of Philosophy Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 403-423. In the essay, Phillips does a good job of showing some of the tensions in Nietzsche’s account of “natural man,” especially the tension between essentializing language and Nietzsche’s anti-essentialism. And while there are differences in our positions, I find his essay particularly helpful in demonstrating Emerson’s influence on Nietzsche in this regard.

303 Nietzsche, BGE, §230, 161-162.
is advocating a form of naturalism precisely to avoid what in his view amounts to the totalitarian Weltanschauung that accompanies metaphysical views of humanity’s place in the grand scheme of things.

As I suggested in the conclusion of the previous chapter, and perhaps it is here in which my disagreement with Appel is most pronounced, Nietzsche’s criticism is less about his anti-egalitarianism than it is about his view of democracy as an extension of the tyranny perpetrated by the Christian moral worldview—a tyranny that forecloses pluralism. For example, the passage from BGE cited above comes in the chapter in which Nietzsche discusses the differences between the virtues held by his free spirits and those found in Morality. Recognizing, for instance, that central to the discourses of modern morality is a fear of cruelty, Nietzsche contends in BGE §229 that members of our late ages “should reconsider cruelty and open our eyes.”

Rather than “mortifying” cruelty, he suggests, Morality has merely altered it:

Almost everything we call “higher culture” is based on the spiritualization of cruelty, on its becoming more profound: this is my proposition. That “savage animal” [that aspect of the human animal that requires some form of cruelty] has not really been “mortified”; it lives and flourishes, it has merely become—divine.

While the ascetic ideal, including the impulse toward metaphysics and the supernatural world of Being or God, ostensibly attempts to subjugate cruelty it actually incorporates forms of cruelty; often to police us:

What seems agreeable in so-called tragic pity, and at bottom in everything sublime, up to the highest and most delicate shudders of metaphysics, receives its sweetness solely from the mixture of cruelty. What the Roman in the arena, the Christian in the ecstasies of the cross, the Spaniard at an auto-da-fe or bullfight, the Japanese of today when he flocks to tragedies, the laborer in a Parisian suburb who feels a nostalgia for bloody revolutions, the Wagnerienne who “submits” to Tristan and Isolde, her will suspended—what all of them enjoy and seek and drink in with mysterious ardor are the spicy potions of the great Circe, “cruelty.”

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304 Ibid., §229, 158.
305 Ibid.
306 Actually, we shall see, part of Nietzsche’s criticism of science is precisely that it is founded on supernaturalist premises.
To see this we must, of course, chase away the clumsy psychology of bygone times which had nothing to teach about cruelty except that it came into being at the sight of the suffering of others. There is also an abundant, over-abundant enjoyment at one’s own suffering, at making oneself suffer—and wherever man allows himself to be persuaded to self-denial in the religious sense, or to self-mutilation, as among Phoenicians and ascetics, or altogether to desensualization, decarnalization, contrition, Puritan spasms of penitence, vivisection of the conscience and sacrificio dell’intelletto à la Pascal, he is secretly lured and pushed forward by his cruelty, by those dangerous thrills of cruelty turned against oneself.\textsuperscript{307}

So, in Nietzsche’s view, whether it is our love for tragic drama, religious asceticism, or the desire for knowledge, an impulse to cruelty plays a role in living. In this regard, Nietzsche’s position is not an attempt to advocate cruelty over a benign “non-cruel” position, but is a call to avoid a simple acquiescence to ascetic forms of cruelty and to claim responsibility for the ways in which we are cruel to ourselves.

Furthermore, to set up his claim in the passage cited from \textit{BGE} §230, Nietzsche ends \textit{BGE} §229 saying:

Finally consider that even the seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclinations of the spirit, and often enough also against the wishes of his heart—by way of saying No where he would like to say Yes, love, and adore—and acts thus as an artist and transfigurer of cruelty. Indeed, any insistence on profundity and thoroughness is a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of the spirit which unceasingly strives for the apparent and superficial—in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty.\textsuperscript{308}

The seeker after knowledge, for example, is caught in a tension. On the one hand, in knowledge she or he desires certitude and safety from cruelty (hence the oft postulated stable world with fixed truths, a world in which there is no cruelty and we are at peace in the stasis of absolute truth or \textit{Being}). While, on the other hand, the desire for knowledge drives the seeker, not only to be cruel to her- or him-self by exhibiting the self-discipline requisite for its attainment, but also because the search for knowledge forces the seeker to be attentive to the world we actually experience (i.e. the world of \textit{becoming}, an unstable world that continues to deny us fixed truths, 

\textsuperscript{307} Ibid. Recall my discussion of internalization from the previous chapter.

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., §229, 159.
the world in which our desires, ideals, and even the goods for which we strive, compete and butcher each other),\(^{309}\) which is itself a form of cruelty against the desire for knowledge. After elaborating on this tension at the beginning of *BGE* §230, Nietzsche continues:

_This_ mere will to appearance, to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to the surface—for every surface is a cloak—is _countered_ by that sublime inclination of the seeker after knowledge who insists on profundity, multiplicity and thoroughness, with a _will_ which is a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience and taste. Every courageous thinker will recognize this in himself, assuming only that, as fit, he has hardened and sharpened his eye for himself long enough and that he is used to severe discipline, as well as severe words. He will say: “there is something cruel in the inclination of my spirit”; let the virtuous and kindly try to talk him out of that.\(^{310}\)

Returning to our passage then, we begin to see Nietzsche’s invocation of the “discipline of science” as part of his larger concern about what it would mean for us to take responsibility for existence in the preparation for the future of the species.

Nietzsche is concerned with resisting the “the siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers” and placing us back into nature. But, recognizing that to follow this path requires at least two forms of cruelty—the self-discipline to proceed and the wherewithal to face the terror of existence (i.e. the instability of becoming, and the notion that existence is devoid of intrinsic value or meaning)—Nietzsche asks, why accept such a task? He ends *BGE* §230 saying: “Everybody will ask us that. And we, pressed this way, we who have put the same question to ourselves a hundred times, we have found and find no better answer—”.\(^{311}\) I take the implication here to be that, precisely because the impulse to cruelty is central to willing, we will be cruel to...

\(^{309}\) While Nietzsche often talks about this in terms of competing drives and competing wills to power within an organism, there is a striking similarity here with William James’s discussion of the tragic nature of our moral lives when he says: “The actually possible in this world is vastly narrower than all that is demanded; and there is always a _pinch_ between the ideal and the actual which can only be got through by leaving part of the ideal behind. There is hardly a good which we can imagine except as competing for the possession of the same bit of space and time with some other imagined good.... So that the ethical philosopher’s demand for the right scale of subordination in ideals is the fruit of an altogether practical need. Some part of the ideal must be butchered, and he needs to know which part. It is a tragic situation, and no mere speculative conundrum, with which he has to deal.” William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” in _The Will to Believe_ (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 202-203. (James, The Will to Believe 1956) (Shapiro and Hacker-Cordón 1999)

\(^{310}\) Ibid., §230, 160-161.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., 162.
ourselves in some form; why then not choose the form of cruelty that gives us strength, insight into the ways in which we experience the world, and control over our destinies?

Nietzsche beckons those who are capable of facing the terror of existence to break free from a worldview that ultimately denies any purpose to our willing. For Nietzsche, the notion that existence is meaningless in-itself does not make our meaning-making pointless. In fact, meaning-making becomes all the more purposeful precisely because it is up to us, and our meanings endure and become reality. However, with the triumph of the ascetic ideal, despite purporting to place us at the heart of existence’s cosmic drama, the meanings that we have generated for millennia, paradoxically, continually renders us less and less significant.  

Nietzsche’s criticism of pessimism, nihilism, and decadence then, is an aspect of his attempt to overcome the ascetic ideal and Morality’s lull; or as Clarence Mark Phillips articulates:

Indeed [Nietzsche’s] “revaluation of values” is ultimately nothing other than a critique of life-forms which, having lost sight of their natural involvement in this world, have grown unhealthy, seeking refuge in the contrived stillness and comfort of another.

Crucial to this revaluation is an attempt to turn away from the dubious security of supernatural comforts and deal squarely with the natural world of becoming. If the world, for us, is one of flux, and the dualism between reality and appearance is dissolved given Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato, then it makes no sense to keep projecting an unchanging metaphysical or supernatural world.

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312 See GM, III §11.
313 Phillips, Homo Natura, 403.
314 In some ways this is still similar to his earlier view in HAH: “Even if the existence of such a world [the metaphysical world] were never so well demonstrated, it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge, more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck.” One significant difference however, is that at the time of HAH Nietzsche was willing to grant that “it is true, there could be a metaphysical world;” whereas by the time of BGE, as we have seen, he thinks that such a formulation is untenable. See HAH, I §9, 15-16.
Of course, there are numerous questions about what constitutes the natural world. What are the bounds? What determines whether a claim is naturalist or supernaturalist? Or even simply, what is naturalism? Bearing many of these questions about naturalism in mind, Brian Leiter proposes that Nietzsche is a “Speculative Methodological Naturalist.”\textsuperscript{315} He contends that Nietzsche’s naturalism is \textit{methodological}, in the sense that he emphasizes a “Methods Continuity” approach—that is, he “demands only that philosophical theories emulate the ‘methods’ of inquiry of successful sciences.”\textsuperscript{316} However, it is also important to note, for Leiter, that while Nietzsche’s is an M-Naturalism, it is of the speculative variety.\textsuperscript{317} He adds: “The speculative theories of M-Naturalists are ‘modeled’ on the sciences most importantly in that they take over from science the idea that natural phenomena have deterministic causes.”\textsuperscript{318}

While I agree that Nietzsche is a naturalist, I am unconvinced by Leiter’s account of him being a speculative, Methods-Continuity, Methodological Naturalist. Generally speaking, I am suspicious of the strong reliance on science at the center of Leiter’s definition of naturalism, but more specifically, if he is right about the commitments of speculative M-Naturalists, then it is difficult to see how Nietzsche can be one.\textsuperscript{319} Although Leiter anticipates and responds to five

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{316} He says that Nietzsche is a “Methods Continuity” \textit{methodological} naturalist as opposed to a “Results Continuity” \textit{methodological} naturalist. These are also contrasted with \textit{substantive} naturalism, which can be either ontological or semantic. Leiter, \textit{NM}, 3-11.
\item \textsuperscript{317} Although Leiter tries to clarify what this adds, in his essay “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered,” it is still not clear. For instance, it seems that when all an M-Naturalist demands is Methods Continuity then much of the content of their theory will be speculative—that is, in line with the discourses of science, until results are verified, theories remain just that, theories (i.e. they remain speculative). So my question is, is there a non-speculative Methods Continuity methodological naturalism? What extra work is the notion of it being “speculative” doing? See Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered,” (January 16, 2009). Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche, 2009; University of Chicago, Public Law Working Paper No. 235. Available at SSRN: \url{http://ssrn.com/abstract=1171285} cited henceforth as NNR.
\item \textsuperscript{318} Leiter, \textit{NM}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{319} See Christopher Janaway’s, \textit{Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy}, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007) chapter 3, for a response to Leiter that shares similarities to mine. Henceforth BS.
\end{itemize}
main objections to his interpretation, I would like to press his rejoinders further. He lists the five objections as follows:

First, all forms of philosophical naturalism demand some type of continuity with the sciences; but is Nietzsche not a critic of science, a Rortyesque debunker of the epistemic pretenses of science for the late nineteenth-century? Second, M-Naturalists like Hume, Nietzsche and Freud purportedly seek causal explanations for human actions and beliefs; but is not Nietzsche an avowed skeptic about notions like causation? Third, how can Nietzsche’s alleged naturalism be reconciled with his apparent hostility to materialism in the Genealogy and elsewhere? Fourth, the naturalistic tradition which includes figures like Hume, Nietzsche, and Freud supposes that there is some “essence” to human nature; but has not Nietzsche rid us of “metaphysical” notions such as that ‘human nature’ has an “essence?” Fifth, the naturalistic Nietzsche characterized in the prior section seems to suppose that he knows certain truths that his opponents (Christian moralists) do not; but does not Nietzsche’s famous “perspectivism” signal his profound skepticism about all claims to knowledge and truth?320

Rather than deal with his responses to each of these objections individually, I will focus on the latter two in order to dispute the initial premise.

Following Leiter’s lead, I will focus on his response to the fifth objection first. Regarding the question of skepticism, Leiter contends, “The Skeptical Reading of Nietzsche has always been in profound tension with Nietzsche’s philosophical practice, in which he repeatedly and regularly employs the epistemic value terms in attacking competing views and promoting his own.”321 For Leiter, not only does Nietzsche often use these terms, but

More generally, Nietzsche’s explicit empiricism – his view that “all evidence of truth comes only from the senses” (BGE: 134) – is impossible to reconcile with the Skeptical reading. For any empiricist critique necessarily presupposes that there exists some epistemically privileged class of claims about the world – those based on, or inferable from sense experience. But a class of claims can only be epistemically privileged if it is possible for there to be objective truths about them and for us to have objective knowledge of those truths.322

320 Leiter, NM, 11-12.
321 “By ‘epistemic value terms’” Leiter continues, “we mean that whole family of related concepts that presuppose the possibility of objective truth and our knowledge of it: e.g., ‘true,’ ‘false,’ ‘real,’ ‘unreal,’ ‘justified,’ ‘unjustified,’ and the like.” Ibid., 13.
322 Ibid., 14.
I find this claim problematic for several reasons. First, as I have suggested in the previous chapters, given the way that Nietzsche comes to conceive of the real, his claim about truth in *BGE* §134 is quite reconcilable with the skeptical reading. Secondly, it strikes me as false that any commitment to empiricism necessarily presupposes both the possibility of objective truths and objective knowledge of those truths. For example, I take William James’s and John Dewey’s pragmatisms to be empiricist, while both reject notions of objectivity. Also, it remains unclear what exactly Leiter means by objectivity. It may be argued, for instance, that Nietzsche’s position shares some similarities with the notion of objectivity advanced by contemporary pragmatists like Robert Brandom and Jeffrey Stout; however, even here the similarities may be too tenuous for the argument to be very compelling. However, given what we have seen of Nietzsche’s position regarding metaphysics, I take it that he would worry that reliance on notions like objectivity ultimately contributes to the denial of our role in the creation of reality, and thus to our ability to maximize the exploitation of our creative energies on behalf of the future.

The other of Leiter’s responses on which I will focus shares several features with Appel’s position. Leiter contends that while it is clear that Nietzsche is opposed to certain classic metaphysical doctrines – like the doctrine of metaphysical realism, according to which there exists a “true

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323 Perhaps Leiter might object to viewing James’s and Dewey’s pragmatisms as empiricist because they are consciously critiquing the traditional (representationalist) empiricist notion of experience. But then so is Nietzsche.

