

Blackwell Companion to 19th Century Philosophy:
Nietzsche

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I. Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical oeuvre spanned a dozen or so books in the relatively short period of 16 years. Distilling that diverse body of work is no easy task. Yet in an encyclopedic entry of the present sort, broad coverage needs to be of the essence. There are various potential approaches to offering such an overview. One could organize a summary topically, outlining Nietzsche's views under the garden-variety sub-headings of philosophy (epistemology, ethics, mind, and the like). Or one could proceed thematically, focusing discussion around key Nietzschean themes—e.g., Judeo-Christian morality, life affirmation, asceticism, the will to truth, and the will to power. Or one could proceed chronologically, going through the succession of Nietzsche's main texts and highlighting a few key philosophical ideas from each. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. I will be opting (mostly) for the latter, chronological format. I'll begin with some brief biographical information and some general remarks about Nietzsche's philosophical methodology and style. Something will also need to be said about the controversy surrounding his notebooks and what role they should play in the exegesis of his views. I will then turn to the discussion of his books themselves, beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and ending with his autobiography *Ecce Homo* (1888). I conclude by reflecting on Nietzsche's philosophical and cultural legacy.

II. Biography

Nietzsche was born in 1844 in the village of Röcken in Saxony.¹ His father, a Lutheran pastor, died when Nietzsche was young. Nietzsche was sent to the academically rigorous school at Schulpforta where he excelled in some subjects and floundered in others. His university education began in Bonn, and continued in Leipzig, where he studied classical philology with one of the leading philological lights of the day, Friedrich Ritschl. Nietzsche's early work was extremely promising, and with Ritschl's glowing recommendation, Nietzsche secured a professorship at the University of Basel at the astoundingly young age of 24. Nietzsche lectured for roughly a decade in Basel, but as the result of increasingly ill-health, he resigned his post and lived subsequently off his modest state pension.

Two figures exerted a considerable influence on Nietzsche's early philosophical development: Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner. The former Nietzsche did not know personally, but he encountered his ideas mainly through Schopenhauer's magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation*. Though Schopenhauer casts a shadow over Nietzsche's early works, Nietzsche came roundly to reject him, and by the time of Nietzsche's mature work *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Schopenhauer had become one of his main philosophical targets. With Wagner, Nietzsche had a close personal relationship. In the time Nietzsche was at Basel, Wagner was in exile nearby at Tribschen, and was at work on *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a cycle of music dramas, which was to premiere in 1876. Following the premiere,

¹ For general biographies of Nietzsche, see Cate (2002), Safranski (2003), Young (2010). For most focused treatments of different periods of his life, see, Blue (2016), D'Iorio (2016), Chamberlain (1996).

Nietzsche and Wagner's relationship cooled, and soon broke off, for reasons partly personal and partly philosophical.

From the late 1870s, Nietzsche spent much of his time between Italy and Switzerland, living in boarding houses and occupied with writing and going for long, solitary walks. During this period, he produced an astonishing range of books. He spent the final lucid months of his life in Turin, where he had a great creative outpouring in 1888. But he began slipping into madness, writing increasingly unhinged letters to his friends, signed as, among others, "God" and "Dionysus." By January 1889, he lost his grip on reality entirely. In the famous, and possibly apocryphal story, Nietzsche saw a coachman whipping his horse. Nietzsche ran to the horse, wept, and threw his arms around it. He never regained his sanity. His friend Overbeck travelled to Turin to bring him to a psychiatric clinic. The sad rest of Nietzsche's sad life was spent in a state of complete mental decrepitude. He lived on in this condition, in his sister's care in Weimar, until his death in 1900. There is no settled view about exactly what precipitated Nietzsche's breakdown. It has often been held, on rather flimsy evidence, to be late-stage syphilis. But others have claimed it was the result of a meningioma, a kind of brain tumor. Other possibilities have been postulated as well, with no definitive resolution.²

Throughout his life, Nietzsche's books had a very small circulation. But by the end of his life, he was beginning to receive greater acclaim, and he was to have an enormous influence, not just within philosophy, but in the wider cultural sphere.

III. Work, Style and Methodology

² See Hunemann (2013) for discussion of these issues.

A. The Matter of the *Nachlaß*

In addition to the many books Nietzsche published or prepared for publication, he also left behind a large collection of notes, the so-called *Nachlaß*. After this death, these were selected, arranged, and published under the title *The Will to Power*, based on the idea, dubious and now discredited, that he was eventually working toward a book with this title.³ His sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche was a key figure in the compilation of this volume, in conjunction with Nietzsche's friend and assistant Heinrich Köselitz.

The place of these notes in the interpretation of Nietzsche bears some discussion. Heidegger famously maintained that Nietzsche's notebooks contain the key to his philosophy (Heidegger 1961). In some of the most philosophically-sophisticated anglophone scholarship on Nietzsche, these notebooks are extensively relied upon.⁴ Other scholars tend to avoid them.⁵ I myself share the latter predilection, and treat them with considerable skepticism. People write down all sorts of ideas in their notebooks, few of which are finalized ideas they endorse. They also include their ideas in a preliminary formulation, ideas that they are simply toying with, ideas they disagree with and want to refute, notes about other people's ideas, and so on. Given that we don't know why Nietzsche was writing something down, we cannot assume that what we find in the notebooks are Nietzsche's own ideas, let alone his own considered ideas. Some of these ideas of course make it into the

³ The Italian Nietzsche scholars Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari undertook the philological work that helped to discredit *The Will to Power*. See Magnus (1988).

⁴ e.g., Nehamas (1985), Richardson (1996), and Reginster (2006) all make extensive use of the notebooks.

⁵ e.g., Clark (1990), Young (1992), Young (2006).

published work, in roughly similar form. But other ideas only really appear in the notebooks. Taken as a whole, the *Nachlaß* is a mixed bag: some brilliant ideas, some ill-thought-out ones, and some summaries, even downright verbatim transcriptions, of other people's ideas. It is, to my mind, largely a matter of taste and philosophical judgment to what extent one wants to make use of the notebooks. Generally, those who make a great deal of the notebooks are in philosophical sympathy with the ideas Nietzsche puts forward there, or with the particular formulations he gives. Those who are in less sympathy tend to make less of the notebooks. Arguments can be given in support of each approach, and for some positions in the middle. But readers coming to Nietzsche for the first time must at least be made aware of the problematic status of *The Will to Power*. At the very least, one needs to be aware of the scholarly issues it raises.

B. Style

Nietzsche is often described as an “aphorist.” He will indeed frequently write in short passages, ranging from a sentence or two to several paragraphs, in which he explores a particular idea. Nietzsche, in different works, organizes these aphorisms with greater and lesser degrees of thematic cohesiveness. But it is important to remember that he is not *only* an aphorist. He makes use of a variety of different literary styles, including: the extended essay, treatise, allegory, mock medical case report, autobiography, poetry, and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a strange quasi-picaresque novel of sorts, with a vaguely biblical air.⁶

One thing we immediately notice about Nietzsche's works is that he doesn't write in a dry, sober philosophical style. His writing is highly literary, bursting with hyperbole,

⁶ See Nehamas (1985), Ch. 1., for a discussion of the variety of stylistic devices that Nietzsche uses.

humor, rich metaphors, and so on. Some interpretive work on Nietzsche has tended to downplay or ignore questions relating to why Nietzsche writes in the rhetorical way that he does; the focus is on isolable philosophical doctrine instead. Yet with a philosopher as writerly as Nietzsche, there is a risk of missing his point when we don't say much about how his distinctive literary style interacts with his philosophical goals. As Christopher Janaway has stressed, Nietzsche is not just interested in communicating philosophical positions.⁷ He is interested in reaching us at affective level, to get us into states of disgust, fear, admiration, and contempt. It is through doing so that he will be able to press us toward reconsidering and revaluing our values— and thereby best advance his favored normative agenda.