324 In contrast to notions that retain the transcendental onto-theological implications prevalent in much scientific and philosophical discourse, Brandom and Stout advance a notion of objectivity, as standards of evaluation that are normative and immanent to practices. See Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jeffrey Stout, “On Our Interest in Getting things Right: Pragmatism without Narcissism,” in *New Pragmatists*, ed. Cheryl Misak, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007). Even when Nietzsche presents his notion of objectivity he places the term in scare quotes, suggesting that he is doing something differently when invoking the term. In contrast to what has come to be known as the view from nowhere, Nietzsche says, “There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be” Nietzsche, *GM*, III §12, 119.

world” (as discussed above) – it is far from clear that he rejects all claims about the essence or nature of various kinds of things.\footnote{Leiter, \textit{NM}, 26.}

Similarly, in his reading of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, Appel says,

It would be sheer folly to teach the many about rank order and self-overcoming, as Zarathustra discovers early in his odyssey. By parts II and III of this work, Nietzsche’s alter ego has concluded that one should not attempt to be a physician to the “incurable” (Z III, 12, 17). All speech is in vain among them because they represent a fundamentally different type and possess instincts foreign to the superior man, whose teachings cannot possibly elicit a sympathetic, knowing response.\footnote{Appel, \textit{ND}, 29.}

This points to one of those apparent tensions found in Nietzsche’s \textit{oeuvre} that continues to frustrate interpreters. On the one hand, as I have been trying to show throughout, Nietzsche seeks to overcome metaphysical claims such as the notion of essentialism (and metaphysics more generally); while, on the other hand, he often talks about the weak and strong as types in seemingly essentialist terms. However, I propose that these moments can also be interpreted pragmatically, especially in light of his perspectivism as elaborated in \textit{GM} III §12.\footnote{See footnote 324 above. Further, by pragmatically I mean to suggest here that Nietzsche’s perspectival account of objectivity in \textit{GM} is similar to Peirce’s, James’s, and Dewey’s pragmatic account of objects; in short that an object is the sum of its descriptions.}

One passage that is particularly difficult, and to which both Appel and Leiter refer in this context, is the well-known passage from \textit{GM} I §13 in which Nietzsche discusses the “birds of prey” and the “little lambs.”\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{GM}, I §13, 44-46.} Appel refers to the passage in a footnote saying:

In \textit{The Genealogy} Nietzsche also presents the free will doctrine as a psychological device that bolsters the herd’s fragile self-esteem. In embracing free will the multitude is comforted by the illusion that it has “chosen” to be weak. To confront the hard truth—that their weakness is innate—would be unbearable.\footnote{Appel, \textit{ND}, 47, n.7. My emphasis.}

Again, the assumption here seems to be something like this: for Nietzsche, the weakness of the weak inheres within them, as if their weakness was an internal, perhaps non-relational, property. But it is precisely this sort of argument that Nietzsche criticizes at this point in \textit{GM}. He writes:

\textit{...}
To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it express itself as strength. A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language… which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.331

While this passage is potentially open to many interpretations, Appel’s invocation of “innateness” seems to miss the point. Nietzsche is explicitly denying the metaphor, or image, of there being a subject whose interior has specific non-relational properties which then determine the exterior’s character. I take Nietzsche here to be making a move similar to the classical pragmatists when they endorse Charles Sanders Peirce’s pragmatic maxim: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”332

Reading Nietzsche’s claim here in light of the pragmatic maxim allows us to see his remark about the strength of the strong and the weakness of the weak as an analytic statement similar to “All bachelors are unmarried”—that is, by definition the moment a man gets married he is no longer a bachelor—rather than a metaphysically essentialist claim. Precisely because we do not have access to some mysterious thing-in-itself, Nietzsche suggests, a thing is the sum total of our descriptions. Just as the more affects we allow to speak about an object the more complete our

conception of it, so does our identification of character types such as weakness and strength stem from our evaluation of deeds. William James’s paraphrasing of Matthew 7:16 seems fitting, “By their fruits ye shall know them, not their roots.” In GM I §13, I take Nietzsche to be raising the question: what would it mean to see something repeatedly exhibit the qualities of one thing, yet insist that it is another?

While Appel’s primary worry is about the anti-egalitarian implications of Nietzsche’s supposed essentializing of human types into strong and weak, higher and lower, a related concern with political consequences that I think the pragmatic interpretation offered here also dissolves regards the question of determinism and agency. For instance, in his discussion of GM I §13, Robert Pippin articulates this concern clearly:

This denial of a subject behind the deed and responsible for it is so sweeping that it immediately raises a problem for Nietzsche. It is the same question that would arise for anyone attacking the commonsense psychological view that holds that a subject’s intention, normally understood as a desire for an end, accompanied by a belief about means or a subject’s deciding or “willing” to act for some purpose or end, must stand both “behind” and “before” some activity in order for the event to be distinguished as a deed at all, as something done by someone. We must be able to appeal to such a subject’s “intending” in order for us to be able to distinguish, say, someone volunteering for a risky mission from steel rusting or water running downhill or a bird singing. The identification of such a prior condition is, in Wittgenstein’s famous words, what would distinguish my arm going up from my raising my arm. It is “behind” the deed in the sense that other observers see only the movements of bodies

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333 Paraphrase of Nietzsche’s claim in GM, III §12, 119; see note 324 above.
335 Although I argue primarily against Appel’s reading of GM, I §13 as evidence of Nietzsche’s essentialism, he is not alone. For instance, Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins also view this passage as potentially essentialist/deterministic. While contending that Nietzsche often discusses the strong and weak distinction in inconsistent terms, Solomon and Higgins, view his discussion in this section in terms of his “apparent determinism,” saying, “The dominant impression Nietzsche gives—at least in Genealogy—is that one can do very little to change one’s basic being, much less ‘improve mankind.’” In particular, whether one is strong and noble or weak and pathetic is not a choice of existential options but a kind of “given,” in terms of one’s social origins and upbringing, and resides at the core of one’s character, perhaps even in one’s genes. As he puts it in Genealogy, an eagle can no more become a lamb than a lamb can become an eagle.” Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, What Nietzsche Really Said, (New York, Schocken Books, 2000), 122, 123-124. There are numerous other discussions of this passage. For instance, Bernard Williams discusses the passage in terms of Nietzsche’s criticism of the implications at the heart of a metaphysical notion of willing, as part of his attempt toward a naturalization of moral psychology. Bernard Williams, “Nietzsche’s Minimalist Moral Psychology,” in Schacht NGM. Robert Pappas views it in terms of Nietzsche’s “anticausality” in The Nietzsche Disappointment; see also Alexander Nehamas’s discussion in Nietzsche especially Ch.3.
say, someone stepping out from a line of men – and must infer some intending subject in order to understand and explain both what happened and why the action, someone volunteering for a mission, occurred. If there “is” just the deed, we tend to think, stepping out of line is just body movement, metaphysically like the wind blowing over a lamp. A subject’s intention is “before” the deed because the commonsense psychological explanation typically points to such a prior intention as the cause of the act; what best answers the question, “Why did this occur?”

However, this formulation seems to miss much of what Nietzsche is up to. Here he definitely questions the recurring assumption in this formulation—namely, why “must” we be able to appeal to a “subject’s” intention in order for us to be able to identify an event as an action?

Aside from the raising the question of the autonomous “subject,” Nietzsche can be read here as suggesting that the problem of agency only arises if two assumptions are held together. On the one hand, the question of agency arises if nature is thought of as causally deterministic—which is why, as I am suggesting, Nietzsche views nature as contingent. On the other hand, the notion

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337 Nietzsche suggests that it has to do both with the creation of the “subject” that occurs in the slave revolt and consequently with the grammatical habits that modern languages have inherited. The ancients, for the most part, did not encounter this issue. However, one can retort that the ancients also did not have as robust a notion of individuality as us moderns. Yet, one finds in thinkers such as Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, for instance, accounts that deny this notion of the subject while still granting notions of individual agency. In contrast, while taking a different line than Butler and Mahmood, Scott Jenkins argues that Nietzsche criticizes the notion of the subject as an entity that is “independent of a causal order.” Scott Jenkins, “Morality, Agency, and Freedom in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals” in History of Philosophy Quarterly, vol. 20 #1, 65. Despite Nietzsche’s suspicion toward the concept of causality, Jenkins suggests that “Nietzsche’s claim about doings could be regarded as one of causal determinism” (66). Nonetheless, Jenkins argues, “Nietzsche’s goal is to explain how this concept [of agent causation] arose, and how it gained importance, by employing a completely naturalistic account of agency—one that does not involve mention of the subject” (68). In other words, while he views Nietzsche as holding a view of things in the world as being causally determined in nature, precisely in response to the notion of the subject that stands in the position of independent spectator, Jenkins maintains that Nietzsche provides and endorses an account of individual agency. While Jenkins makes many plausible claims, the weakest part of his argument comes when he has to account for how Nietzsche’s account of agency counts as such, given his interpretation of Nietzsche’s naturalism as entailing causal determinism. At this point, nature’s “causal determinism” seems to be loosened in order to accommodate what Jenkins refers to as Nietzsche’s compatibilist conception of freedom. He says, “Thus, Nietzsche’s positive conception of freedom is a compatibilist one. To possess free will is, for Nietzsche, to be autonomous, and this is compatible with being a part of a natural order. More generally, Nietzsche believes that viewing the world as a collection of interrelated events is compatible with normative assessment, but not with moral assessment. While we have control over the capacities and traits with which we are born (as Nagel points out), Nietzsche maintains that these are precisely the kinds of things that determine whether one is an autonomous admirable, healthy, well constituted, ‘good’ agent, or a base, sick, flawed, ‘bad’ agent (where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are used in the noble sense outlined in GM I)” (78). What Jenkins does not explain is how free normative assessment is compatible with causal determinism. It seems that for normative assessment to be free in any meaningful sense nature must be conceived as contingent rather than causally deterministic.
of agency becomes a problem when the question of intention gets separated from the action.

Recognizing something like the latter, Pippin warns:

But, as we have seen, if we accept *GM I*, 13 at face value, and insist that there is *no* doer behind the deed, we have to give up much more than the will to power, and its assumptions about exclusively created value. We will make it very difficult to understand the whole of Nietzsche’s own attack on the moral psychology of Christian morality, since he appears to rely on a traditional understanding of act descriptions, and invokes a complex picture of unconscious motives, operative and motivating, but inaccessible as such to the agents involved.  

Because Nietzsche deploys many of the terms of the moral psychology that he criticizes, Pippin contends that it does not make sense to read him as denying that there are persons, acting as agents, performing deeds.

In contrast to the determinist or essentialist reading of the passage, Pippin presents an expressivist account of *GM I* §13 and argues that we can read the claim about there being no doer behind the deed as suggesting that the doer is *in* the deed. He says, “We thus need to return to *GM I*, 13 and appreciate that Nietzsche is not denying that there is a subject of the deed; he is just asserting that it is not separate, distinct from the activity itself; it is ‘in’ the deed.”

Following his, and Charles Taylor’s, reading of Hegel’s “‘expressivist’ notion of action,” Pippin contends that:

The main similarity [between Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s expressivism] turns on what might be called a non-separability thesis about intention and action, and a corresponding non-isolability claim about a subject’s intention, the claim that the determinate meaning of such an intention cannot be made out if isolated from a much larger complex of social and historical factors.

Reading Nietzsche on these, dare I say pragmatic, terms allows us to see how his denial of a subject *behind* the deed avoids being deterministic. As I suggested above, we can view the claim as an analytic proposition. In this regard, his rejection of the claim “that the strong man is free to

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338 Pippin, AND, 377.
339 Ibid., 379.
340 Ibid., 380-381.
be weak’’ is not to deny that I raise my arm, or that, let us say, vegetarian Patricia can choose to
eat meat, but it denies that my intention to raise my arm can be identified independently of my
raising my arm, or that Patricia is free to eat meat and be a vegetarian—the moment she eats
meat, she is, by definition, not a vegetarian.

Although Leiter has a different reading of GM I §13 from Appel’s, he still focuses on
Nietzsche’s use of the term essence to support his claim that Nietzsche is a speculative M-
Naturalist:

[Nietzsche] makes claims about essences with some frequency – for example […]
“the weakness of the weak … – I mean [their] essence [Wesen].” The mistake of
most anti-metaphysical readings of Nietzsche is to conflate Nietzsche’s opposition to
non-empirical or non-naturalistic claims (which he does, indeed, repudiate) with an
opposition to any and all claims about a thing’s essence or nature.341

It is a bit unclear though, what precisely is the commitment towards metaphysics that Leiter
wishes to attribute to Nietzsche here. The issue is that while suggesting that Nietzsche is not
critical of metaphysics per se, but only to specific metaphysical doctrines, Leiter turns to Quine’s
description of essences in the essay “Intensions Revisited” to provide a way of reading
Nietzsche’s use of the phrase “sein Wesen.” But in the passage to which Leiter turns, Quine
seems to be attempting to hold metaphysics, per se, at bay. Without going into detail about the
contours of his argument, Quine’s point in the passage illuminates the centrality of context to
ascriptions of knowledge and belief. Quine contends that, in modal logic, the ascription of belief
or knowledge to an agent is vacuous devoid of contextualization, similarly is it for the notion of
essences. Hence he says,

It [the notion of knowing or believing who or what someone or something is] and the
notion of essence are on a par. Both make sense in context. Relative to a particular
inquiry, some predicates may play a more basic role than others, or may apply more
fixedly; and these may be treated as essential. The respective derivative notions,

341 Leiter, NM, 26.
then, of vivid designator and rigid designator, are similarly dependent on context and empty otherwise.  

The point is that where there may be some terms that are critical to the description of an object toward which knowledge may be ascribed (i.e. they may be essential), they are only so in a context. So in our example, Patricia is, in “essence,” a vegetarian so long as she does not eat meat. Furthermore, she is, as a vegetarian, not free to eat meat. Returning to Leiter’s reading of Nietzsche then, he is forced to provide a description that prioritizes context precisely because the notion that Nietzsche does not adopt an anti-metaphysical stance in the later writings is untenable.  

This gets us to the heart of the matter. While there are instances in his mature writings in which Nietzsche commends science, his naturalism does not rely, nor is modeled, on a Methods Continuity, or on any form of continuity with science for that matter. Rather, the order of dependence runs in the other direction. For Nietzsche, the methods of science are only acceptable when they accord with naturalism—that is, while he accepts science and its method because it places humans back into the text of nature, he finds that it is often not naturalist enough given its belief in the singularity of truth. Nietzsche’s criticism of science does not stop at positivism or at its cowardice and naïveté, as Appel suggests, nor at material reductionism, à la Leiter. Nietzsche is skeptical about the onto-theological impulses undergirding science’s will to truth; as he argues, for instance, in GM III §24. While

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344 Although talking about Results Continuity at this point of his discussion, I take Janaway’s claim here to hold true for any notion of continuity when he says, “if science persists in spurning concepts of will-like activity and competition in its descriptions of nature, will continuity with the results of science be an overriding desideratum for Nietzsche? If so, should he fall in line and abandon his notion of the will to power as unconfirmed? It is hard to be confident, however, that Nietzsche would not rather continue to blame scientists for consistently misreading reality in this respect, however well-established their results might become.” Janaway, *BS*, 39.  
345 In fact, if we look at Nietzsche’s emphasis on and deployment of a psychological interpretation of the evolution human beings, he seems less interested in any potential scientific verification of the account than he is in telling a story in which the facets emerged immanently. Cf. Robert Pippin’s, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* for more on these issues. See also Janaway’s *BS*, chapter 3.
complimenting those committed to science as the “last idealists of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual conscience dwells and is incarnate today,” because they aim to overcome the metaphysical impulse of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche nonetheless contends that “they themselves are its most spiritualized product, its most advanced front-line troops and scouts… They are far from being free spirits: for they still have faith in truth.”346 When Nietzsche endorses science in his later writings, he does so because of the role it has played historically, in his view, to discredit the tenability of Christianity’s and the ascetic ideal’s metaphysical worldview, and not because it uncovers the true nature of reality, as Appel suggests. Yet, Nietzsche continues to be wary of science precisely because, in its faith in truth, it remains beholden to the logic of Christianity and its moral consciousness.347

Once we take seriously Nietzsche’s skepticism toward the metaphysical impulse that runs through science’s will to truth and his rejection of essentialism, it becomes clear that his denunciation of democracy is derived neither from anti-egalitarian commitments nor from an essentialist claim about human types. Given his account of the stranglehold the ascetic ideal has on how we view the world, including science’s attempt to overcome metaphysics, rather than endorsing a form of tyranny perpetrated by an “essentially strong type” over the “essentially weak,” we can see Nietzsche’s rejection of democracy, and hope for the Übermensch, as stemming from a concern about engendering pluralism.348

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346 GM, III §24, 149-150. There are three interrelated points on which he criticizes contemporary science here: 1) Science’s commitment to “facts.” 2) Its faith in truth. The implicit notion that when uncovering these facts science is getting to the truth about the world. And 3) that the value of the conception of truth is unquestioned.

347 One of the sub-plots in the narrative of GS §108-125’s account of the “death of God,” for instance, is a story about the emergence of science as an extension of Christianity’s emphasis on falsification. The story goes something like this: As Christianity rose to prominence it scrutinized all other ways of viewing the world, denying the truth-aptness of their claims. However, as its opponents lessened, this process of falsification turned toward Christianity itself (leading to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the scientific revolution). This impulse toward falsification, its will to truth, has played a significant role in God’s slaying. However, one of Nietzsche’s main criticisms is that despite rendering God unbelievable science still maintains Christianity’s will to truth.

348 Cf. H. W. Siemens, NCD.
Yet, recognizing that Nietzsche conceives of “politics as aesthetic activity,” and drawing on his references to the master race, Appel interprets Nietzsche’s account of the imposition of laws as advocating tyranny of the strong over the weak. Referring to *GM* II §11, Appel says, “As it was in the aristocratic societies of antiquity, so it should be in the future: rulers must use ‘the institution of law… to impose measures and bounds upon the excesses of the reactive pathos and to compel it to come to terms.’” Focusing primarily on his language of “imposition,” Appel concludes that, for Nietzsche, “The just political order is therefore one in which the vast majority is regulated by stringent legal codes. This is as it should be, for law is an instrument in the power struggle among social forces and is one of the most valuable tools in the hands of the artist-tyrant.” However, if we look at the context of the passage from *GM* II §11, we see a different picture emerge from the one Appel paints.

In the midst of providing his account of the emergence of guilt and the “bad conscience,” Nietzsche suggests that it is with stronger human beings, those who are able to shrug off injuries, that justice is possible. He says,

> The active, aggressive, arrogant man is still a hundred steps closer to justice than the reactive man.….. From a historical point of view, law represents on earth… the struggle against the reactive feelings, the war conducted against them on the part of the active and aggressive powers who employed some of their strength to impose measures and bounds upon the excesses of the reactive pathos and to compel it to come to terms. Wherever justice is practiced and maintained one sees a stronger power seeking a means of putting an end to the senseless raging of *ressentiment* among the weaker powers that stand under it (whether they be groups or individuals)—partly by taking the object of *ressentiment* out of the hands of revenge…

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349 Appel, *ND*, 121.
350 Ibid., 138. See *GM*, II §11, 75.
351 Appel, *ND*, 139.
352 Nietzsche, *GM*, II §11, 75. I also discuss this section of *GM*, in a different context, in the previous chapter.
Judging from this passage, it does not seem to be the case that Nietzsche actually endorses the imposition of laws for “future rulers.” However, he does find that historically it took the institutionalization of a power strong enough to resist the temptation of mere vengeance to stop revenge killings. Here Nietzsche seems to be giving a fairly straightforward account of how penal institutions emerged as forces powerful enough to curtail mob vengeance; for, he suggests, it is only those who can resist the desire for immediate vengeance that can potentially seek justice.

This is not to suggest that Nietzsche has a specific notion of justice in mind, which can then be universalized for all, or forever. On the contrary, and this is also why I dispute Appel’s reading of GM II §11, Nietzsche argues that

“Just” and “unjust” exist accordingly, only after the institution of law (and not, as Dühring would have it, after the perpetration of the injury). To speak of just and unjust in itself is quite senseless; in itself, of course, no injury, assault, exploitation, destruction can be “unjust,” since life operates essentially, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought of at all without this character.

While specific claims to justice are only possible after the construction of institutions powerful enough to contain mob vengeance, the moment those claims become totalizing, the members of those societies become complacent and often simply rely on readymade accounts about how to comport themselves; so much so that those claims begin to restrict the ways in which the members of those societies imagine how to organize themselves in relation to their traditions, which, Nietzsche suggests, further limits their desire, ability, and drive to pursue future greatness. He continues:

353 In fact, he ends GM II §11 on an entirely different note. While he recognizes that the imposition of laws worked to take punishment out of the hands of revenge, by setting general, consistent, standards, Nietzsche ends this section warning that granting too much authority to legal systems can have deleterious consequences limiting the ways in which future generations deal with their changing circumstances. I saw more below.

354 Nietzsche, GM, II §11, 76. Note how Nietzsche’s use of the term “essentially” follows on the type of contextualist basis we found in Quine.
One must indeed grant something even more unpalatable: that from the highest biological standpoint, legal conditions can never be other than exceptional conditions, since they constitute a partial restriction of the will of life, which is bent upon power, and are subordinate to its total goal as a single means: namely, as a means of creating greater units of power. A legal order thought of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle between complexes but as a means of preventing all struggle in general… would be a principle hostile to life, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of man, an attempt to assassinate the future of man, a sign of weariness, a secret path to nothingness.—

It might be the case, in Nietzsche’s view, that at one point a strong segment of human beings were able to resist the temptation toward revenge, institute this strength in order to thwart the mob from carrying out its vengeance, and, as such, be in a position to seek justice; however, the moment that the position maintained by this segment is held as an end in itself, as needing to be the position held by all, it becomes as much of a problem for humanity’s future as the mob’s ressentiment. That is, Nietzsche lauds competition among points of view because it allows for the engagement of our creative energies, whereas he worries when any dominant position fails to see itself as merely one competing view that can potentially be bettered.

While it is true that he does not believe all people, or points of view, to be equal either in intelligence or virtue, Nietzsche’s main issue concerns the deleterious effects that any totalitarian impulse may have on the future of the species. So it is not simply the “weakness” of the ascetic interpretation of existence that Nietzsche rejects, but, just as significantly, also its totalitarianism. Nietzsche says,

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355 Ibid.
356 This view, shares many similarities with John Dewey’s endorsement of democracy; particularly his fallibilism.
357 By “virtue” here I simply mean the ability live up to the standards which render the achievement of our aims purposeful with maximal excellence (i.e. among the reasons we can give for why FC Barcelona was able to dominate Manchester United in the 2011 UEFA Champions League Final, for instance is that more of their, Barca’s, players are better, more virtuous, footballers).
358 Here I disagree with Michael Frazer’s assertion that Nietzsche’s “greatest objection to slave morality is precisely that it is the morality of the slaves—of the weak and the sick.” Michael Frazer, “The Compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on Sympathy and Strength” in The Review of Politics, Vol. 68. No.1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, Winter, 2006), 54. Disagreeing with Nehamas’s emphasis on Nietzsche’s perspectivism and interpretive and stylistic pluralism, Frazer suggests that Nietzsche’s privileging of “the perspective of life” acts as a sort of singular fundament by which the wrongness of the weak interpretation of existence can be evaluated.
The idea at issue here is the valuation the ascetic priest places on our life; he juxtaposes it (along with what pertains to it: ‘nature,’ ‘world,’ the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, unless it turn against itself, deny itself: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds—that we ought to put right: for he demands that one go along with him; where he can he compels acceptance of his evaluation of existence.\(^{359}\)

Not only does the ascetic priest limit our vitality, he demands that we acquiesce to his interpretation of existence. This recognition, in turn, accounts for Nietzsche’s more specific criticism of liberal institutions: “Liberal institutions immediately cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained: subsequently there is nothing more thoroughly harmful to freedom than liberal institutions.”\(^{360}\) When Nietzsche rejects Christianity, nihilism, the ascetic ideal, and democracy, his concern, in large part, is to imagine a way of generating the possibility of pluralism in a context that demands conformity.\(^{361}\)

Mark Warren also recognizes the significance of taking Nietzsche’s epistemic pluralism into account when attempting to make sense of his contribution to political philosophy. He argues,

> A further point of note with regards to the politics of Nietzsche’s philosophy is that his conception of truth is intrinsically pluralistic. By construing the truth of claims about the world in terms of their effect in constituting individuals under different conditions of life, Nietzsche in effect denies that truth is the sort of thing that could be imposed politically, as, for example, seems to occur in Plato’s *Republic*. Truth retains its quality as truth only in relation to constituting individual agents. Put in different terms, Nietzsche’s conception of truth rules out potential totalitarianism stemming from what Hannah Arendt has called politics construed on the model of

However, if we take seriously the implications of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, we recognize that “the perspective of life” is not a singular perspective at all. “The perspective of life,” in Nietzsche’s view, amounts to a recognition of the flux of *becoming*. It entails an openness to numerous perspectives, and is derived from the willingness to adopt perspectivism. In this regard, I find Nehamas’s interpretation more persuasive than Frazer’s.

\(^{359}\) *GM*, III §11, 117; emphases are Nietzsche’s.

\(^{360}\) *TI*, “Expeditions,” §38, 103.

\(^{361}\) While considering Nietzsche’s views on democracy in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, Siemens admits, “So if Nietzsche denies the emancipatory value of democracy in the moment that he expresses it, one reason is that democracy emancipates us from the concentration of power in a single despot or genius at the cost of establishing another kind of tyranny: that of the ‘people.’” Siemens, *NCD*, 25.
making, the fabrication of a political sphere through the technocratic application of ideas…362

For Warren, because Nietzsche talks about the will to power in terms of the way people experience themselves as unified individuals, and truth as interpretations of the world that allow for particular forms of life,363 Nietzsche’s pluralism concerning truth denies the possibility for any particular interpretation of the world to be posited as being the necessary form of life for everyone. However, referring also to Arendt in this context, Alan Woolfolk criticizes Warren on this point, contending that:

What Warren does not explain is that Arendt’s conception of genuine politics is rather fleeting, as she acknowledges, and highly aestheticized, as many have noted. Noble as it is, that vision of political life may well depend upon a more commanding conception of truth than Arendt permits in order to rule out the potential of totalitarianism. Nothing in Warren’s article explains how that potential is forbidden in Nietzsche’s vision of life. In fact, his entire article unintentionally demonstrates just how impossible it is to forbid evil possibilities when one has forbidden oneself to forbid.364

The problem, for Woolfolk, is that if Warren is right about the implication of Nietzsche’s epistemic pluralism for political philosophy, then, similar to Arendt’s position, totalitarianism remains a possibility. Rather than viewing Nietzsche’s contribution as yielding totalitarianism, ironically perhaps, Woolfolk objects that Nietzsche’s philosophy leaves open the potential for totalitarianism because it is not totalitarian enough.

Yet, in his magisterial text, Politics and Vision, Sheldon Wolin reads the symbolic action performed by Nietzsche’s political philosophy as a “politics of critical totalitarianism.”365 In a

363 “Truth claims are interpretive articulations of the world that make goal-oriented actions possible.” Warren, NPP, 194.
365 Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004 ed.), Chapter 13; cited henceforth as PV. Recognizing the myriad of difficulties in charting Nietzsche’s political philosophy, Wolin looks at how the continuum between Nietzsche’s “external” political concerns about culture (and his view of culture as politics) and the accompanying “internal” implicit theory of politics function as a form of symbolic action. With
manner reminiscent of Arendt’s groundbreaking study of totalitarianism in her classic text, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Wolin tries to identify what one might call an ontology of totalitarianism. Attempting to chart some of the discourses central to totalitarianism, Wolin notes similarities between these discourses and aspects of Nietzsche’s often excessive rhetoric. Wolin contends that

To name a discourse “critical-totalitarian” is to identify it as a certain mental construction and to locate it as a hostile presence in the artificial world conventionally formed around the idea and practice of *interchange*…. Interchange might be likened to the discursive equivalent of the political: it signifies a governing ideal for engaging in intellectual activities whose life blood is differences.

Practically speaking, Wolin views Nietzsche’s symbolic action as imagining its position both as the intellectual norm and its other in order to denounce the traditional normative notion of politics. Within the “critical-totalitarian” discourse, “mind” is reimagined, metaphorically, as “anti-mind” to denounce radically the traditional notion of mind—hence Nietzsche’s supposed “irrationalism” acting as the basis to denounce philosophy and rational exposition. However, the important point to note, for Wolin, is the way the totalitarian position, both critical and actual, postures itself to render contrasting views of the world obsolete. He says, “Such a discourse, one can say, would be totalistic in the sense that the aggression acted out in its metaphors, images,

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these concerns in mind, Wolin argues that the politics of Nietzsche’s symbolic action represent a critical totalitarianism (*PV*, 464-466).


368 Wolin describes it thus: “Critical-totalitarian discourse might be described as mind denouncing mind. It begins by invoking a metaphorical vocabulary that enables mind to remake its own nature in the image of anti-mind and to mount a radical challenge to the tradition of interchange” (*PV*, 465). And further, “Although Nietzsche’s critique might be described as a theoretical subversion of theory by anti-theory, its aim was to liberate theory by undeceiving the theorist, dissolving the unity of theory and truth in order to reveal the dazzling range of expressive modes made available once the model of a depersonalized self, disinterestedly serving the common good, had been overthrown” (*PV*, 482).
and narratives aims not only to obliterate its enemies but to bring down an entire world it believes the enemies have made.”