C. Truth and Perspectivism

It is sometimes held that Nietzsche repudiates the idea of truth.⁸ This is a highly problematic interpretation, if taken to mean that he denies that there are any truths. To begin with, the claim is at best paradoxical and probably incoherent. (After all: Is it *true* that there are no truths?). The closest Nietzsche comes to such a denial is in his early unpublished essay “On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,” frequently cited as evidence for this truth-skeptical interpretation. Even as an interpretive claim about the ideas found in this essay, the view that Nietzsche is a truth-denier is very doubtful. His wording is rather zealous and incautious, to be sure. And Nietzsche does put forward a skeptical position. But it is not a denial *of truth*, but rather a skeptical denial that most (or any) of our *beliefs* are true. (This elementary distinction seems lost on the incautious readers of this text, and

⁷ Janaway (2007).

⁸ Rorty (1989).

Nietzsche doesn't help matters by saying "truths" where what he really seems to mean is *beliefs about what is true.*) Nietzsche's main thought is the following: Our beliefs never *fully* correspond to the objects they are about. Thus, our beliefs are not fully true. And thus, to some degree, our beliefs are systematically falsifying. But notice this is very different from maintaining that there are no truths. On the contrary, such an argument *presupposes* the existence of truth, and a highly demanding notion of truth at that.

Whatever we make of the "Truth and Lies" essay, Nietzsche's later work is unequivocal that truth exists (GM I:1).⁹ Nietzsche's focus is instead on questioning the allegedly unconditional value of truth, as well as the psychology of relentless truth-seeking.¹⁰ Whereas it has been tacitly assumed by virtually all philosophers throughout history that truth is an eminently valuable goal, Nietzsche wants to subject this idea to critique. This is not because he is doubtful that truth-seeking is, in any sense, a worthwhile enterprise, but rather because he wants us to be more critical about its worth and more critical about what drives us toward truth. Nietzsche wants to remind us that sometimes it is better, from the standpoint of life and flourishing, not to seek out the truth; illusion might be highly beneficial too (BGE, 1; BGE, 4). Our continuing overvaluation of truth, he believes, is a holdover from Christianity, both in our ascetic devotion to truth-seeking and in the erection of truth as a kind of God-substitute, with which in the secular age we can beatifically commune.

⁹ Clark (1990) is a seminal treatment of these issues.

¹⁰ See Gemes (1992).

Closely related to these issues around truth is Nietzsche's doctrine of so-called "perspectivism."¹¹ Nietzsche never puts forward this doctrine in a systematic way. The notion of a perspective is instead a rich metaphor that Nietzsche draws upon in various places. One basic idea of this metaphor is that there is no, as it were, 'aperspectival' view of things. Everything is always seen from some standpoint or other. And in being seen, it is always, to some degree, colored by the affects, not judged through the cool lens of rationality. Nietzsche thus opposes Schopenhauer's contention that there could be a "pure, willless" form of "contemplation" at all (GM, III:12).¹² Insofar as there is an epistemological position here, the view Nietzsche is offering would seem to be a radicalization and neo-Kantian naturalization of a certain thread from transcendental idealism, which sees the subject as playing an important role in constituting the objects of experience and cognition.

Sometimes the perspectivist position takes on a further degree of generality and extremity, to apply to any position on anything whatsoever.¹³ According to what we might call Extreme Perspectivism, every view (including every philosophical claim) is *only* a perspective, including the views put forward by Nietzsche.¹⁴ Extreme Perspectivism maintains that there is no standpoint outside perspectives, from which the legitimacy of a given perspective might be finally judged. If Nietzsche endorses Extreme Perspectivism,

¹¹ For discussion, see Nehamas (1985), Clark (1990), Anderson (1998), Clark (1998), Gemes (2013).

¹² Clark (1998).

¹³ "Facts," as Nietzsche says at one point in his notebooks, "are precisely what there are not, only interpretations." (WP, 481). But the context of this oft-quoted sentence, and its status as an unpublished notebook entry, make it problematic to rely upon it in the ways it sometimes has been in the secondary literature—namely, as the main basis for attributing to Nietzsche a very extreme form of perspectivism. For discussion of these difficulties, see Gemes (2013).

¹⁴ This seems to be the position of Nehamas (1985), Ch.2, but he goes on to seek to resolve, on Nietzsche's behalf, the difficult philosophical puzzles it generates.

Nietzsche could be thought to pull the rug out from under the legitimacy of his own views. These are just perspectives, none with any claim to final legitimacy or to potential correspondence with how things “really” are. This Extreme Perspectivist view is on the wane, and has been subjected to forceful scrutiny.¹⁵ But wherever we stand on the issue of Extreme Perspectivism, one of the important lessons Nietzsche wants us to take away is not about the *semantics* of truth claims (about which, in my view, he has little, if anything, plausible to say), but instead about the *value* of certain forms of understanding. In perhaps his most famous discussion of perspectivism, Nietzsche champions the epistemic value of seeing things from a variety of perspectives: “the *more* affects we allow to speak about a matter, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our ‘concept’ of this matter, our ‘objectivity’ be” (GM III:12). Philosophers so far have mainly been concerned with getting to The Eternal Truth about The Big Questions. But Nietzsche reminds us that there are also interesting and important truths about the contents of particular *perspectives* on these and other questions: that is, what people think and have thought, and why they think and have thought it. These (perhaps faulty) perspectives are not to be cast aside as mere tissues of error, but are to be made central objects of philosophical study.¹⁶

D. Naturalism?

In some recent literature on Nietzsche, the divide between naturalism and non-naturalism has figured prominently. This reflects a broader debate about where exactly to

¹⁵ Gemes (2013).

¹⁶ I develop this reading further in Huddleston (forthcoming b).

situate Nietzsche, with respect to his 18th and 19th century predecessors, as well as with respect to debates in contemporary philosophy, particularly surrounding moral psychology, the philosophy of action, and the philosophy of mind.

Brian Leiter, in an influential study, has argued that Nietzsche is a “methodological” philosophical naturalist—namely, someone who sees the methods of philosophy as needing to be in line with those of the natural sciences, including psychology.¹⁷ Such sciences characteristically seek to explain phenomena, often in terms of their determining causes, by reference to naturalistically-respectable entities or processes (whatever exactly those may be) or a naturalistically-supported, albeit “speculative” theory of human nature, of the sort offered by, for example, Hume. One prominent reading in this vein sees Nietzsche as a drive theorist, who explains a variety of human phenomena by way of a certain dynamic, hydraulic model of human psychology.¹⁸ As proponents of the naturalist Nietzsche have stressed, there was important resurgence of neo-Kantian naturalism in the decades before Nietzsche was writing, a movement with which he was familiar and sympathetic.¹⁹

In one sense, it should be completely uncontroversial that Nietzsche is a naturalist of some kind. He rejects spurious supernaturalist ideas about God, noumenal selves, and libertarian free will. He sees humans, in important ways, as continuous with the rest of the animal world (BGE, 230). But does he subscribe to some more specific naturalist view beyond this, for example to the suggested idea that the methods of philosophy should be continuous with the methods of the natural sciences? Are these methods, in his opinion,

¹⁷ Leiter (2002); Leiter (2013). For further defense of a similar form of naturalism, see Kail (2015).

¹⁸ Richardson (1996); Gemes (2009b).

¹⁹ Leiter (2002). For a helpful overview of the complex debates surrounding scientific method in the period leading up to and contemporary with Nietzsche, see Patton (2015).

fully adequate to understanding human phenomena?²⁰ As with perspectivism, Nietzsche's explicit remarks on this subject are quite thin.²¹ In terms of his philosophical practice, we often see attempts on Nietzsche's part to explain in a way that looks to be in line with methodological naturalism. He will sometimes give us explanations of complex human beliefs reductively in terms, for example, of psychological needs and motivations, sometimes even in terms of physiology (BGE, 187; D, 119; GM, III:15). But we also see him often taking a more hermeneutical approach to human phenomena, where this involves not just explaining their causal antecedents and determinants, but explaining them through interpreting them, in such a way as to draw upon the framework of meanings and significances that are salient for the beings he's interpreting.²² Humans indeed are animals, but they are *human* animals, who operate in a historically-mediated set of cultural practices,

²⁰ The non-naturalist Nietzsche has taken various forms in the secondary literature. One prominent non-naturalist suggestion, developed by Clark and Dudrick (2012) is that a normative dimension is central to Nietzsche's philosophical enterprise, and to the sorts of accounts he gives of the human psyche in particular. While I am sympathetic to the importance of the normative (Huddleston 2017), my own sense is that best foil for methodological naturalism is a broader methodology that allows that there are distinctive, epistemically respectable modes of understanding present in the "human sciences" [*Geisteswissenschaften*] (a term used by Dilthey) that don't fit the naturalistic model.

²¹ We must also bear in mind, even when he mentions "scientific method," that *Wissenschaft* in German is a very broad sort of domain, encompassing not just the hard sciences and the social sciences, but systematic types of scholarly intellectual inquiry in history, classics, music, and various other humanities subjects. (As also noted by Leiter (2002), Ch. 2). Thus, we must be careful about just what we take Nietzsche to be praising when he praises the "scientific method" (A, 59) or the "procedures of science" (HH I, 635). Classical philology has a "scientific method" in the relevant sense.

²² Consider, for example, Nietzsche's etymological enquiries in GM I about evaluative terminology and categories, or his discussion of the self-interpretation of guilt in GM II, or of ascetic ideal as offering man a 'meaning' [Sinn] and why such a meaning would be appealing in GM III. Such interpretation is conceived by Nietzsche as something that we do as philosophers, but also something that goes on, pre-theoretically, at the level of our practices and the level of our self-understandings (e.g., GM II:12). The pervasiveness of interpretation in Nietzsche's work is an important point stressed by Nehamas (1985). See also Berry (2011), who also stresses the role of interpretation, using the model of philology as the "art of reading well," understood as being able to "read facts without falsifying them through interpretation, without letting the desire to understand make you lose caution, patience, subtlety. Philology as ephexis in interpretation" (A, 52).

in terms of which they understand (and he stresses, often *mis*understand) themselves and what they are doing.²³

Nietzsche has considerable admiration for natural science surely, but it is more doubtful whether he takes it to be the sole privileged standpoint from which to lay the groundwork for a philosophical inquiry into complex human phenomena. There is, in my view, an equally strong affinity with a more hermeneutic tradition, which seeks to give interpretations of the sort just mentioned. Such a view needn't be positing mysterious, non-natural entities. For its claim is not metaphysical, but epistemic: it maintains that there are modes of understanding beyond those employed in the empirical natural sciences, which amount to distinctive forms of understanding relevant to comprehending human beings and their practices.

So while Neo-Kantian naturalism was in the air, so too was the careful hermeneutical tradition in which Nietzsche was raised as a philologist. When we look to these influences, as well as his own philosophical practice, I think the correct conclusion is that Nietzsche is a philosopher who proves difficult to categorize along the non-naturalist vs. naturalist axis. It's not clear that much is gained by doing so either: We miss a good deal of what is philosophically interesting and distinctive in Nietzsche's work if we try to shoehorn all his explanations into a purely naturalist framework—or, for that matter, if we ignore the interesting ways in which he was in dialogue with the science of his day, and usefully applying insights of psychology and physiology to better understand what humans are up to.

²³ For this emphasis on the role of culture, see Janaway (2007). From the fact that many of these self-understandings are misunderstandings, it doesn't follow that *we* understand these creatures better by opting just for a naturalistic explanation of how they've been led to that misunderstanding.

IV. *The Birth of Tragedy* and the Death of Tragic Culture

Nietzsche's first book was published during the time that he was Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basel. The book is a strange concoction: On some level, it is a work of classical philology, although it has very little documentation for the dramatic claims it advances. On some level too, it is a treatise in aesthetics, dealing with issues about two dueling artistic forces, which Nietzsche labels the "Apollonian" and the "Dionysian," issues about our experience of tragedy, and issues about the contribution different aspects of the drama make to that experience. And it is also a work of cultural criticism, diagnosing a crisis in modern culture, and proposing Richard Wagner, and his re-creation of tragic drama as music drama, as the solution to this crisis.

Let us begin with its philological dimension. We best see the book against the backdrop of a certain conventional wisdom about Greek art as radiating calm serenity. Winckelmann is a notable proponent of such an outlook in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764, "The History of Ancient Art"). Nietzsche's main historical claim is that this is a misleading image of Greece and the Ancient Greeks. They were a people who were acutely aware of the horrors of life, who thus needed to interpose a veil between themselves and this reality in order to make life bearable. The Olympian Gods are mythological creations that seek to do this, and tragedy itself served a similar function, representing the horror of life, but also distancing us from it in certain aestheticizing ways (BT, 3).

Nietzsche has a further series of claims about the trajectory of tragedy as a genre. He maintains that the height of tragedy came with Aeschylus and Sophocles, and then by the time of Euripides, tragedy declines as a genre (BT, 11). Nietzsche's favored explanation for this is that tragedy becomes increasingly rationalistic, a failing that Nietzsche attributes to

something he calls “aesthetic Socratism.” (BT, 12). In Euripides, matters become too rationalistic, with gods swooping in to fix things, and ends getting tied up overly neatly. This glosses over the incomprehensibility and messiness that characterize the tragic side of human life, and that should be central to, and reflected in, good tragic drama.

When tragedy is discussed in philosophical aesthetics, a central issue is the so-called “paradox of tragedy.” Why, despite the terrible things it depicts, are we drawn to tragedy? A simple solution would be to say that these events are merely fictional. No one is *actually* dying. But this solution is unsatisfactory, because through the fictional scenarios it presents, tragedy, as Nietzsche realizes, intimates a deeper, and ultimately terrible, truth about the world: that individuals can be crushed by titanic forces beyond their control.²⁴ Why do we want to see *this truth* represented? Nietzsche’s solution to the paradox of tragedy is philosophically-distinctive: It focuses on tragedy’s power to afford us a form of existential consolation. Tragedy confronts us with this cruel truth, but thanks to its use of illusion, and particularly its imposition of a form-giving aesthetic order on this horror, it renders it bearable, even appealing. Tragedy does so by inviting us to take up a highly removed perspective at odds with our usual one. Nietzsche will sometimes describe this perspective as that of an amoral ‘Artist-God,’ (BT, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 5) or of a wanton child, building sandcastles and then knocking them down for fun (BT, 24). For such beings, creation and destruction are aesthetic phenomena. It is from this perspective, which we can temporarily occupy as spectators of the tragic drama, that the events seem to have a certain meaning—not, according to Nietzsche, a moral meaning, but a purely aesthetic meaning, an effect heightened all the more by the aestheticizing language and presentation of the tragic

²⁴ For a helpful discussion of the connection between tragedy and truth, see Janaway (2014).

scenario. Thanks to this confluence of factors, existence, on the tragic stage, gets transfigured, in such a way that it *seems* to have an aesthetic “justification.”²⁵ How exactly we carry this consolation into life outside the theater is another matter, but Nietzsche thinks its subliminal effect is to wed us ever more to life.

In addition to these philological and aesthetic projects, *The Birth of Tragedy* has a cultural goal in mind. Nietzsche’s eye is ultimately on this problem: We moderns are in a crisis in which we lack the sort of existential framework of values that could give meaning to human life.²⁶ This spiritual poverty has about come largely as the result of the dominance of a certain sort of Socratic rationalism that has undone the importance of illusion and myth. At this early point in his career, Nietzsche was very enmeshed with Richard Wagner, who saw a similar sort of crisis in modernity and wanted to create an antidote through his music dramas. Wagner envisaged *Der Ring des Niebelungen* as drawing on a wellspring of sources to create a new mythology for the modern era. We see in *The Birth of Tragedy* optimism on Nietzsche’s part that this Wagnerian program might stand a chance of success at this almost-impossibly-ambitious task. Although Nietzsche eventually came to see that Wagner’s program was doomed to failure, Nietzsche in essence took up the mantle himself, in thinking we need to “revalue” all values, an important aspect of his project which we will return to in what follows.