However, to maintain dominance, the totalitarian position cannot merely eradicate the opposing view. From Wolin’s perspective then, Nietzsche’s politics of critical totalitarianism amounts to a series of discursive strategies designed to deride and supersede a form of life committed to the exchange of difference. Designed ultimately to elevate the Few over the Many, these strategies must be dynamic. “The totalitarian dynamic,” Wolin continues, “derives from a tension between two utterly contradictory tendencies.” On the one hand, there is an anti-modern, or conservative, tendency, “a longing for communion with an idealized and archaic fons et origo to which is attributed revitalizing powers.” On the other hand, there is a modernizing tendency which is “‘progressive’ or at least anti-nostalgic” in character.

Wolin contends that the former, the supposed nostalgic aspect of Nietzsche’s thought, begins in *BT* with Nietzsche’s emphasis on myth and generating a rebirth of tragedy and runs through his corpus with the way he deploys tropes relating to health and infection. Focusing primarily on Nietzsche’s diagnostic or therapeutic language, Wolin argues that both critical and actual totalitarianism rely on describing the enemy it wants to eradicate as “sick” or “weak.” Yet, he admits that “By representing its enemies as carriers of infection, the totalitarian is assured of an inexhaustible supply of sacrificial victims because the contaminated elements have inevitably become mixed (e.g., by marriage) with elements otherwise pure.” It is important to his analogy, between Nietzsche’s position and the discourses of totalitarianism, that the enemy be inexhaustible because Wolin has to acknowledge the ways in which Nietzsche’s position also

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369 Wolin, *PV*, 466.
370 Ibid., 469.
371 Ibid.
372 Ibid.
373 Ibid., 475.
appears to resist the severity of the accusation. He says, “One paradox of the totalitarian mind is that if it is to follow a practice, to be methodical, its enemies must ultimately be ineradicable even though their elimination is its proclaimed objective.”

However, Wolin’s analysis breaks down, in my view, when he has to account for the tension between Nietzsche’s emphasis on becoming, with its implicit pluralism, and the claim of his supposed totalitarianism. Wolin acknowledges the tension and is then forced to ask:

The most striking characteristics of the critical totalitarian mentality stem from what seems to be a permanent dynamic, continuously in motion, and inherently transgressive/aggressive. How that dynamic is acquired, and the elements that enter into its composition, are of crucial importance. The dynamic and its elements are shaped by the paradoxical requirement that total power should always elude it. What, then, is totalitarian about critical totalitarianism such that it can be identified as a theoretical practice with a corresponding politics?

While Wolin frames the question around “the politics of theory” central to Nietzsche’s supposed critical totalitarianism, the question pertains more generally: What is it that is totalitarian about Nietzsche’s position? Wolin responds, “Its defining characteristic can be described as the

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374 Ibid., 467-468.
375 Ibid., 467. Arendt also discusses the centrality of a similar dynamism in her analysis of totalitarianism. Articulating what she finds to be the difference between authoritarianism and military dictatorship, she says: “The so-called ‘leader principle’ is in itself not totalitarian; it has borrowed certain features from authoritarianism and military dictatorship which have greatly contributed toward obscuring and belittling the essentially totalitarian phenomenon. If the functionaries appointed from above possessed real authority and responsibility, we would have to do with a hierarchical structure in which authority and power are delegated by and governed by laws. Much the same is true for the organization of an army and the military dictatorship established after its model; here, absolute power of command from the top down and absolute obedience from the bottom up correspond to the situation of extreme danger in combat, which is precisely why they are not totalitarian. A hierarchically organized chain of command means that the commander’s power is dependent on the whole hierarchic system in which he operates.” Arendt, OT, 364. While totalitarianisms share discursive features with non-totalitarian formations, especially around the deployment, and types, of propaganda, it is significant for Arendt to note the dynamic non-hierarchical form of organization that renders totalitarianism structurally unique. Arendt continues, “The Leader principle does not establish a hierarchy in the totalitarian state any more than it does in the totalitarian movement; authority is not filtered down from the top through all intervening layers to the bottom as in the case in authoritarian regimes. The factual reason is that there is no hierarchy without authority and that, in spite of the numerous misunderstandings concerning the so-called ‘authoritarian personality,’ the principle of authority is in all important respects diametrically opposed to that of totalitarian domination. Quite apart from its origin in Roman history, authority, no matter in what form, always is meant to restrict or limit freedom, but never to abolish it. Totalitarian domination, however, aims at abolishing freedom, even at eliminating human spontaneity in general, and by no means at a restriction of freedom no matter how tyrannical. Technically, this absence of any authority or hierarchy in the totalitarian system is shown by the fact that between the supreme power (the Fuehrer) and the ruled there are no reliable intervening levels, each of which would receive its due share of authority and obedience.” OT, 404-405.
moment when the extraordinary marginalizes the normal, usurping its role in order to become the dominant practice.” But, this response raises more questions than it answers. For example, does finally learning to perform a skill in a more efficient manner than I previously did count as a form of totalitarianism? Surely, my previous routine was “normal” and in some regards my new maneuvers “extraordinary”; does my change in practice not marginalize my old routine? Does the acceptance of my new way of performing the skill actually dominate the marginalized routine? Does an insistence on total sovereignty and absolute rule over others, not have to be included as defining characteristics of totalitarianism? Ultimately, Wolin is unable to answer the question satisfactorily, and resorts primarily to illuminating ways in which Nietzsche’s rhetoric seems to mirror totalitarian discourses. However, despite these potential overlaps between aspects of Nietzsche’s rhetoric and totalitarian discourses, the questions must be asked: Are there not many other formations with which totalitarianism shares discursive features that are not totalitarian themselves? Is the problem with identifying what renders totalitarianism unique not that it shares discursive features with numerous non-totalitarian formations?

Even Wolin has to acknowledge that “Unlike totalitarian practice, [Nietzsche’s so-called] critical totalitarianism did not culminate in a vision of its elite directly ruling the masses.” He recognizes that

The ultimate stake in Nietzsche’s indictment of theory and revival of myth was not this or that system of philosophy, politics, science, or ethics, but the deleterious consequences for the biologic health of the species that resulted when the vita contemplativa was exalted as the best way of life, and its values, of objective, universal truth and disinterested truth-seeking, were installed as the finest realization of human potentials.

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376 Wolin, PV, 467.
377 These questions pertain even before we take some of Arendt’s findings about the uniqueness of totalitarianism into account.
378 Wolin, PV, 490.
379 Ibid., 485.
However, Wolin overstates his claim here. While it is true, that Nietzsche worries about the ways in which the nihilistic implications of the moral view of the world affects the future of the species as a whole, his problem is not with the “vita contemplativa” *per se*. Nietzsche is not nostalgic for the ancient heroes. His philosophers of the future may live contemplative lives if they choose, and besides, contemplation is a gift that must complement the “man of action’s” activity.\(^{380}\) Furthermore, like the Brahmins of old, these potentially contemplative philosophers of the future may use religion to set up hierarchies among those for whom accepting responsibility for the meaningfulness of existence is too difficult, in order to be able to pursue their own ends. These points come together in a passage from *BGE* §61:

> And if a few individuals of such noble descent are inclined through lofty spirituality to prefer a more withdrawn and contemplative life and reserve for themselves only the most subtle type of rule (over selected disciples or brothers in some order), then religion can even be used as a means for obtaining peace from the noise and exertion from *cruder* forms of government, and purity from the *necessary* dirt of all politics. That is how the Brahmins, for example, understood things: by means of a religious organization they gave themselves the power of nominating the kings of the people while they themselves kept and felt apart and outside, as men of higher and supra-royal tasks.\(^{381}\)

This is not to suggest that ascetic interpretations of existence are equally valid as views that emphasize *becoming*. Focusing on *becoming* is eminently superior, in Nietzsche’s view, because it allows us to fortify ourselves in ways that simultaneously strengthens and appropriately invigorates us to face the challenges central to existence, and an unknown future.\(^{382}\) However, that his imagined future higher types may tolerate the moral view of the world illuminates that Nietzsche’s main concern remains to avoid positing any particular worldview as necessary for

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\(^{380}\) This comes out more in the previous chapters.

\(^{381}\) Nietzsche, *BGE* §61, 72-73.

\(^{382}\) One could imagine, in analogy, an American football linebacker training for the upcoming season by ensuring that he gets copious amounts of rest, food, and watching film, without ever working out. Regardless of how helpful, and even important, it is for a linebacker to develop good sleeping, eating, and game-studying habits, he will never be able to complete a successful series in a game without subjecting his body to the severe punishment of football workouts.
everyone to maintain. For example, after contending that religion, as a means of education, may continue to harden some of the weaker human beings for whom the terror of existence is too much to bear in \textit{BGE} §61, Nietzsche begins \textit{BGE} §62 saying:

\begin{quote}
In the end, to be sure—to present the other side of the account of these religions, too, and to expose their uncanny dangerousness—one always pays dearly and terribly when religions do not want to be a means of education and cultivation in the philosopher’s hand but insist on having their own \textit{sovereign} way, when they themselves want to be the ultimate ends and not means among other means. \textsuperscript{383}
\end{quote}

In sum, Nietzsche hopes for the emergence of the \textit{Übermensch} precisely to overcome the totalitarian demand for conformity central to the moral language used to justify democratic commitment.

However, this leaves Nietzsche with a significant challenge, namely, if his diagnosis is right and the ascetic interpretation of existence maintains a hegemonic stranglehold on our \textit{Weltanschauung}, how are these \textit{Übermensch}en to emerge? In other words, if in saving humanity from both the over-exuberance of the ancient masters’ creative energies as well as from being a plaything to meaninglessness and goallessness, the ascetic ideal’s slave morality has gotten the strong to submit to its interpretation of existence, thereby weakening them and maintaining its dominion, under what conditions can the \textit{Übermensch}en emerge?

A version of this question drives Robert Pippin’s interpretation of Nietzsche in \textit{Modernism as a Philosophical Problem}. In the text, Pippin deals with

\begin{quote}
the widespread nineteenth-century suspicions (at least on the European continent) that (arguably) the two greatest accomplishments of world civilization, modern natural science and technology, and a progressive, liberal democratic culture, were also slowly and inexorably enervating and spiritually destroying that very culture…. \textsuperscript{384}
\end{quote}

He finds that as the Enlightenment thinkers, philosophers and scientists, disrupted traditional notions of intellectual authority, there also arose numerous novel existential and intellectual

\textsuperscript{383} Nietzsche, \textit{BGE}, §62, 74. \\
\textsuperscript{384} Pippin, \textit{MPP}, xii.
problems about our place in the universe and our ability to scrutinize ourselves as objects, or perhaps more accurately subjects, of study. Particularly, in Pippin’s view, beginning with Kant’s break from the Cartesian tradition, and shift from the conception of “mentality as substance to mindedness as spontaneity and like-mindedness as a social achievement,” the agenda for the view of modernism as a philosophical problem was set. The “basic issue at stake,” Pippin terms “simply as the problem of ‘autonomy,’ or of genuine self-determination or self-rule.” The quintessential modern philosophical problem, he finds, is a prevalent dissatisfaction with previous accounts of who we are and how we can create ourselves to be truly self-legislating agents.

Pippin notes that where Descartes, Kant, and others attempted to depict us moderns as autonomous, Nietzsche claims “that, ironically, all forms of the much ballyhooed modern claim for ‘independence’ actually represent a deep fear of genuine independence, and a disguised or self-deceived form of dependence.” Pippin argues that for Nietzsche the reliance on some “outside,” whether method, the world, will, or history, as providing the conditions for our autonomy is still a form of dependence. For Nietzsche, he continues,

Being genuinely free, or in his language truly ‘active,’ and ‘self-affirming,’ has nothing to do with realizing one’s nature within the whole, with any reliance on a ‘certain’ methodology, or a complete, critical, self-consciousness, whether historical or transcendental, or with the rational will, or with merely an unconstrained successful satisfaction of one’s interests.

The challenge then, for Nietzsche, is to provide an account of existence and our place in it that can, in turn, allow for us to be genuinely autonomous. It is in this context, Pippin suggests, that we acknowledge Nietzsche’s perspectivism and emphasis on interpretation.

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385 Ibid., xiv.
386 Ibid., 3.
387 Ibid., 79.
388 Ibid.
However, these emphases (on interpretation and perspectives), in Pippin’s view, once again raise the very problems that they were supposed to resolve. As Pippin states:

Nietzsche’s view creates the following dilemma. The outcome of modernity’s rigorous self-criticism is this: all human sense-making practices are perspectival. To appropriate, deal with, communicate about, the world, we require a “net” of concepts and evaluative criteria whose structure cannot be fixed by any appeal to the “world (or the good) in itself” (including any “world” of purposes, ends or basic desires); such a world in itself is “chaos.” And such perspectives are wholly conventional. It is not only true that there is no realist or intuitional or methodological way to secure or anchor such a structure; there are and can be no “good reasons” at all for them (whether transcendental or historical). Such an appeal would only reflect other conventions.  

Even if Nietzsche evades the metaphysical problems that encumber reliance on notions such as “the world,” or “the good,” Pippin suggests, Nietzsche, or his higher men, still must appeal to factors “outside” interpretation, to history, in order to resolve doubts about the significance and possibility of interpretation, he must appeal to another sort of “outside,” or an audience, others, in order to resolve doubts about the power, cogency and unity of individual interpretations.

Pippin’s point, and here I think he is right, is that ultimately Nietzsche has a difficult time providing an account of the conditions under which his self-legislating individuals, the Übermenschen, can emerge, because his worries about conformity compel him to imagine the individual in terms that are too isolationist. In the next chapter I will argue that democracy provides a way to account for how the Übermenschen can emerge, given the hegemony of the Christian moral Weltanschauung. To do so, I will provide a justification for holding democratic commitments which does not rely on the language of the ascetic ideal.

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389 Ibid., 103. In the next chapter I will disagree with one implication of the final claim here; namely, the notion that the concepts which structure our evaluative criteria are themselves conventions does not necessarily disqualify them from providing good reasons for the inferences we draw in our sense-making practices. A central part of what I take Nietzsche’s point to be is that the very conventions we devise and deploy to make sense of our existence become meaningful and have enduring significance—that is, we do not need some external, transcendental, or absolute notion of the good to determine whether some of our reasons are better than others as we evaluate each other’s commitments.

390 Ibid., 104.
Chapter 5: Justifying Democracy

Democrats expect much of democracy.... [They] expect democracy to make the world a better place. They believe it will diminish injustice and oppression, and bring reason to bear on the organization of collective life.

-Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón

Rousseau’s teaching on compassion fostered a revolution in democratic politics, one with which we live today. Compassion is on the lips of every statesman, and all boast that their primary qualification for office is their compassion.

-Allan Bloom

The pro-compassion tradition, as developed by Rousseau, made compassion’s thought about external goods the basis for the modern development of democratic-egalitarian thinking.

-Martha Nussbaum

[I]n general, there can be no society without some moral rules, and [even] he [the amoralist] needs society.

-Bernard Williams

The previous chapter has brought us to this dissertation’s ultimate concern. In it, I illuminated why I think many of the arguments against Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy fail. I argued that rather than simply being a rejection of egalitarianism, Nietzsche criticizes democracy because it stems from, and relies upon, a view of existence that he finds monolithic and stifling. But, perhaps more importantly, I emphasized, is Nietzsche’s condemnation of the manner in which democracy, and its attendant worldview, demands allegiance. He worries, ultimately, that—like the ascetic ideal which underwrites it—democracy has a tyrannical impulse whose

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393 Martha Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 385; cited henceforth as UT.
demand of allegiance denies pluralism; and, it is precisely the evisceration of plurality that Nietzsche finds most objectionable. Thus, for example, he is even suspicious of his contemporaries who see themselves as challenging the ascetic ideal. He says of them, “These Nay-sayers and outsiders of today who are unconditional on one point—their insistence on intellectual cleanliness… they certainly believe they are completely liberated from the ascetic ideal as possible, the ‘free, very free spirits’; and yet, to disclose to them what they themselves cannot see—for they are too close to themselves…. They are far from being free spirits: for they still have faith in truth.”

And Nietzsche’s suggestion here is that the notion of truth to which they are beholden implies singularity. I concluded that while Nietzsche ultimately failed to account for how his higher individuals can emerge, democracy itself can provide the conditions for their propagation. In this chapter, I flesh out this argument and provide a justification for holding democratic commitments that evades the brunt of Nietzsche’s criticisms.

This chapter has two main trajectories. In the first, I look at a discourse that often has pride of place in the justification of democracy, and that Nietzsche finds most problematic, namely the morality of compassion. Here I engage some of the problems that emerge when our justifications for holding democratic commitments rely on the language of compassion—particularly arguments which emphasize the centrality of empathy.

In the second movement of the chapter, I build on Hilary Putnam’s insight about John Dewey’s “epistemological

395 Friedrich Nietzsche, *GM*, III §24, 149-150. I say more about this passage in the previous chapter. See fn. 346.

396 As empathy and pity are central notions to the discourse, or language, of compassion, I will sometimes use these notions interchangeably. However, there are distinctions between the terms worth noting. While cursory, I take the main distinctions between compassion, empathy, and pity to be as follows: To have pity for someone is to “feel sorry” for them. Whereas, empathy is to engage in imaginative reconstruction of another’s situation in order to “feel their suffering as if placed in their shoes.” Compassion, in turn, is being moved by pity and/or empathy to alleviate someone’s suffering. One crucial point of the distinction, for example, is that one can respond emotionally to the suffering of others (i.e. have pity), and be moved to alleviate their suffering (i.e. have compassion), without empathizing with them (i.e. engaging in an imaginative reconstruction of the sufferer’s situation in which the pitier sees her- or him- self in their place). For further discussions emphasizing distinctions between pity, compassion, and empathy see Martha Nussbaum’s *UT*; and Roger Crisp’s “Compassion and Beyond” in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Jun., 2008).
justification of democracy,” as I provide a justification for holding democratic commitments that eschews some of the problems within democratic ethical theory that Nietzsche’s criticisms help to illuminate.

One of the central tenets, whether implicit or explicit, in endorsements of democracy concerns its relationship with and ability to expand compassion. We see this in thinkers as diverse as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Walt Whitman; we even find it in the work of contemporary thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum. While the way these figures think about compassion may differ, Nietzsche’s criticisms raise concerns about the general reliance on its terms to one’s ethical and political projects. Although he presents a number of arguments against the discourses central to the morality of compassion, Nietzsche seems to have two main concerns. He worries that not only is the reliance on compassion ill-suited for our thriving in an order of things in which flux, change, and the perpetual destruction of the now, are central—an order of things that requires adaptability, toughness, and an ability to act even amid uncertainty—but also that it is in fact a tool of revenge used by those incapable of toughness against those who are. However, there is also a third issue central to these concerns with which we must deal. Primarily, the discourses around compassion also run into numerous questions regarding its scope. For instance, for whom is one supposed to have compassion? And, what role does empathy play in expanding the scope of compassion? In particular, is reliance on empathy enough when there are sides competing for one’s compassion?

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In her now classic, “Pity and Mercy,” Martha Nussbaum examines, in some detail, Nietzsche’s critique of the tradition that endorses compassion.\(^\text{398}\) She argues against two of the main interpretations of Nietzsche’s criticisms of pity. On one side, there is the “boot-in-the-face” view of Nietzsche, à la Philippa Foot and others, which argues that “the historical linkage between Nietzsche and fascism is not altogether mistaken” because, as they see it, Nietzsche’s “critique of pity and praise of hardness… are indeed injunctions to cultivate a callous indifference to the fate of one’s fellow human beings.”\(^\text{399}\) On the other side, is the view propagated primarily by Walter Kaufmann and his followers, which renders Nietzsche as an innocuous figure within the tradition of Western thought; that, in effect,

> he is simply continuing a line of reflection familiar from the works of the Greek and Roman Stoics, Spinoza, and Kant. And his attack on Christianity is itself an attack only on what is insincere or imperfectly consistent in Christian ethical practice, a recalling of Christianity to the true doctrine of the Gospels.\(^\text{400}\)

The problem with both of these interpretations, as Nussbaum notes, is that neither does justice to Nietzsche’s attempt “to bring about a revival of [the] Stoic values of self-command and self-formation within a post-Christian and post-Romantic context.”\(^\text{401}\) Identifying the subtleties implicit in this project, Nussbaum argues, not only places Nietzsche within the tradition of critics of pity stemming from the Stoics, but it also recognizes the iconoclastic character of his position in the modern context.

It is at this juncture that Nussbaum makes what is, for our purposes, a critical claim, as she sums up quite eloquently one of the assumptions underwriting the political arguments of the modern pro-pity tradition. She states:

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\(^{399}\) Nussbaum, PM, 139-140.

\(^{400}\) Nussbaum, PM, 140.

\(^{401}\) Ibid., 140.
it seems to me that Kaufmann is wrong to suggest that the morality with which Nietzsche leaves us is innocuous or uncontroversial. For it does assail the roots of the deepest sorts of human love. And it also embodies a deliberate assault on the foundations of political socialism and democracy—above all as these were constructed by Rousseau, in his eloquent writings on pity as the basic moral sentiment.\(^{402}\)

Nussbaum not only acknowledges that Nietzsche’s criticism of the discourse of compassion hits a vital nerve with regards to how we moderns conceive of ourselves as human beings, she recognizes also that his criticisms present a direct attack on a fundamental assumption within theoretical defenses of egalitarianism—an assumption of the necessity of compassion for the vitality of democracy;\(^{403}\) an assumption which, in many ways, finds its modern roots in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau sets out to answer the question, “What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?” He begins, however, by presenting a hypothetical history of the emergence of reason and language. Rousseau contends that as he imagines human beings as we were before we entered into societies,

> I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others but, on the whole, the most advantageously constituted of all; I see him eating his fill under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, making his bed at the foot of the same tree which furnished his meal, with all his needs satisfied…. [He attains] the instincts of the beasts, with the advantage that, unlike any other species which has only its own instinct, man, who has none which belongs to him alone, appropriates them all, lives equally well on most of the different foods that the other animals share amongst themselves, and, consequently, finds his subsistence more easily than any of them.\(^{404}\)

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\(^{402}\) Ibid.

\(^{403}\) While, like Nussbaum, I acknowledge that socialist theory is also committed to egalitarianism, I will continue to focus primarily on democracy for the purposes of the dissertation.

First and foremost, in Rousseau’s view, human beings were creatures whose instincts were so varied that we were the best suited to survive the trials set forth by nature. However, as we became social, he suggests, we began to rely less on our individual strengths, thereby weakening the gifts that nature had bestowed upon us. In a beautifully romantic passage that sums up this point, Rousseau continues:

As the savage man’s body is the only instrument he knows, he puts it to various uses for which our bodies, through lack of exercise, are unfit, and it is our industry that deprives us the strength and agility that necessity obliges him to acquire. Had he had an axe, would he have broken such strong branches with his hands? Had he had a sling, would he have thrown a stone so hard? Had he had a ladder, would he have climbed trees so nimbly? Had he had a horse, would he have been so swift a runner? Give civilized man the time to assemble all these tools around him, and he will undoubtedly overcome savage man with ease, but if you want to see an even more unequal contest, pit them against each other naked and unarmed, and you will soon see the advantage of having all one’s strength constantly at one’s disposal, of always being prepared for every event, and of always carrying one’s whole self, so to speak, with one.  

Civilization’s primary effect was to alienate us from our natural selves. Moreover, not only did we become alienated from our whole selves physically, the process of civilization also gave rise to a new feature in us that has furthered our decline.

Central to the declension of our species, Rousseau contends, is the expansion of our intellectual capacities. He argues, “If nature destined us to be healthy, I venture to affirm that the state of reflection is contrary to nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal.” It is not that having developed the capacity to reason is inherently debilitating; however, it is that the changing conditions under which we developed the capacity forced us to become an almost entirely different type of being than nature intended. As changes in the environment forced

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405 DOI, 11-12.
406 Ibid., 13
natural individuals to begin relying on others—forcing us to become social, in effect—we began having to think in radically new ways. Rousseau explains:

As the human race spread, difficulties multiplied along with men. Differences in soils, climates, and seasons could force them to make changes in their ways of living. Barren years, long hard winters, scorching summers that consume everything demanded new skills from them. Along the sea shores and the river banks they invented the hook line and became fishermen and eaters of fish. In the forests, they made bows and arrows, and became hunters and warriors….

The repeated use of things different from himself and from each other must naturally have engendered in man’s mind the perceptions of certain relations.407

One of the primary, negative, consequences of having evolved from natural individuals to social beings is that we began reflecting discerningly on things, granting differing values to them. Two central, and closely related, transformations in our modes of valuation gave way to the problematic consequences that in Rousseau’s view led to social and political inequality.408 The first change occurs in the way we value objects. In humanity’s natural state, Rousseau implies, an object has functional value—that is, he suggests, a natural individual would value an object according to the role it plays in the fulfillment of her or his projects. While this value is instrumental, it is still closely tied to the object’s “natural” purpose (i.e. its inherent value). The conditions which brought humans into society, in contrast, forced people to begin valuing objects, especially artifacts (produced goods), in ways that exceeded their initial, or immediate, function. Rousseau writes in a critical note:

407 Ibid., 35.
408 For Rousseau, the categorical differences between natural inequality and social/political inequality are significant. In short, the differentiation of skills and strengths between individuals living in their natural state do not count as genuine, or significant, inequalities because in that state one’s limitations are only applicable to one’s self. For example, if I only have a 20-inch vertical leap and another individual has a 35-inch vertical, in the state of nature, that difference never raises any serious issues between us. If I desire a fruit on a tree that requires the minimum of a 30-inch leap, I would quickly move on, or so Rousseau suggests, to a fruit that I can reach; for the fruit’s sole value to me, in my natural state, is nourishment, and, as such, I have no inclination to continue to strive for something that exceeds my ability to achieve it. That type of desire, for objects that exceed my immediate ability to achieve, only emerges when our talents are placed in measurable competition—that is, when we are placed within a social context. See Rousseau’s note IX (translator’s note 3), DOI, 16, excerpted below.
Once he has eaten, savage man is at peace with all nature and the friend of all his fellows. What if a dispute sometimes arises over his meals? He never comes to blows without first having compared the difficulty of winning with that of finding his subsistence elsewhere; and since pride is not involved in the quarrel, it ends with a few blows of the fist; the victor eats, the vanquished goes off to seek his fortune, and all is peaceful. But for man in society, there are very different concerns; there is, in the first place, the matter of providing for the necessities and then for the superfluities; next come the luxuries, then immense riches, and then subjects and slaves; he does not have a moment of respite. What is most remarkable is that the less natural and urgent his needs, the more his passions grow, and, what is worse, his power to satisfy them…

The change in how human beings began valuing objects had dramatic consequences, especially with the introduction of the notion of private property. However, it is the second transformation to the natural individual’s modes of valuation, experienced with the development of reason, that Rousseau suggests leads to our gravest problem.

Even within the passage cited above, as he qualifies the ease with which the natural individual turns away from disputes, Rousseau provides a clue as to what occurs within the other transformation, when he says, “and since pride [l’orgueil] is not involved in the quarrel, it ends with a few blows of the fist.” As we have seen, in Rousseau’s view, the conditions of socialization have alienated the human individual from her- or him-self. In this regard, the civilized human is physically less capable of living fully than the natural individual. But as we begin reasoning as a species, our natural sentiments are also transformed in problematic ways. Not only do we begin valuing objects differently, individuals begin to value themselves differently. As our reasoning capacities expand, we develop a form of self-consciousness that depends upon the esteem of others—amour-propre, (hence pride being introduced into the disputes of civilized

\[\text{DOI, 16, n.3 [XI].}\]
\[\text{Cf. G.F.W. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, in which he has a similar discussion of the role that a form of self-consciousness which depends on the esteem of others plays in yielding the unhappy consciousness. However, Hegel’s argument provides a powerful criticism of Rousseau’s entire position, in that, for Hegel, freedom is gained, rather than lost, in the sociality achieved through mutual recognition. Discussing Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Frederick Beiser sums this up nicely, saying: “Notoriously, in his Second Discourse Rousseau had argued that civil}\]
Rousseau asserts, “It is reason that engenders self-love \([\textit{amour-propre}]\), and it is reflection that strengthens it; it is reason that turns man back on himself and that separates him from all that annoys and afflicts him.” The development of \(\textit{amour-propre}\), and the way it transforms our natural sentiments, in turn, hastened the degradation of the natural human being.

DOI is perhaps best known for Rousseau’s claim about our two primary natural sentiments. He says,

Pondering the first and simplest operations of the human soul, I believe that I perceive in it two principles that are prior to reason, of which one makes us ardently interested in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient being, and principally our fellow men, perish or suffer.