V. Positivism: *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak*

²⁵ See Geuss (1999), Came (2005), and Anderson (2009) for discussion of these issues. Nietzsche writes: “...we may very well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity lies in our significance as works of art—for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*...” (BT, 5).

²⁶ See Gemes and Sykes (2014).

Following *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's main philosophical focus was on a series of four essays, published in the mid-1870s, and compiled together under the title *Untimely Meditations*. Their themes range from *Bildung* [self-cultivation/ culture], to the value of the study of history, to Wagner's plans for Bayreuth. Although there is a great deal of important material in these texts, I will need to leave aside discussion of them for reasons of space. I will focus instead on Nietzsche's next two books *Human, All too Human* and *Daybreak* and treat them together. The former was published in 1878, supplemented by two further parts in the few years following. *Daybreak* followed on its heels in 1881. In both works, we see Nietzsche moving toward the aphoristic style for which he is best known.

Around the time of *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche resigned his Professorship in Basel on the grounds of ill-health. He was, as already mentioned in the biographical section of this article, living on this modest pension and devoting himself to writing. Nietzsche was shedding Wagner's and Schopenhauer's influence and was beginning to come into own philosophically. While we can see important anticipations of later Nietzschean themes in the *Untimely Meditations*, one still has the sense of Nietzsche being in Wagner's and Schopenhauer's shadow and asserting himself relatively cautiously. But by the time of *Human, All Too Human*, he is reaching philosophical independence to a far greater degree than he had done so far. *Daybreak* continues down such a path.

Human, All Too Human and *Daybreak* are often classified together as representative of Nietzsche's "positivistic" period. He offers physiological or mechanistic explanations of a variety of phenomena. This amounts to a pendulum shift of sorts, with respect to *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he goes in for obscure concepts— the "primal one-ness" [Ur-Eine] most

notoriously (BT, 1).²⁷ These positivistic books are more sober and do away with such “artist’s metaphysics,” a term Nietzsche will come to use to denigrate his approach in *The Birth* (BT, “Attempt,” 2).²⁸

One of the most important concepts to emerge from *Human All Too Human* is the idea of the “free spirit.” (Indeed the book is subtitled: *A Book for Free Spirits*). Such a person—the free spirit—is able to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and convention.²⁹ Nietzsche will make use of the contrastive image of “the herd,” which will become important in a number of his later texts: Whereas most people are content just to follow what is done around them (“the herd”), the “free spirit” will make her own way, particularly when it comes to exposing the values in the surrounding culture to critical scrutiny. (We see various echoes of this important idea in later existentialist thinkers.)

Daybreak [*Morgenröte*] (also sometimes translated as *Dawn*) continues in much the same spirit. It is subtitled *Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, and in it, we see Nietzsche playing the role of “free spirit” himself and subjecting the predominant value system in the west—Judeo-Christian morality—to extended critical scrutiny. As he will later write in *Ecce Homo*, “With this book [*Daybreak*] my campaign against morality begins” (EH, “Daybreak”). It is where Nietzsche will begin to style himself as a “denier” of this morality:

²⁷ The extent to which he actually buys into this metaphysics is less clear. We know from his notebooks that he was doubtful about a number of aspects of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, to which the (apparent) metaphysics of *The Birth of Tragedy* shares some seeming affinities. See “On Schopenhauer” (ENB).

²⁸ Nietzsche appends this “Attempt at Self-Criticism” to BT in his revised 1886 edition.

²⁹ For further discussion of the “free spirit,” see Reginster (2003).

I deny morality as I deny alchemy that is, I deny their premises: but I do not deny that there have been alchemists who believed in these premises and acted in accordance with them...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 different reasons than hitherto* (D, 103).

He is not claiming that all the particular prescriptions of morality are wrong. But he instead is making a claim about the justifications that have hitherto been given for moral actions. These stand in need of revision. He continues: “We must learn *to think differently* in order perhaps very late on, to achieve even more: *to feel differently*” (D, 103). Nietzsche’s concern is thus not just with our explicit thoughts or reasoned decisions about what we morally should do, but with our affects and attitudes. Many of those fall unthinkingly into step with Judeo-Christian morality. But by subjecting this morality to greater critical scrutiny, he thereby hopes to lessen (at least for some of us) the affective grip of its ideals and values.

Nietzsche’s groundbreaking theme of power as an important motivator of action (D, 348, 360) will also become prominent in *Daybreak*. In *Human, All Too Human*, by contrast, Nietzsche will sometimes be pressing the simplistic assumption that we are driven solely by hedonic motivations, meaning that everything that we do is ultimately driven by a desire for our own satisfaction. But by *Daybreak*, Nietzsche will note, far more interestingly, that we are often driven by a desire for *power* instead, and that we often sacrifice pleasure for power. We, for example, do things that are highly challenging, not because of pleasure, but because

of the power we have in facing obstacles and overcoming them.³⁰ As we shall see, Nietzsche will later develop this theme in a very sophisticated way in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where he will try to give a psychological explanation of what might drive us toward asceticism, where our power is turned back against ourselves, and where we seek to snuff out our own drives.

VI. *The Gay Science*

Nietzsche published *The Gay Science* in 1882. Stylistically, it is a masterpiece, apart from some ill-judged and rather uneven poetry. It is in the vein of *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak* in being aphoristic rather than a treatise on a focused topic. Its title signals Nietzsche's move away, to some extent, from the positivism of his previous two books, but even more so, his explicit volte face from the pessimistic Schopenhauerian outlook he had previously accepted in *The Birth of Tragedy* a decade before. *The Gay Science* is seeking a form of "science" [*Wissenschaft*] that will be joyful, centered in particular around the idea of *life affirmation*—finding life as something valuable to be celebrated, not something to be condemned, as Schopenhauer would have it.

Nietzsche gives us the ultimate image, and limiting case, of this life affirmation with his idea of the eternal recurrence, and the potential responses to it:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more..."

³⁰ Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power is explored further in Reginster (2006) and in Katsafanas (2013).

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash you teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” (GS, 341).

This immediately presents various philosophical puzzles. Does Nietzsche see the demon as announcing something that is actually true of existence—a kind of cyclical cosmology? Or is the point instead to offer an imagined scenario to gauge our reaction? A few dissenting voices aside, a consensus has emerged in recent literature that Nietzsche is not presenting this as the correct cosmology.³¹ He is more interested in the ethical and existential implications of this “thought” of the eternal recurrence. But even if it is a thought-experiment, is it coherent enough to imagine? Some have raised concerns on this front, and suggested that even as a thought-experiment it needs to be taken, non-literally, along the lines of the question, “If you had it to do over, would you marry me again?”³² The point of this question is to assess one’s present marriage, not to throw up philosophical brain teasers about multiple marriages to the same person, time travel, and the like. Nietzsche, in presenting the thought of the eternal recurrence and dramatizing potential reactions to it, is primarily interested in giving us an image of what full-throated affirmation

³¹ e.g., Loeb (2013) for a cosmological reading of the eternal recurrence.

³² This nice example is due to Clark (1990).

would be. It is not that there actually are repeating cycles; each of us has, as the saying goes, only one life to live. Can we accept this? Or will we long for a different and better life?³³

Christianity of course promises us a better life in heaven than the one we are living on earth. For Nietzsche, its promises are empty, and its theology bankrupt. Perhaps no catch-phrase is more associated with Nietzsche than ‘God is Dead.’ When we understand this in the broad way Nietzsche intended, those words might be thought to encapsulate his philosophy, and his place in the history of philosophy, better than anything else. Philosophers before Nietzsche had been skeptics about conventional religion. Voltaire, Hume, Schopenhauer and others were dubious of a theistic worldview. And the idea of a ‘death of God’ was anticipated already by Hegel and others. But no philosopher before Nietzsche understood the ‘death of God’ in as radical a fashion. For Nietzsche, the ‘death of God’ is not a claim about the non-existence of a certain metaphysical being, though of course Nietzsche thinks there is no such being. But rather it is about a broader crisis of values in Western culture. Whereas other philosophers saw a way of salvaging something like our ordinary form of other-regarding morality from the ashes of Christianity’s demise, Nietzsche thinks that the “death of God” calls our continuing reliance on this morality radically into question.

Nietzsche dramatizes this announcement of the “death of God” by telling of a “madman” who goes, with lantern lit in the “bright morning hours,” into a marketplace to announce the death of God. His listeners are uncomprehending, as he conveys his prophetic message:

³³ For further discussion of the eternal recurrence, see Soll (1980), Nehamas (1985), Clark (1990), Anderson (2005), Huddleston (forthcoming a).

“Whither is God?” [the madman] cried; “I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?” (GS, 125).

The Gay Science is largely about maintaining our joyfulness and capacity for life-affirmation in the face of the knowledge that this world is not governed by a benevolent deity according to a cosmic plan. The world is a mixture of good and bad. It is our choice whether we accept this package and get on cheerfully with life, or whether we stew in dismay, rancor, and self-pity, and wish things were different.³⁴

VII. Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is perhaps the most unusual book in Nietzsche’s corpus, though the competition for that label is stiff. He composed it from 1883 to 1885 in separately published sections, with the culmination of Part III usually thought to be the originally-envisaged ending, and then Part IV an addition. Following Nietzsche’s suggestion that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a “tragedy” of sorts, it is sometimes thought that Part IV is the “satyr

³⁴ It is not clear why Nietzsche expects the question to be quite so polarizing. Couldn’t we opt for a middle-ground position, celebrating some things and condemning others?

play” following the tragedy, though the interrelation of its parts remains a matter of some dispute.³⁵ In standard editions of the book, one will now find all four sections together.

As already discussed, Nietzsche was an exceptionally literary writer in all his works. But this is perhaps his most self-consciously literary effort. It takes the form of an episodic novel, which will seek to fuse philosophy and literature. In linguistic style, it has an affected, archaic air, with resonances of the Luther Bible. One of the key interpretive questions is whether it is a parody of a religious book, or meant to be taken “straight,” as a kind of quasi-religious-mystical outpouring.³⁶ My own view is that it is downright unbearable (some choice passages aside) unless one takes it as a rather arch sendup of a religious book, and even then it is tough going.

The basic narrative line of the book follows the character Zarathustra, modeled, at least in name, after the Persian prophet Zoroaster. The book begins with Zarathustra coming down from his mountain home. The narrative follows Zarathustra, his travels, his trailing menagerie, and his reception by those to whom he conveys his message. It consists largely in a series of speeches in a grandiose mock-Biblical style, complete with its “Verily[s]” and its concluding “Thus Spoke Zarathustra’s.” The themes of many of these speeches are broadly resonant with Nietzschean themes we see elsewhere. This can lead us to think that Zarathustra should be regarded as a straightforward mouthpiece for Nietzsche’s own views. On some level, he clearly is. But the book is operating on two levels. It is trying to propound new Nietzschean values, and it is also the story of a *character* who is trying to propound new

³⁵ On the interrelation of its parts, see Nehamas (2000), Loeb (2010), Tevenar (2013).

³⁶ Note what Nietzsche says about it in *Ecce Homo*: “Here no ‘prophet’ is speaking, none of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power whom people call founders of religions. Above all, one must *hear* aright the tone that comes from this mouth, the halcyon tone, lest one do wretched injustice to the meaning of its wisdom” (EH, “Preface, 4).

values, to an audience that is at times uncomprehending, even hostile. Interpretive caution is in order, as Nietzsche may have dramatized this curious character and his attempt to disseminate his views precisely to allow for a degree of ironic distance.³⁷

One of the book's most recognizable themes is that of the *Übermensch*, an ideal that really only appears in *Zarathustra*, and in Nietzsche's retrospective discussion of the book in later work. The term presents considerable issues of translation: "Superman" has a vaguely comical ring, and the neologisms "overhuman" and "overman" strike an odd chord as well. The basic idea of the *Übermensch* is of a higher type of being who is going to transcend our present miserable human condition. This condition takes two problematic forms. The first form is Christianity, particularly its suspicion about and disdain for the things of this world, and its attempt to anchor the value and meaning of life in another world beyond this one (TSZ, "On the Afterworldly"). The second, and in many ways worse form is seen in the figure of the "last man".³⁸ In the Prologue, Zarathustra warns of this approaching spectre, who is concerned with pleasure, safety, and comfort, and has no interest in striving for anything great (TSZ, "Prologue"). Indeed, such a creature is left utterly unmoved by greatness: "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks" (TSZ, "Prologue," 5). As a way of counteracting these two quite different pathologies, Zarathustra preaches the *Übermensch*, who is supposed to be the (new) "meaning of the earth" (TSZ, "Prologue," 3). Whereas Christianity disdains this life and world and can find nothing of real redemptive value in it, the last man finds nothing worthwhile that really excites his admiration and awe, devoted as he is to simple creature

³⁷ Pippin (1988).

³⁸ "Last human" is a better translation of *letzter Mensch*, but the former is the conventional anglophone designation of this character.

comforts. The *Übermensch*, as the epitome of human excellence, seeks to answer both problems: it gives us something i) this-worldly, that ii) provides a worthy object of reverence, and that iii) confers redemptive meaning on existence.

Another key theme in the book is that of the eternal recurrence, which we have already discussed in connection with *The Gay Science*. As I mentioned, it is sometimes maintained that Nietzsche means this as a cosmological claim. The evidence in *Zarathustra* is better for this, but it is not straightforward. At various points in the book, the eternal recurrence is presented as a metaphysical doctrine, characterizing the supposed cyclical nature of existence (e.g., TSZ, “On the Vision and the Riddle”). But that is of course within the literary frame of a book filled with numerous allegories and parables. Nietzsche does maintain that the “eternal recurrence” is fundamental to the book (EH, “Zarathustra”), but it is less clear whether he means by that the cosmology, taken literally, or instead the ethic of life affirmation that the idea embodies.³⁹

When he turns back to reflecting on his own works and their contribution to philosophy, *Zarathustra* is the book Nietzsche heaps the most praise on. He notoriously claims that it is the greatest gift that has been given to humanity (EH, “Preface,” 4), and that chairs will be devoted to the study of it. After a very small first print run, the book, within a few decades, would become hugely popular. It had an enthusiastic reception in some artistic circles. It offered inspiration to Mahler, Strauss, Kubrick, and many other great artists. It undeniably contains some beautiful poetry. Yet in anglophone interpretations of Nietzsche, the book tends to be downplayed, if not entirely ignored. A few Nietzsche scholars have vigorously championed its importance, and suggested that it is where we are to look to find

³⁹ Loeb (2013) makes a case for the cosmological interpretation.

the key to Nietzsche's philosophy.⁴⁰ At the very least, the book is highly polarizing among philosophical readers of Nietzsche.

As an aesthetic whole, the book, to my mind, is a marked failure. The early Nietzsche was in Wagner's shadow. With his break from Wagner, and Wagner's death (in February 1883, the year Nietzsche began the composition of *Zarathustra*), Nietzsche claimed he would become to a good extent Wagner's "heir."⁴¹ Perhaps he took this as meaning he would take up the Wagnerian program of offering us a fusion of art, religion, and philosophy, that would attempt to grant us a new mythology for modern life, and infuse it with a significance and meaning that it was lacking. This is what he attempted. But Nietzsche's literary talents lay elsewhere. He simply did not have the requisite creative skill to pull this off, much as he tried. He is much more in his element in writing beautiful, penetrating aphorisms and essays. Though it is true that many have found *Zarathustra* Nietzsche's great contribution to world literature, others—I count myself among them—are as yet immune to its alleged charms. Nietzsche, at his best, could be a real master of imagery, allusion, humor, and other literary devices. But in *Zarathustra* he goes grotesquely overboard, and produces a book that is pompous, overstuffed, and downright boring.⁴² Yet opinions on its merits clearly differ. As I say, many great artists have found inspiration in it, and perhaps it is a matter of taste.