Prior to the development of reason, the two crucial sentiments natural to human beings were a form of self-love, \(\textit{amour de soi}\), and a form of concern directed to others, namely \(\textit{pitié}\). While the natural individual’s primary instinct is \(\textit{amour de soi}\), as Rousseau will suggest elsewhere, this form of self-love is related to the other natural sentiment, \(\textit{pitié}\), in a vital way. They both

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411 L’orgueil and \(\textit{l’amour-propre}\) can be used synonymously for pride.
412 DOI, 29.
413 DOI, 6.
414 As one will note, different interpreters translate \(\textit{amour de soi}\) and \(\textit{amour-propre}\) in various, potentially confusing, ways. For example, in DOI, Julia Conway Bondanella often translates \(\textit{amour de soi}\) as “self-esteem” which marks the internal looking implication to the phrase. Whereas she often translates \(\textit{amour-propre}\) as “self-love” or “pride” leaving open the complications implicit within the notion of \(\textit{amour-propre}\)—for instance, that it is still derived from \(\textit{amour de soi}\) but is preoccupied with the esteem of others. Allan Bloom, on the other hand, leaves \(\textit{amour-propre}\) untranslated but occasionally translates \(\textit{amour de soi}\) as “self-love,” in \textit{Emile}. Bloom says in a footnote referring to the distinction between the two notions: “This is the first discussion of \(\textit{amour-propre}\) in \textit{Emile}. It is the central term in Rousseau’s psychology and will remain untranslated throughout. Ordinarily, in its non-‘extended sense,’ it would be translated by vanity or pride, but it is a word too full of nuance and too important for \textit{Emile} not to be defined contextually and revealed in its full subtlety. It is usually opposed to \(\textit{amour de soi}\). Both expressions mean self-love. Rousseau, instead of opposing love of self with love of others, opposes two kinds of self-love, a good and bad form.” \textit{Emile}, 483-484; Bloom is commenting on a passage from p.92 of his translation.
415 In \textit{Emile}, Rousseau states: “The source of our passions, the origin and the principle of all the others, the only one born with man and never leaves him so long as he live is self-love \([\textit{l’amour de soi}]\)—a primitive, innate passion, which is anterior to every other, and which all others are in a sense only modifications.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, \textit{Emile}, 212-213.
emanate from within the individual. Even pitié, our repugnance toward the suffering of others, is derived from within and its significance rests solely with the individual experiencing it. In other words, while pitié is concern for others, it springs up within the individual naturally with no implication to anything external to itself, such as praise, esteem, or even a notion of rightness or goodness.

However, as the expansion of our intellectual capacities gave rise to amour-propre, our natural sentiments were degraded. Love of self became implicated with the esteem of others, with devastating consequences. Rousseau sums it up, saying:

As ideas and feelings succeeded one another, and as the mind and the heart are trained, the human species continues to be domesticated, contacts increase, and bonds are tightened. People became used to assembling…. Each one began to consider the others and want to be considered in return, and public esteem came to have a value….

As soon as men had begun to appraise each other and the idea of esteem was formulated in their minds, each claimed a right to it, and it was no longer possible to deny it to anyone with impunity. In that way the first duties of civility arose, even among savages, and in that way, every intentional wrong became an open insult, because along with the injury which resulted from it, the offended party saw in it a contempt for his person, which was often more unbearable than the injury itself. Thus, as each person punished the contempt shown him by others in proportion to the degree to which he valued himself, vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel.

416 My interpretation of Rousseau thus far shares many affinities with Laurence Cooper’s. For instance, Cooper makes the claim that “The continued enhancement of man’s cognitive capacity brings about the full flowering of amour-propre” Laurence Cooper, Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 153.

417 In a critical note, Rousseau discusses the distinction he is drawing between amour de soi and amour-propre. He says, “Self-love [amour-propre] and self-esteem [amour de soi-même] must not be confused; they are two very different passions by nature and in their effects. Self-esteem is a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to look after its own preservation and which, being guided in man by reason and modified by compassion, produces humanity and virtue.[4] Self-love is only a relative, artificial sentiment born in society, which leads each individual to place a greater value on himself than on anyone else, which inspires all the evil that men do to one another, and which is the real source of honor. With this firmly in mind, I say that in our original state, the true state of nature, self-love did not exist, for, since each man individually looks upon himself as the only witness to his actions… and as the only judge of his own merit, a sentiment which originates in comparisons that he is not capable of making cannot possibly spring up in his soul” DOI, 27, note XV. *Rousseau is already talking about civilized human beings at this point. It must be borne in mind also that the degeneration of our sentiments that occurs with the development of reason, and birth of amour-propre, accompanies our physical degradation.

418 DOI, 38.
Central to this process has been *amour-propre’s* continued assault on our natural sentiments.\(^{419}\)

For instance, the need to be esteemed that accompanies *amour-propre* stifles compassion,\(^{420}\) and leads to the *schadenfreude* that often accompanies mimetic rivalry.\(^{421}\) Or as Rousseau contends,

> I would point out how this universal desire for reputation, honors, and preference, which consumes us all, exercises and holds up our talents and strengths to comparison; how it excites and multiplies our passions; and how, by making all men competitors, rivals, or, rather, enemies, it daily causes defeats, successes, and disasters of all kinds, by making so many aspirants take part in the same contest…. Finally, I would prove that if we see a handful of rich and powerful men at the pinnacle of greatness and fortune, while the crowd grovels in obscurity and misery, it is because the former esteem the things they possess only insofar as others are deprived of them, and because, without any change in their condition, they would cease being happy if the people ceased being miserable.\(^{422}\)

In the end, Rousseau concludes that as long as the trajectory of human history remains on this course we seem destined to enter into “a new state of nature that differs from the one with which

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\(^{419}\) However, Rousseau also seems to walk back some of the stronger claims about the devastating effects of civilization. As he recognizes, because the process of civilization began as a result of the precariousness of global conditions, Rousseau also admits that if societies could have remained small, the nascent stages of civilization would have perhaps remained the happiest stage in human development. He speculates, “But it must be noted that, once society had been established and relations had already developed among men, they needed qualities different from the ones they owed to their primitive constitution; that since morality was beginning to be introduced into human actions, and since each man prior to the existence of laws, was the sole judge and avenger of the offenses committed against him, the goodness suitable to the pure state of nature was no longer suitable to nascent society; that punishments had to become more severe as the opportunities to offend became more frequent; and that the terror of revenge had to replace the restraint of laws. Thus, although men had become less patient, and natural compassion (*la pitié naturelle*) had already undergone some deterioration, this period of the development of human faculties, maintaining a happy medium between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our self-love (*amour-propre*), must have been the happiest and most enduring epoch. The more we reflect on it, the more we realize that this state was the least subject to revolutions, the best for man, and that he must have left it only by some fatal accident which for the common good should never have happened. The example of savages, most of whom have been found at this stage, seems to confirm that the human race was made to remain there always; that this state is the true youth of the world; and that all the subsequent advances have apparently been so many steps towards perfection of the individual, and, in fact, towards the decrepitude of the species” DOI, 39.

\(^{420}\) “[T]he usurpations of the rich, the brigandage of the poor, the unbridled passions of all, stifling natural compassion and the still feeble voice of justice, made men avaricious, ambitious, and wicked” DOI, 43.

\(^{421}\) To use René Girard’s term. See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), and *Violence and the Sacred*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005). *Schadenfreude*, in this context is my term. Girard does not discuss the pleasure derived from/within the scapegoat mechanism—a phrase borrowed from Kenneth Burke—in terms of *schadenfreude*. Nonetheless, there are numerous parallels in his discussion with the claim I make here concerning mimetic rivalry.

\(^{422}\) DOI, 53-54.
we began in the sense that the former was the pure state of nature and this last is the fruit of excessive corruption.⁴²³ Although this new state would be more akin to a state of war, Rousseau refers to it as a state of nature because the attempt to remedy the problems, introduced by the socialization of the natural individual, by political and legal means keeps amplifying the amount of corruption and inequality within the state; so much so, that everyone except the tyrant (or tyrannical few) are rendered equal once more. They will be equal, however, in their lack of freedom and in their vast inequality from their leader(s):

Here all private individuals become equals once again, because they are nothing, and once subjects have no law other than the will of the master and the master no other guide than his passions, notions of good and principles of justice vanish once more. Everything here is reduced to the law of the strongest alone, and, consequently, to a new state of nature….⁴²⁴

Rousseau ends DOI on this note, confident that he has answered the question with which he began; namely, it is the changes that occurred when the natural individual became civilized—the development of reason, along with the advent of the notion of property, the invention of tools, and the development of languages—that inevitably led to human inequality. He concludes,

It follows from this account that inequality, which was almost nonexistent in the state of nature, owes its strength and growth to the development of our faculties and the progress of the human mind and finally becomes permanent and legitimate with the establishment of property and laws.⁴²⁵

However, in Emile, Rousseau tries to imagine a potential alternative trajectory to the one pictured above. Assuming many of the premises put forth in DOI, Rousseau calls for a particular form of education as a corrective to the degeneration of the natural sentiments suffered by civilized human beings. Beginning with an epigraph drawn from Seneca’s On Anger,

⁴²³ DOI, 55.
⁴²⁴ Ibid.
⁴²⁵ Ibid., 57.
“Sanabilibus aegrotamus malis; ipsaque nos in rectum genitos natura, si emendari velimus, iuvat,”

Rousseau sets the stage for his argument. Rather than attempting to remedy the problems of civilization merely by political and legal means, Rousseau argues that civilized humanity needs to be made receptive to an education from nature itself. Identifying the three main sources from which humanity receives their tutelage—nature, objects, and society—he asserts:

The disciple in whom their various lessons are at odds with one another is badly raised and will never be in agreement with himself. He alone in whom they all coincide at the same points and tend to the same ends reaches his goal and lives consistently. He alone is well raised.

But given that the education provided by society, and consequently, objects, is at odds with nature’s tutelage, the project of rendering civilized persons amenable to it is more difficult than it may initially appear.

Given Rousseau’s description of the mutual exclusivity of society and nature, he maintains that “one must choose between making a man or a citizen, for one cannot make both at the same time.” Yet wanting Emile to be both, Rousseau hopes to circumvent the difficulty by attempting to raise Emile as a natural human in controlled contact with civilization. Of course, this is complicated precisely because he has to do so within the context of civilization.

Nonetheless, while a significant element of this project is physical, as well as intellectual, perhaps the central component is the act of training Emile’s moral sentiments. Because our natural sentiments, _amour de soi_ and _pitié_ are now thoroughly implicated with _amour-propre_, the primary phase of the regimen Rousseau sets for Emile revolves around getting him “to know

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426 Seneca, De Irā, B II, c.13, quoted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, _Emile_, 31. “We suffer curable evils; and nature, having borne us to do right, if we want to improve, she helps” [my translation].

427 Or, as Allan Bloom describes in his introduction, “Man requires a healing education which returns him to himself” Bloom, “Introduction,” _Emile_, 3.

428 Rousseau, _Emile_, 38.

429 Rousseau, _Emile_, 39.
himself... to take advantage of himself... to know how to live and to make himself happy.”

Bloom notes, “The right kind of education, one independent of society, can put a child into direct contact with nature without the intermixture of opinion.... Thus Rousseau’s education of the young Emile confines itself to fostering the development of the faculties immediately connected with his preservation.”

Once Emile has become somewhat self-sufficient, Rousseau begins emphasizing the second phase of his education, namely the training of compassion. He accepts that this training will ultimately render compassion differently than it manifests in the state of nature. Where, in the state of nature our pitié is devoid of concerns about external evaluation, the compassion of the human-citizen has those concerns, but must still be grand enough to supersede our vanity. For this reason, Rousseau emphasizes that

To become sensitive and pitying, the child must know that there are beings like him who suffer what he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and that there are others whom he ought to conceive of as able to feel them too. In fact, how do we let ourselves be moved by pity if not by transporting ourselves outside of ourselves and identifying with the suffering animal...? ... It is not in ourselves, it is in him that we suffer.

One must engage in imaginative reconstruction and feel the suffering of others, in order to short circuit the ways in which amour-propre has corrupted our natural pitié.

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430 Ibid., 48.
431 Bloom, “Introduction,” Emile, 9. However, while Emile’s primary childhood education revolves around his learning self-preservation, there is a small component of moral training about which Bloom also notes: “The moral education of the young Emile is, then, limited to the effective establishment of the rule that he should harm no one” Bloom, “Introduction,” Emile, 15.
432 While Emile has inadvertently already begun his education in compassion, Rousseau waits until his teenage years to emphasize it because of the ways in which the various forms of love come to the fore around the time Emile reaches puberty—that is, as he begins to take serious note of others. Rousseau says, “As the roaring of the sea precedes a tempest from afar, this stormy revolution is proclaimed by the murmur of the nascent passions.... This is the second birth of which I have spoken. It is now that man is truly born to life and now nothing human is foreign to him” Emile, 211-212.
433 Rousseau, Emile, 222-223.
Despite the fact that Rousseau’s argument here appears simply to restate a premise central to the ancient pro-pity tradition, the way he configures the relationship between compassion and political society is quite novel. Looking at Nussbaum’s discussion of the ancient pro-pity tradition, allows us to tease out this difference. Nussbaum isolates three central premises to the cognitive structure of pity according to the ancient tradition. She asserts,

Pity is a painful emotion directed at another person’s pain or suffering. It requires, and rests upon, three beliefs: first, the belief that the suffering is significant rather than trivial; second, the belief that the suffering was not caused by the person’s own fault; and third, the belief that one’s own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer, that the suffering shows things ‘such as might happen’ in human life.\(^{434}\)

It is the third premise with which Rousseau’s argument shares the most similarities. But if we focus on the logic of the premise, we find precisely where Rousseau adds something new to the discourse. Admitting that “the third point is the most subtle and controversial,” Nussbaum contends that

The point seems to be that the pain of another will be an object of my concern only if I acknowledge some sort of community between myself and the other—to the extent that I am able, in imagination, to see that suffering as a possibility for me and to understand, on the basis of my own experience, what its meaning might be for the person who has it. Only then will I know enough about it to react to it with concern.\(^{435}\)

It is on this note, though, that the distinctiveness of Rousseau’s position crystallizes.

There is a unique tension implicit within Rousseau’s extension of the third premise. On the one hand, when trying to mark a distinction between “ancient” and “modern” political thought, there are two notions that one finds generally absent in ancient thought that is abundant in modern thought from Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Rousseau onward, namely, the notion of a private individual with a pre-political self, along with the notion that these selves are

\(^{434}\) Nussbaum, PM, 141.