VIII. *Beyond Good and Evil*

⁴⁰ e.g., Loeb (2010)

⁴¹ Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 19 Feb. 1883

⁴² Perhaps Nietzsche heaps such great praise on it because he unconsciously recognizes that it is his greatest failure. For the suggestion of Nietzsche's lapses in self-criticism when it comes to *Zarathustra*, see Tanner (1994).

With Nietzsche's next book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, he returns to the literary style of which he was a master: the aphorism. The book is divided into 9 sections, which tie these aphorisms together, and concludes with a selection of poetry. Thematically, it treats a huge range of topics, ranging from conventional philosophical issues in metaphysics and epistemology, to religion, to art and culture, to society and politics, to moral psychology. The book is subtitled *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, and this gives us a good hint about what is arguably its core theme: a methodological conception of what Nietzsche's preferred form of philosophy would be.

Nietzsche sets up a distinction between those he calls "philosophical laborers" on the one hand and "genuine philosophers" on the other. Genuine philosophers, according to Nietzsche, are those that create values (BGE, 211). By contrast, philosophical laborers are those who "determine and press into formulas, whether in the realm of logic or political (moral) thought or art, some great data of valuations—that is, former positings of values, creations of value which have become dominant and are for a time called 'truths.'" Such venerable figures as Kant and Hegel he brands as philosophical laborers. This can seem bizarre and unfair, when we think of their tremendously innovative philosophical ideas. But Nietzsche sees them both as basically conservative figures: taking received ideas, giving them a rational veneer, and making them the heart of their philosophical systems. Kant, on Nietzsche's view, will try to give philosophical articulation to the morality of common-sense and fight a rear-guard action to make room for God, immortality, and free will, while Hegel will try to justify the norms imbedded in our present practice, seeking to give rational sanction to what is in effect a warmed-over version of Christianity.

It's well and good to say that genuine philosophers will be concerned with creating values. But what exactly does this mean? Nietzsche is most plausibly read, I would suggest, as thinking of values on a social model.⁴³ He is saying that social value systems are ultimately human creations. We have been operating with a Christian moral value system for nearly two millennia. For its time, this was innovative (which is not to say everything innovative is thereby good, Christianity being a case in point.) But its time has now utterly past, and it will fall to forward-looking "philosophers of the future" (BGE, 210) to give us a new value system that will replace it. They are "commanders and legislators, they say, 'thus it shall be!' They first determine the Whither and For What of man..." (BGE, 211).

For all its talk of "value-creation" as the work of genuine philosophers, *Beyond Good and Evil* spends rather little time actually offering new values. Instead, it spends quite a bit of time in a critical-anthropological vein, working through various received ideas and subjecting them to scrutiny.⁴⁴ Nietzsche sees there as being an important connection here between the critical-anthropological and the creative enterprises. It is by experiencing and understanding a range of existing values that we are then in a good position to create new ones:

Perhaps [the genuine philosopher] himself must have been critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and solver of riddles and moralist and seer and "free spirit" and almost everything in order to pass through the whole range of human values and value feelings and to be able to see with many

⁴³ I discuss this further in Huddleston (2014).

⁴⁴ Not all of these ideas are directly about values, but even behind abstruse and seemingly remote metaphysical ideas Nietzsche thinks that there are value commitments to be found (BGE, 6).

different eyes and consciences, from a height and into every distance, from the depths into every height, from a nook into every expanse (BGE, 211).

This is what Nietzsche himself tries to do in his mature work. For this reason, the sort of value creation is not completely *ex nihilo*, nor is it completely a priori. One needs to survey what values there have been in order to have a good sense of what better values there might be.

IX. On Genealogy of Morality

Shortly after completing *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche begins his masterwork *On the Genealogy of Morality*, which expands on themes from *Beyond Good and Evil*'s section on the "Natural History of Morals." The *Genealogy* is Nietzsche's most cohesive book, in terms of exploring a relatively focused theme. It is divided into three essays, each of which treats a different aspect of Judeo-Christian morality, broadly-understood. Nietzsche treats this morality as an historical phenomenon: It is not written into the fabric of the universe. It is instead something that came to be at a particular time in history, in the process displacing a different pagan value system that held sway before it. Nietzsche dubs his form of historical inquiry "genealogy," thereby indicating his interest in tracing roots. But whereas most genealogies (of, say, a king, or a race horse, or show dog) *valorize* the object of the genealogy, by showing a value-preserving chain of succession, the point of Nietzsche's genealogy will be to call the object of the genealogy into question.⁴⁵ We need, as he says, "a critique of moral values, for once the value of these values must itself be called into question—and for this we

⁴⁵ Geuss (1994).

need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted' (GM, "Preface," 6). Although genealogy is partly a descriptive historical-anthropological enterprise, this is ultimately in the service of the normative goal of *assessing* the values we today may unreflectively endorse—selflessness, humility, charity, compassion, and the like. Such an assessment can then pave the way to new values, at least for some people.

The *Genealogy's* First Essay charts a certain radical shift in values. In the classical Greek world, the dominant value system was organized around the categories of "good" and "bad." These are not particularly moralized notions; they are instead indications of status, capability, and merit. The good are the strong, brave, high-stationed, noble, healthy, and beautiful. The bad are their opposite: the weak, craven, base, common, sick, and ugly (GM, I:2). According to the reigning outlook, the 'good' are *doing well* as people, the 'bad' are *doing poorly* as people. This is, in somewhat caricatured terms, the perspective of the pagan world. Judeo-Christianity marks a watershed moment in human history, because it overturns this previous hierarchy. As the result of something Nietzsche refers to as the "slave revolt," values get turned upside down. Those previously looked down upon (the weak, sick, etc.) now claim the mantle of merit for themselves. ("Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5)). They claim for themselves the title of "good," and brand those who were previously "good" as evil. The key psychological mechanism at work is something that Nietzsche refers to as *ressentiment* (GM, I:10). This is a form of vengefulness that in the weak is unable to discharge itself outwardly. The weak seethe with this *ressentiment* against those with power over them. But because they cannot take adequate revenge, they compensate themselves with an "imaginary" form of revenge, in the form of a worldview,

whereby they get lauded for their previously denigrated traits, and their oppressors get denigrated for their previously lauded traits.⁴⁶ The name “slave revolt” is somewhat misleading, since Nietzsche sees the key movers of this revolt as being the “priestly people,” namely the Jews (GM, I:10). Nietzsche’s claim here is highly incendiary, and traffics in ugly anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jewish conspiracies. Does he accept these stereotypes himself, or is he using them for rhetorical purposes, needling an anti-Semitic audience with the idea that their beloved value system is an invention of the people they hate?⁴⁷ In general, how literally we are supposed to take this idea of the slave revolt? It is very doubtful that it is supposed to be a plan by conscious design. But as an indication of a substantial historical change, it makes more sense: The worldviews of Homeric Greece and of the New Testament are drastically different, in many respects, diametrically opposed. Whether Nietzsche puts his finger on exactly why this change happened, it certainly seems right that there has been a marked change.

The Second Essay continues Nietzsche’s genealogical exploration, focusing on a loose web of themes: guilt, bad conscience, punishment, memory, promising, and autonomy. These do not sit entirely neatly together. But this is part of Nietzsche’s point. The development of humans and their culture in these respects has not been thanks to a single driving force, but is the product of different factors coalescing in complex ways. The Second Essay gives a story about our transition from the condition of being wild animals to the condition of being humans in civilization. This change requires what Nietzsche thinks of as internalization, whereby many of our impulses, particularly our aggressive impulses, need to

⁴⁶ For further discussion of the First Essay, see Bittner (1994), Reginster (1997), Migotti (1998), May (1999), Leiter (2002), Gemes (2006), Janaway (2007), Wallace (2007), May (2011), Schuringa (2014).