\(^{435}\) Nussbaum, PM, 142.
equal. It is precisely these notions for which social contract theory and the notion of the state of nature are trying to account. So while, the ancient theorists within the pro-pity tradition maintained that the condoler responds with concern to the suffering of another because she or he imagines her- or him-self in “some sort of community” with the sufferer, Rousseau goes further than that. The entire difficulty in training Emile’s already compromised compassion, lies in the attempt to get him to recognize himself as equal with the sufferer. Rather than the compassionate response being derived from the recognition “that one’s own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer,” for Rousseau, Emile must be transported outside of himself and identify with the sufferer.437

On the other hand, although Emile’s sentiment of compassion is trained so that he recognizes the equality of humans qua sufferers in the moment of pity, the presence of amour-propre also reinforces the difference between the pitier and sufferer. Rousseau says,

Imagination puts us in the place of the miserable man rather than in that of the happy man. We feel that one of these conditions touches us more closely than the other. Pity is sweet because, in putting ourselves in the place of the one who suffers, we nevertheless feel the pleasure of not suffering as he does.438

Bloom sums it up eloquently in a noteworthy passage:

The psychic mechanism of compassion is as follows. (1) Once a man’s imaginative sensibility is awakened, he winces at the wounds others receive. In an attenuated form he experiences them too, prior to any reflection; he sympathizes; somehow these wounds are inflicted on him. (2) He has a moment of reflection; he realizes that it is the other fellow, not he, who is really suffering. This is a source of satisfaction.

436 Of course, this is not to deny that once the notion of the human that is being used is scrutinized, that these thinkers do not have specific human beings in mind—often privileged white European men like themselves. Although, however, given his thinking on gender, albeit still limited, even here Rousseau differs from his contemporaries.

437 I agree with Bloom. Discussing Rousseau’s position in relation to Lock and Hobbes, Bloom argues that his “recognition of our sameness and our common vulnerability dampens the harsh competitiveness and egotism of egalitarian political orders. Rousseau takes advantage of the tendency to compassion resulting from equality, and uses it, rather than self-interest, as the glue binding men together. Our equality, then, is based less on our fear of death than on our sufferings; suffering produces a shared sentiment with others, which fear of death does not. For Hobbes, frightened men make an artificial man to protect them; for Rousseau, suffering men seek other men who feel for them” Bloom, “Introduction,” Emile, 18-19.

438 Rousseau, Emile, 221.
(3) He can show his own strength and superiority by assisting the man in distress. (4) He is pleased that he has the spiritual freedom to experience compassion; he senses his own goodness. Active human compassion (as opposed to the animal compassion described in the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality) requires imagination and amour-propre in addition to the instinct for self-preservation. Moreover, it cannot withstand the demands of one’s own self-preservation. It is a tender plant, but one which will bear sweet fruit if properly cultivated.\footnote{\textsuperscript{439} Bloom, “Introduction,” Emile, 18.}

While I am skeptical about aspects of Bloom’s depiction in (1) and (2)—it is unclear, for instance, what “somehow these wounds are inflicted on him” could legitimately entail in this context, nor does it seem that, according to Rousseau’s description, the pitier needs to “reflect” in order to discover that the person actually suffering is not her- or him-self, but rather the person for whom they are experiencing the sentimental unity of compassion—his account of (3) and (4) illuminate the complexity of Rousseau’s account of compassion after the development of amour-propre. In the end, though, it is the very tension between compassion as other-directed concern, and as a sign of strength and expression of spiritual freedom, that allows Rousseau to put forth the view that compassion is a critical requirement for egalitarian political association, and that an egalitarian political context, in turn, is the best way to maintain the necessary structures, educational or otherwise, that maximize compassion’s scope.

In what follows, I will agree with the final claim; however, I will raise two challenges with regards to the penultimate assertion. While it may be the case that operating within the context of an egalitarian socio-political tradition is the best way to maintain the structures necessary to maximize the scope of compassion, it is not clear that compassion \textit{needs} to be considered a critical requirement for egalitarian political association—or to use Nussbaum’s even stronger terms, that “Without that sense of commonness, I will react with sublime indifference or intellectual curiosity” to the suffering of others.\footnote{\textsuperscript{440} Nussbaum, PM, 142.} On the one hand, I question,
along with Nietzsche, the validity of the third premise—the supposed necessity of empathy. Is it truly the case that one’s only options are empathetic identification or sublime indifference/intellectual curiosity in response to someone else’s suffering? It strikes me as if, in most scenarios, one potentially can empathize with another but the nature of the moral dilemma (precisely because it is a moral dilemma), renders that compassion a moot point. Or, in contrast, that one can potentially recognize the humanity of a suffering other, find oneself embroiled in a moral dilemma—again because the meddlesomeness of the circumstances are such to warrant deeper concern than mere intellectual curiosity—in which one is compelled to respond to their suffering, yet still be unable to identify with her or him empathetically. On the other hand, I question whether it is the case that having compassion when confronted with the suffering of others necessitates that one will respond with concern for them.

To be clear, the first question, though similar in some respects to one of the primary Stoic worries, presses against a different point. For instance, as Nussbaum notes, the Stoics choose mercy over pity, not simply because pity is an emotional experience. Emotions are not necessarily problematic in themselves; the problem resides in how they are grounded. Nussbaum acknowledges:

Finally, the Stoics base their denunciation of pity on a detailed and systematic analysis of the passions and their interrelationships with one another. According to this analysis, not pity alone, but all major emotions… are based upon evaluative judgments that ascribe extremely high value to ‘external goods’ that are in the control of fortune. Thus, according to Stoic moral theory, all are based on judgments that are false, and that will be removed by the acceptance of correct philosophical teaching.\footnote{PM, 146.}

Nussbaum argues that, for the Stoics, and for Nietzsche as well, the pro-pity tradition fails to recognize that our emotional responses to phenomena actually compound the problems of existence. If all individuals’ primary value is their own character, or virtue, we would find that
much of the suffering in the world would cease; this is because we will ignore the things we cannot change and finally be in control of the things we can. So in response to Philippa Foot’s criticism of the rejection of pity, Nussbaum asserts that

What Stoic analyses bring out again and again is that the repudiation of pity is not in the least connected with callousness, brutality, or the behavior of the boot-in-the-face tyrant. In fact, we might say that on this picture it is pity itself, not the absence of pity, that is closely connected with anger and cruelty.\(^\text{442}\)

When one suffers, the Stoic will feel no pity, but will still show concern by advocating for the sufferer to develop virtue and self-command. Nor will the Stoic respond with anger when he is hurt; rather, he will continue to endorse virtue and self-command, and reject anger. In turn,

Not angered on account of his own personal damage, not feeling himself dragged down by the bad acts of another, the good Stoic will be free to ask what punishments are most likely to do good for society as a whole, and for the criminal’s life as a whole. And Seneca argues in *On Anger* and *On Mercy* that such punishments will be free from the harshness and cruelty that he connects with anger’s uncontrolled vulnerability. They will be as judiciously selected as are a doctor’s prescriptions; and frequently they will be merciful.\(^\text{443}\)

It is indeed the case that Nietzsche’s argument shares many similarities with this formulation.\(^\text{444}\)

However, Nussbaum overstates the proximity of Nietzsche’s position with that of the Stoics. Where the Stoics reject pity because it is “based upon evaluative judgments that ascribe extremely high value to ‘external goods’ that are in the control of fortune,” Nietzsche wants to dispel the notion for a number of reasons—none of which rely on either the notion of “external

\(^{442}\) Ibid.
\(^{443}\) Ibid., 147.
\(^{444}\) For example, in *GM II*, Nietzsche contends that mercy is the privilege of the strong. He argues against limitations to the notion of justice, especially when tied to the morality of compassion, maintaining that justice on these terms is just another avenue for the weak to exact revenge on those who have caused them harm. In contrast, he affirms that only the powerful can show mercy. Those of us who begin with notions like pity, empathy, and compassion, Nietzsche argues, are often more likely to desire revenge in the name of justice; whereas, those who are beyond the morality of compassion can afford not to punish someone who transgressed against them they were not truly hurt by the transgression. See Nietzsche, *GM II*, §§8-11.
goods,” or “fortune.” As I have argued in the previous chapters, Nietzsche rejects democracy because of its relationship to a worldview he finds ultimately debilitating to the future of our species. When read together, Nietzsche’s specific arguments against compassion lead to the same general point. Yet, when considering six of Nietzsche’s specific arguments, Nussbaum tries to maintain the connection between him and the Stoics on the question concerning the value of the goods being esteemed, asserting:

5. The things for which we pity people are, on the whole, things that are not bad but good for them. In the Genealogy above all, Nietzsche turns to the central evaluative claims of Stoicism, concerning the value of ‘external goods’ such as money, status, friendships, family, marriage, and material comforts of all kinds. And he goes far beyond Stoicism, in a direction suggested by Romanticism, in holding that these ‘goods’ are, on the whole and for the most part, not valueless (as the Stoics, with some qualification, hold) but actually bad.

But there is a tremendous difference between Nietzsche’s position and that of the Stoics here. Declining to have pity for someone because one deems them mistaken over the cause of their suffering, because the cause is in the hands of fortune anyway, is drastically different from declining to have pity for someone because pity itself is a problematic emotion. Where, for the Stoic, there is no genuinely pitiable suffering, for Nietzsche, even if there are, and he grants that there are, moments in which pity—at least “a higher and more far sighted pity”—is

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445 While Nussbaum recognizes a difference between Nietzsche and the Stoics on this point, she proceeds, without acknowledging what that difference entails; thereby, in my view, stretching the interpretation to fit her argument.
446 Nussbaum, PM, 152-153. Nussbaum has an expanded discussion of these issues in UT, esp. pp.361-364.
447 For example, an injunction against feeling pity for a friend who just received very nasty reviews on a highly original publication because it is supposedly a false view of the universe to believe that good reviews are valuable, is quite different from an injunction against feeling pity for her because pity as an emotion is attended by numerous problems. Even when Nietzsche suggests that the “goods” being valued are not good at all, he is not arguing that they are bad because they are in the control of fortune. Rather, he contends that many of those “goods” came to be seen as good under a worldview unfit for the vicissitudes of existence. While the Stoics might agree with the latter claim, they would do so because they maintain the position that we ought not care about the things beyond our control. Nietzsche does not take this step.
448 Nietzsche, BGE, §225, 153. Earlier in the text, Nietzsche also contends, “Anyone… who approached this almost deliberate degeneration of and atrophy of man represented by the Christian European (Pascal, for example), feeling the opposite kind of desire, not in an Epicurean spirit but rather with some divine hammer in hand, would surely have to cry out in wrath, in pity, in horror: ‘O you dolts, you presumptuous, pitying dolts, what have you done! Was that work for your hands? How have you bungled and botched my beautiful stone! What presumption!” Nietzsche,
potentially warranted, the questions revolve around the nature of our pity (whence does it emerge? is the catalyst a genuine good for humanity? etc.), not about the relationship of our values, or “goods,” to fortune.

Noting this difference between Nietzsche and the Stoics also gets us to the precise point of my first main question concerning the pro-pity tradition’s third premise—particularly to Rousseau’s amendment to the premise. Unlike the Stoics, I do not deny that concern for “external goods” may be significant in the evaluation of one’s circumstance, and that compassion may be an appropriate response to some situations. But I am wary that privileging a mandate to identify empathetically with another as essential often obfuscates just how many other dynamics are already at work when occasions for moral reasoning arise. And, along with Nietzsche, I worry that relying upon any stock response, regardless of how “enlightened,” may keep both the catalyst and the empathizer trapped within the status quo.

Take the following example: Imagine, a young man living under imperialist domination gets recruited into a guerilla unit fighting for the liberation of his people. He is a good warrior who fights with the decorum that many globally are willing to agree is excellent battlefield etiquette. Further, because of his trustworthiness, he is placed on detail to guard a high priority enemy prisoner, whom he soon realizes is being interrogated using techniques he finds problematic. One day he comes face to face with the prisoner, alone. The prisoner begs him for clemency. What is the guerilla fighter to do? Let us assume that recognizing the prisoner’s suffering, the guerrilla identifies empathetically with him, is the young rebel to release him? Ought he kill the prisoner to rescue him from further suffering? Even if the goods about which the prisoner is concerned are genuine—that is, they are not based on false evaluative claims and

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are indeed worthy of care (although, of course, to the Stoics they could not be, as all concerns except for questions about one’s character fail this test and the virtuous man cannot be harmed), it is still not clear to what avail our fighter’s compassion comes. There are numerous contravening issues that are relevant to the moral dilemma at hand, many that would pertain whether or not the young fighter could identify empathetically with the prisoner. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, there is no reason to believe that the young fighter cannot very well recognize the value of the prisoner’s humanity even if he failed, or lacked the capacity, to identify with him empathetically.\footnote{Recognition of another’s humanity is one of the main upshots of the Stoic theory. See UT, 371.} One might respond, arguing that, while compassion does not resolve the moral dilemma at hand, history has taught us that in such cases, without the introduction of empathetic identification, it is all-too-easy for combatants to lose sight of the humanity of the other. While this may be the case, all it suggests is that compassion is strongly recommended, not that it is the basic social emotion without which we are left only with indifference or curiosity.

This gets us to my second challenge to the thesis defending the necessity of empathy. Imagine once more, that our young warrior is tasked to escort two prisoners across a desert. One of them is the prisoner of war, the other a fellow guerilla fighter who is suspected of collaboration with the enemy and treason. However, en route their vehicle breaks down and they are stranded. The young fighter has just enough water to ensure that he will make it. Should he share? Let us suppose instead that with some risk he has enough so that if he shares with one of the prisoners they will both make it, but there is no possibility of anyone surviving if he tries to share with both prisoners. Let us assume also that he knows that even if he kept the appropriate amount of water for himself and tried to share the rest with both prisoners they will both die—and, as such, it is not an option; both prisoners are visibly dehydrated and in pain. And, our
young warrior has no specific orders which will aid in his decision. What does the young fighter do? If he were to share because of his compassion, empathetic identification renders it difficult to imagine that our young fighter would share with the more distant other. This suggests, and history is filled with examples, that often, particularly in the midst of an ongoing conflict, reliance on the language of compassion, as a justificatory premise, perpetuates the conditions which generate or prolong moral dilemmas.

As we see in Nussbaum’s account, Adam Smith raises a similar concern about the potential partiality present in the dictate to identify empathetically with the suffering other. However, he goes in a different direction than I do here. Nussbaum lays out the position saying,

Compassion, the… [partiality] argument goes, binds us to our own immediate sphere of life, to what has affected us, to what we see before us or can easily imagine. Because the imagination plays such an important role in it, it is subject to distortion through the unreliability of this faculty. But this means that it is very likely to present an unbalanced picture of the world. In short: broaden the emotion as we may through education, compassion remains narrow and unreliable.

Recognizing the validity of the criticism, Nussbaum responds in some detail. Her primary response is to contend that what is required is an adequate theory of concern: “Just as we should concede that compassion needs a correct theory of the importance of various external goods, so too we should concede that it needs a correct view of the people who should be the objects of our

450 This scenario is an expansion on a classic ethical debate, within Jewish ethics, between Rabbi Akiva vs. Ben Petura. While there are numerous themes within the debate, there is one statement that, I believe, has particular bearing on our scenario: namely, when Rabbi Akiva exclaims, “I am nearest to myself,” suggesting that he would drink the water and save himself. Although there may be other ways to read the exclamation, one straightforward way of interpreting it is as saying, ‘while I feel for the other person, I can best identify empathetically with myself.’

451 I leave the initial utterance vague in the hopes of displaying the complexity at hand. While it is possible that our young fighter may well identify more readily with the enemy POW in this case, because suspected treason renders his compatriot “excluded from the world of moral concern,” to use Michael Walzer’s phrase, most likely, many of us would initially imagine the “enemy” POW as the more distant other, precisely because we can best identify empathetically with ourselves—and those most like us. See Michael Walzer, Exodus and Revolution, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 142.

452 How often do conflicts continue precisely because one party’s empathetic identification with another renders yet another the enemy?

453 Nussbaum, UT, 360-361.
Developing our educational systems to provide such a view, will, in turn, expand any parochial limitations to our imaginations. Although I find no real issue with Nussbaum’s response to the problem as framed by Smith, my objection here is not really about the limits to our imagination. I am pointing out, however, that many of us, “contemporary egalitarians,” have lived long enough within traditions that maintain the notion of the fundamental equality of human beings that, when in conflict, we are often able to recognize both sufferers as equal in themselves, while still maintaining that one party is more important to me. Often, in the midst of the moral dilemma, we are compelled to choose a side. In too many of these instances, however, it seems that empathetic identification trumps potentially more important questions—for example, questions such as, could the side that I chose be wrong? In this regard, I merely highlight a practical, and very real, limitation to the empathy requirement of the pro-pity tradition.

At this point, members of the pro-pity tradition could interject, affirming the merits of compassion; highlighting that when it is not present we often fail even to perceive the other as suffering, or worse, that we may recognize their suffering but do not see why we ought to care. While this is in one sense primarily a reiteration of the initial premise concerning the necessity of empathy—recall Nussbaum’s claim from above that “Without that sense of commonness, I will

454 UT, 387.
455 This worry animates much of the concern regarding Semaritanism. For an excellent discussion of these concerns see Maureen O’Connell, Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009). In the text, O’Connell describes some of the ways in which the operations of globalization have disrupted the force of compassion in our contemporary world. In turn, she argues for a re-orienting of Semaritanism to combat the fragmenting forces of globalization. For different foray into some of these issues see Joseph Winters’s dissertation: Joseph Winters, Remembering the Dismembered, 2009. There he argues, brilliantly, for the importance of developing strategies that render us more attuned to the suffering of others. Winters contends that our (modern) cultures reproduce arrangements and practices which often make us blind, or forgetful, towards the suffering of others. That many of the forces that help to generate a sense of solidarity actually work to keep us, whoever that particular “us” might be at the time, from being able to recognize how “others” actually suffer. What we need then, is to spend time within the stories of the suffering and develop strategies that enable us to mourn the losses others experience, which in turn opens up space for hope. By spending time within the stories of the suffering (for example Primo Levi’s stories, and the blues) we, in effect, Winters argues, work to short circuit the forces operating on us which render us blind to the suffering of others.
react with sublime indifference or intellectual curiosity,”—it does reveal an implicit assumption, shared by many in the pro-pity tradition, that I find problematic.

As I noted above, one feature that we find prevalent in modern thought, which is relatively absent in the ancient world is the notion of the individual having a private, pre-political self—let us call this assumption the predominant modern philosophical anthropology. One of the primary concerns faced by thinkers who begin with this assumption is the need to account for why and how these types of individuals compromise aspects of their pre-political privacy, equality, and freedom, to enter into political associations. This is the assumption undergirding much of social contract theory. While variants of this theory have led to many influential positions within modern political thought, perhaps most notably that of John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, it has been criticized on many fronts. Despite differences among these criticisms, they share a common feature. Many communitarians, post-modernists, and pragmatists alike, are suspicious of the notion of the self that is implicit in the quintessential modern philosophical anthropology. For example, contending against the notion of the individual as essentially having two selves—a private, free, pre-political self with equal rights mysteriously appended to it and a self that somehow finds itself having agreed to the contract of politically organized life—Alasdair MacIntyre provides a “concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”

As part of this narrative, the self is an agent, actor, and author. But as MacIntyre advises,

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458 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 205; henceforth cited as AV.
we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives.… We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others.\textsuperscript{459}

In this view, the self is contingent and gains its unity in the context within which it lives. On these terms, furthermore, the quintessential modern philosophical anthropology proves untenable, as it makes little sense to attempt to account for a notion of the self prior to the stories that can be told about it.

Suspicious concerning the notion of the pre-political self are not new, however. Numerous modern thinkers from G.W.F. Hegel to John Dewey have put forth accounts of the self as situated. In fact, this is also a point on which Nietzsche agrees.\textsuperscript{460} Yet, a remnant of the predominant modern philosophical anthropology remains latent in responses to his criticism of compassion. For instance, a significant factor in Philippa Foot’s criticism of Nietzsche is an unease she has over his subjectivism. In her, now classic, essay, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism,” Foot contends that Nietzsche’s objection to the universalizing of morality does not concern “the commonplace insistence on the relevance of circumstances to moral good and evil.”\textsuperscript{461} Rather,

\begin{quote}
It was not that objection to absolutism which Nietzsche had in mind; he meant rather that moral generalization was impossible because the proper subject of valuation was, instead, a person’s individual act. We were to ask not what is done, but rather whom it is done by.\textsuperscript{462}
\end{quote}

Foot bases this argument on a passage from\textit{Twilight of the Idols} in which Nietzsche discusses the value of egoism. Nietzsche asserts:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
MacIntyre, AV, 213.
\end{verbatim}
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\begin{quote}
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See chapter 1, footnote 118 p.45, above for a discussion of the similarity between Nietzsche’s position and MacIntyre’s on this point.
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\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
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\begin{quote}
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Ibid.
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

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The value of egoism depends on the psychological value of he who possesses it: it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible. Every individual may be regarded as representing the ascending or descending line of life. When one has decided which, one has thereby established a canon for the value of his egoism.463

Reading Nietzsche’s criticism of the universalizing of morality along subjectivist lines engenders Foot’s worry that Nietzsche’s philosophy has “a fatal implication for the teaching of justice.”464 The worry is that if no moral values are universalizable, what is to stop individuals from acting in radically self-centered ways. What is to stop the subjectivist from doing what solely pleases her or him, regardless of context or consequence?

However, interpreting Nietzsche’s criticism of the universalizing of morality in subjectivist terms misses part of what Nietzsche actually is criticizing. In fact, implicit in Foot’s worry is the quintessential modern philosophical anthropology—one of the very notions Nietzsche finds problematic.465 For Nietzsche, the processes of socialization are so overbearing and successful that the problem we face is how to generate individuals. As he argues in GM II, §§1-2, the generation of the human being with the right to make promises has made us calculable. If Nietzsche, along with Hegel, Emerson, and Dewey for that matter, are correct about how thoroughly socialized human beings are, the question of subjectivism no longer remains a problem. There is no language in which a socialized individual can interpret an aspect of existence so entirely privately that an utterance, or belief, can be said to be entirely theirs.466

464 Foot, NI, 7.
465 In fact, Foot recognizes this problem in another context, in her essay, “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?” in which she argues that neither directly or indirectly, “does the acceptance of ‘Hume’s practicality requirement’ give any support to noncognitivism in ethics.” Her general argument here is that accepting Hume’s practicality requirement when considering moral reasoning does not entail that the motivating reasons behind moral judgments derive from individual personal desires, feelings, or passions. Philippa Foot, “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?” in the Oxford Journal of Legal Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Spring, 1995), pp. 1-14
466 This is why later in the passage from *TI* that Foot cites above, Nietzsche talks of the individual as part of a line. He says, “For the individual, the ‘single man’, as people and philosophers have hitherto understood him, is an error:
This does not entail that every thought we have is determined, it merely denies the notion of a private language implicit in the worry about subjectivism.\textsuperscript{467} However, what Nietzsche misses, and what I think Emerson and especially Dewey saw, is that democracy, justified along particular lines, actually provides an opportunity to generate individuals. It still does not guarantee that individuals will emerge, but if those committed to the emergence of individuals continuously strive to reduce the ills of democracy, we can transform the conditions in such a way so that they can emerge.

But, if these problems remain with reliance on compassion as central to the justification of democracy—that is, if democracy is not justified by its ability to maximize compassion’s scope, or because its relation to compassion best allows it to diminish injustice and oppression globally—why endorse democracy at all?

In conclusion, I endorse democracy for two reasons. The first is because democracy, when conceived of as “not just one form of social life among other workable forms of social life; it is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems,”\textsuperscript{468} to refer to Hilary Putnam’s reading of John Dewey’s epistemological justification of democracy, evades Nietzsche’s criticisms. By conceiving of democracy as the form of socio-political organization that most readily remains open even to marginal voices in the application of the ideas that best withstand the tinkering necessary to resolve perpetually evolving social problems, one does not need to posit any specific notion of the good that necessarily forecloses inquiry.

My second reason for endorsing democracy is primarily internal to the dissertation. Democracy

\textsuperscript{467}See Wittgenstein’s criticism of the notion of a private language in Philosophical Investigations, §§243-271.

\textsuperscript{468}Putnam, RDD, 180.
conceived along these lines, also resolves the problem into which Nietzsche’s constructive project runs—that is, his inability to account for how his higher individuals can emerge.

Thinking about problems surrounding the justification of socio-political arrangements, Putnam turns to Dewey because he finds that Dewey provides a compelling justification of democracy without falling prey to metaphysics or skepticism.\(^\text{469}\) Putnam says, “In my view, the great contribution of Dewey was to insist that we neither have nor require a ‘theory of everything,’ and to stress that what we need instead is insight into how human beings resolve problematical situations.”\(^\text{470}\) Rather than attempting to commence with a theory of the good which democracy then fulfills, Dewey begins with descriptive claims trying to chart, and make sense of, what human beings do. For example, pondering where to begin an inventory of the tasks of philosophy, Dewey writes:

> A criticism of current philosophizing from the standpoint of the traditional quality of its problems must begin somewhere, and the choice of a beginning is arbitrary. It has appeared to me that the notion of experience implied in the questions most actively discussed gives a natural point of departure. For, if I mistake not, it is just the inherited view of experience common to the empirical school and its opponents which keeps live many discussions even of matters that on their face are quite remote from it, while it is also this view which is most untenable in light of existing science and social practice…. Any account of experience must now fit into the consideration that experience means living; and that living goes on in and because of an environing medium, not a vacuum. Where there is experience, there is a living being. Where there is life there is a double connection maintained with the environment…. While all organic changes depend upon the natural energies of the environment for their origination and occurrence, the natural energies sometimes carry the organic functions purposefully forward, and sometimes act counter to their continuance.

\(^\text{469}\) This is not to suggest that Dewey adopts a simplistic common sense-ism in which all our purported knowledge is taken for granted. Dewey recognizes the importance of skepticism, but he finds wholesale skepticism untenable. In his Gifford lectures, for instance, he says, “It is always in place to be doubtful or skeptical about particular items of supposed knowledge when evidence to the contrary presents itself. There is no knowledge self-guaranteed to be infallible, since all knowledge is the product of special acts of inquiry. Agnosticism as a confession of ignorance about special matters is, in the absence of adequate evidence, is not only in place under such circumstances but is an act of intellectual honesty. But such skepticism and agnosticism are particular and depend upon special conditions; they are not wholesale; they do not issue from a generalized impeachment of the adequacy of the organs of knowing to perform their office” John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, in The Later Works, 1925-1953; Vol. 4: 1929, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 154. Perhaps ironically, it is precisely Dewey’s antiskepticism that best reflects his commitment to fallibilism.

\(^\text{470}\) Putnam, RDD, 187.
Growth and decay, health and disease, are alike continuous with activities of the natural surroundings. The difference lies in the bearing of what happens upon future life activity. From the standpoint of this future reference environmental incidents fall into groups: those favorable-to-life activities, and those hostile.  

Dewey makes two critical points in this passage. Firstly, is his assertion about the arbitrariness of beginnings. Following William James, Dewey suggests here that one never begins to formulate a hypothesis from some rationally pristine point of view. The arbitrariness also reflects the radically contingent nature of experience. Because the human being enters into stories already being told, some things are always already going to be normative. While sometimes we may have to take a stand on something we believe to be right, and even this comes from within the stories of which we are a part, the best we can do is to adopt an experimental attitude, attempt to account for why we maintain particular commitments (especially when faced with possible alternatives), be prepared to act in the face of contingent circumstances when needed, aim for results that represent the best of our ideals, and try better when we fail.

Secondly, Dewey provides a pithy criticism of the traditional notion of experience used by empiricists, rationalists, and transcendentalists alike—that is, the notion of experience as the field in which the senses simply gather data for perception. Precisely by emphasizing that experience means living, and that living yields both favorable and hostile outcomes, Dewey avoids claiming to draw his premises from a priori grounds. By viewing life as “a matter of simultaneous doings and sufferings,” Dewey can ground his discussion of its meddlesome character, and the centrality of problematic situations to living, in his conception of experience, without having to resort to metaphysical claims about the nature of existence, the world, being,

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472 Rather than going through the rigmarole of dealing with the problem of a presuppositionless beginning, Dewey concedes that as embodied finite organisms our attempts at philosophizing can’t help but begin somewhere.
473 Dewey, NRP, 63.
or the good. Putnam appreciates this move. He says, “Dewey believes (as we all do, when we are not playing the sceptic [sic]) that there are better and worse resolutions to human predicaments—to what he calls ‘problematical situations.’ That this is so is not something Dewey argues on a priori grounds.”474 In the end, Dewey argues for maintaining democratic commitments by relying on an observable claim, and by providing an account of how human beings have learned, historically, to employ critical intelligence toward the solution of problems. As Putnam puts the point: “In short, Dewey believes that… we have learned something about how to conduct inquiry in general, and that what applies to intelligently conducted inquiry in general applies to ethical inquiry in particular.”475

This is not to say that as committed participants of democratic societies we only treat moral dilemmas as moments for ethical inquiry. Precisely because of how thoroughly socialized we are, living democratically engenders us with particular habits. Responding with compassion to the suffering of others is often one of those habits. However, living democratically also means that we remain open to inquiries into the nature of our commitments, and questioning why we maintain our commitments to the things we hold normative. Democracy conceived along these lines can accept that there may be instances in which compassion is the appropriate response to the suffering of others, but does not require compassion as part of its justification.

Providing an epistemological justification of democracy, in which democracy conceived as a socio-political arrangement organized after the model of experimentalism and problem solving activity, Dewey’s account eschews the brunt of both Nietzsche’s, and my, criticisms. Furthermore, it is precisely because of democracy’s (thus conceived) openness to differing

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474 Putnam, RDD, 186.
475 Putnam, RDD, 186.
voices in attempt to resolve problems, that room is garnered to generate the conditions for the emergence of Nietzsche’s higher individuals.
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