⁴⁷ Gemes (2006), Anderson (2011).

be turned inward. In the process of becoming “tamed” in this way, the animal man has “beat itself raw on the bars of its cage” (GM, II:16). A second major theme is that of memory and promising, and its relation to punishment. As we become more complex creatures with a memory, we are able to make promises and hold each other accountable for these promises.⁴⁸ This allows for indebtedness, whereby we recall something we owe to another person, and what this other person owes to us. As Nietzsche notes, there is a close etymological relation between “debt” and “guilt” [*Schuld* for both in German]. Guilt arises out of a sense of indebtedness to our ancestors (GM, II:19).⁴⁹ But this sort of indebtedness was something we could pay off. Reverence to ancestors forms a key aspect of some religious traditions, where the main devotional practice is in the form of gifts offered to the ancestors. These ancestors get transmogrified into gods (GM II:19). In the pagan world, the relationship with gods is still basically transactional, however. They give you things, you give them things. They have given you a good harvest. Now you are in their debt, and you sacrifice a sheaf of wheat. Christianity is a change in several respects. There is one “maximum” God (GM II:20) who is responsible for absolutely everything. But there is no way of possibly paying him back for all he has given you. And most importantly, it ceases to be plainly transactional. We are now seen as *affront* to God, for existing with the animal impulses we ineluctably have. We cannot fully expiate for these, nor can we rid ourselves of

⁴⁸ Nietzsche is often taken (on the basis of passages such as GM, I:13 and others) to deny that we have free will. (Leiter 2002; 2007). In the face of this apparent denial, much scholarly debate has centered around the figure of the ‘Sovereign Individual’ (GM, II:2) from the Second Essay and the possibility of a Nietzschean conception of autonomy, at least as the province of the few. If there is such a notion of autonomy, it will not be an innate metaphysical capacity that humans in general possess, but rather a rare achievement. (A number of papers on this topic are found in Gemes and May (2009). See also Anderson (2013). For continuing skepticism about this reading, see Leiter (2011).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the relation between guilt and bad conscience, see Risse (2001).

them entirely. So, in a perverse twist, God makes a sacrifice of his own son (GM, II:21) to forgive us of our sins. This affects to lift the weight of sin, but rather than lifting this burden for good, simply weighs us down with it all the more, since we are now indebted both to God and Christ for their loving self-sacrifice on our behalf. This engenders even more guilt, in a form that cannot be adequately expiated.

The Third Essay explores the dominance of what Nietzsche calls “the ascetic ideal.” This ideal is already anticipated in the Second Essay, with the idea that we are an affront to God, on account of our “base” animal drives (e.g., toward aggression or sex). The ascetic ideal counsels resisting, deadening, or extirpating these drives, insofar as possible. As Nietzsche indicates, there can be unproblematic pragmatic or instrumental forms of asceticism that employ forms of drive suppression (GM III:9).⁵⁰ One can resist the temptation of passing impulses in order to undertake a particular project of some kind. The key feature of the ascetic *ideal* is that it will hold that asceticism is, in a way, an end-in-itself, an optimal human condition to strive for. It thereby amounts to a will toward self-annihilation, of a form that is championed in different ways by Buddhism, by Schopenhauer and by Christianity. Why has this ascetic ideal gotten a hold on us, Nietzsche wonders? His answer is striking: We need, he thinks, to find meaning in our suffering (GM, III:28). The apparatus of guilt, from the Second Essay, was one central way of doing that. It tells us: We suffer because we are bad people. But we also need to have a goal, something to will: Our “existence on earth contained no goal; ‘to what end man at all?’—was a question without answer; the *will* for man and earth was lacking” (GM, III:28). The ascetic ideal answers that need, giving us something to will, even if it is our own annihilation. In Nietzsche’s pithy

⁵⁰ Gemes (2009b).

phrase, we “would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will” (GM, III:1). Although the ascetic ideal staves off “suicidal nihilism” (GM III:28), it poisons as much as it protects (GM, III:15).

Near the end of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche gives us a key twist, returning to the “will to truth” theme we’ve already touched on. Whereas it might have seemed that the relentless will to truth, unmasking Christianity and its morality, is the ultimate expression of a secular ideal, Nietzsche wants to argue that appearances are deceiving. The “kernel” of the will to truth is the ascetic ideal. Those who relentlessly pursue truth are ultimately driven by a form of asceticism (GM, III:24-5). Far from being free from Christianity, they are simply its latest inheritors. They may have abandoned its metaphysics, but they have not shed its outlook entirely. And perhaps Nietzsche thinks something similar is true of himself as well.⁵¹

It may seem, by the time we get to the end of the *Genealogy*, that Nietzsche is unequivocally against Judeo-Christian morality and its various offshoots. But this impression is rather misleading. He thinks it has been good in certain ways, while highly problematic in others.⁵² But its moment has now passed. Many may have no live option but to remain in its thrall. But for others, its shackles can be shed. By showing it to be a contingent creation, Nietzsche opens the way for eventually abandoning it.

IX. *The Antichrist: Anti-Christianity?*

⁵¹ Owen (2007).

⁵² See Huddleston (2015).

Nietzsche composed *The Antichrist* in 1888, an astonishingly productive year, in which he wrote 3 other books: *Ecce Homo* (discussed below), *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Case of Wagner*. The latter two books I will leave off for reasons of space.⁵³

Nietzsche conceived of *The Antichrist* as a first element in his envisaged project of a “revaluation of all values.” As we’ve seen in his discussion of the *Genealogy*, he wants us to reconsider the Christian values we might otherwise unthinkingly accept, even once we have given up on Christian theology and metaphysics. The book’s title makes reference to the “Antichrist,” the false messiah in Christian theology, with whom Christ will allegedly do battle on his second coming. With this allusive title, Nietzsche, in his enmity toward Christianity, is comparing himself to this Antichrist, but in a way suggesting that Christ himself is the Antichrist, a false messiah who has been wrongly revered for nearly two millennia. Nietzsche thus casts himself also as a kind of new Christ figure, saving us from the Antichrist Christ. (This will come more to the fore in the title of his *Ecce Homo*). Although the title *The Antichrist* can make it seem as though the key opponent is Jesus Christ, it contains an important ambiguity which does not come through fully in English translation. The German “*Christ*” means “Christ” (i.e., Jesus), but it is also the noun form of “Christian.” Punning on this ambiguity, Nietzsche notes that there was “only one [Christ/Christian], and he died on the cross” (A, 39). As we will see, the heart of Nietzsche’s opposition is really to the cult of Christianity that sprung up around Jesus Christ, less to the man himself. In the story that Nietzsche tells, the religion of Christianity is, in important ways, a betrayal of the message of Christ. The key villain in this narrative is St. Paul, by

⁵³ While *Twilight* is rich in philosophical content, it is in some ways a summary restatement of key Nietzschean themes that we’re considering elsewhere. *The Case of Wagner*, as the name would suggest, is a polemic against Richard Wagner.

Nietzsche's reckoning a hate-filled "dysangelist" (A, 42) who invents the core of Christian dogma. He organizes Christianity around hope for an afterlife. But this, according to Nietzsche, is alien to Christ's key message, which is about a way of living this life.

Although Christ's emphasis on compassion for the sick and suffering is anti-Nietzschean, there is one key respect in which Christ is offering a Nietzschean ideal. He is notably free from *ressentiment* (A, 40). Although vile things are done to him, a desire for vengeance is not present in his psychology. He is the champion of turning the other cheek, seeking to love where others hate. Nietzsche thinks that he, unlike his followers, actually achieved this. Although Christ is clearly very weird, Nietzsche finds something fascinating and admirable in his example. Christians, by contrast, claim to turn the other cheek against those who oppress or wrong them, but this is often a mask for something else: a desire for vengeance against such people and for power over them. These motives find expression in subterranean ways (Cp., GM I:13-15). Mendacity [*Verlogenheit*] is also a dominant thread in the discussion (e.g. A, 9). Christians are not capable of full self-understanding, because this will unmask the poisonous forces that drive them. In addition to this moral-psychological failing, Nietzsche also objects to the basic evaluative stance of Christianity. It has turned upside down the values of the classical world, thereby making "an unvalue out of every value" (A, 62). Strength, nobility, bodily pleasure get branded as evils, and weakness, humility, and asceticism get celebrated. Nietzsche sums this up with the formula that Christianity is anti-life, or is "life-negating." Is the idea here simply that a mistake is being made in Christianity? Nietzsche is concerned with matters of truth and falsity, and the falseness of Christianity is one thread in his discussion. But he claims that the fundamental problem with Christianity is about the values it endorses. Thus, Nietzsche's account is

deeply ethical in spirit. It is not, fundamentally, about whether or not God exists, or whether Christian theology is correct. It is instead about whether God, and the values he represents, are worthy of reverence (A, 47).

X. *Ecce Homo*

As mentioned in the previous section, Nietzsche, in the title of *The Antichrist*, is implicitly comparing himself to Christ. That becomes even more explicit in his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, which he started writing at the age of 44, in October 1888. Its title echoes the words of Pontius Pilate, presenting the scourged Christ: Behold the man. But Nietzsche wants us to take that phrase literally, to behold him for what he is. “Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for what I am not” (EH, Preface, 1). Hence the writing of the autobiography.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche goes in for considerable self-aggrandizement. Its first few sections include chapter titles such as “Why I am So Wise,” “Why I am So Clever,” “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “Why I am Destiny.” To some degree, this is tongue-in-cheek, mocking the self-congratulatory genre of autobiography. But it is also indicative of Nietzsche’s sense of his world-historical importance, perhaps with more than a dash of his incipient madness. The book is subtitled “How One Becomes What One Is,” and Nietzsche explores that theme throughout the text, considering the different ways in which the circumstances of his life led to his development and his success. Here the key idea is about conditions of *individual* enhancement. What is good for Nietzsche may not be good for others. He focuses in particular on the everyday: diet, climate, exercise—things that he thinks philosophers have thus far neglected in their concern for the elevation of the spirit

over the body. Nietzsche thinks that these mundane conditions are at least as important and worthy of consideration insofar as human flourishing is concerned than the sorts of things that occupy attention in the Judeo-Christian tradition (e.g., sexual chastity, the purity of one's soul, and the like). He writes: "I am much more interested in a question on which the "salvation of humanity" depends far more than on any theologians' curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: 'how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength, of *virtù* in the Renaissance style of moraline-free virtue?'" (EH, "Clever" 1).

In presenting this narrative of his own life, *Ecce Homo* also exemplifies an important Nietzschean theme, namely that of self-creation. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes the process of "giv[ing] style" to one's character: "a great and rare art. It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye" (GS, 290). In *Ecce Homo*, we see Nietzsche describing how he has done this, but also to some extent *doing* this, precisely by retelling his own philosophical career, in such a way as to give it an attractive narrative arc.⁵⁴

XI. Nietzsche's Legacy

Along with Hegel and Marx, Nietzsche is among the most influential philosophers of the 19th century. In the time since his death, at which point his works were gaining in popularity, he came to be embraced by a variety of figures on the left and on the right.⁵⁵ His

⁵⁴ See Nehamas (1985) for an exploration of this theme.

⁵⁵ Aschheim (1994)

appropriation by the Nazis in Germany, well after his death, left a damaging stain on his reputation. But he was rehabilitated in the anglophone philosophical world, partly through the efforts of his distinguished German-American translator Walter Kaufmann, who published a landmark study of Nietzsche shortly after the Second World War.⁵⁶ In the past decades, Nietzsche scholarship has grown into an increasingly sophisticated philosophical sub-discipline, carrying forward the sort of rigorous philosophical-reconstructive work practiced on Kant and Hegel, and the philosophical figures preceding them.

His influence on 20th century thought was profound. Freud offers a drive-psychological picture of human beings, and theory of unconscious motivation, that is very much in the vein of Nietzsche. Heidegger, drawing heavily on Nietzsche's notebooks, gives an extensive series of lectures on Nietzsche in the 1930s, which will place Nietzsche as the last figure in what Heidegger saw as the history of metaphysics. Foucault will take up the practice of genealogy, extending its methods beyond the phenomena that Nietzsche himself considered, in order to explore different ones, and citing considerably more concrete evidence in the process. He will write about the treatment of the mentally ill (and the very idea of "madness" as a kind of illness), methods of punishment, medical perception, sexuality, and other topics. Power, a Nietzschean notion recast in a Foucaultian inflection, will figure centrally in all these accounts.

After decades of near-total neglect, Nietzsche also is now having increasing influence in anglophone philosophy as well. Bernard Williams, one of the most important moral philosophers of the 20th century, and a philosopher in many respects firmly in the analytic tradition, took a keen interest in Nietzsche, and a number of other prominent moral

⁵⁶ Kaufmann (1974 [1950]).

philosophers have taken his views into account, including Philippa Foot, Derek Parfit, Susan Wolf, R. Jay Wallace, and others. In his monumental tome, *On What Matters*, Parfit, though no friend of Nietzsche's views, admits that he is the "most influential and admired moral philosopher of the last two centuries," and devotes several chapters to engaging with Nietzsche's views.⁵⁷

Nietzsche's influence reaches not just to philosophy, but into the arts and culture more broadly. Yeats, Mahler, Mann, Musil, Rilke, Hesse, Kubrick, and many others were deeply inspired by Nietzsche. Given Nietzsche's thoroughgoing concern with matters of culture, this wide reach is at least as important to him as affecting change in philosophical debate alone.

Though he is, in one sense, unquestionably a canonical philosophical figure, Nietzsche is also, in another sense, a kind of philosophical outsider. There are various reasons for this.⁵⁸ But the most profound reason, I suspect, is that Nietzsche was not especially interested in the bread and butter of philosophy, as practiced in the anglophone world, and by many of his historical predecessors: making fine-grained distinctions, making careful arguments with premises leading ineluctably to a conclusion. He wants instead to diagnose a crisis in Western culture, and to point the way beyond it. Like those he labels "genuine philosophers" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he hopes to give us a new "for Whither and What" for humankind. Brilliant diagnostician though he was, Nietzsche, it is fair to say, did not succeed at this hugely ambitious task, if success would mean that his preferred vision took hold and gained sufficient ascendancy. But more than perhaps any philosopher in

⁵⁷ Parfit (2011), p. 570

⁵⁸ See the discussion in Loeb (2017).

history, he confronts us with searching, unsettling reflections on the values we hold, and offers an exalted—if ultimately unrealizable and indeed somewhat unpalatable—vision of what might replace them.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Ken Gemes and John Shand for their comments on drafts of this piece.

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Works by Nietzsche

Works by Nietzsche are cited by section number using the following abbreviations and translations, which I have modified where I've thought appropriate.

A = *The Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
 BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
 BT = *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs
 D = *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale
 EH = *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
 ENB= *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, trans. Löb, ed. Geuss and Nehamas
 GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann/ *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Clark and Swenson.
 GS = *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
 HH = *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale
 TSZ = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
 WP = *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale

In works that comprise several individual essays, after the abbreviation is the essay number (as a Roman numeral) and section number (as an arabic numeral). For example, GM, I:2 is *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I, Section 2. In works that include titled main sections, I include a key word for that section, followed by subsection numbers, if applicable. For example, TI, "Socrates," 1 is the *Twilight of the Idols* section "The Problem of Socrates," subsection 1.

For the German I rely on the following, cited by volume and page number.
 KSA= *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Colli and Montinari (de Gruyter).

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