Introduction

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I. THE NIETZSCHE PHENOMENON

Anyone who has heard anything about Nietzsche has probably heard him associated with many of the following phrases: God is dead. Everything, all of nature and certainly the human world, is will to power, a constant zero-sum game struggle for dominance and mastery. Judaism and Christianity are slave moralities. The motivation for and the meaning of the Christian religion reside in a feeling of "*ressentiment*" against the stronger, the masters. The Christian moral tradition has culminated in nihilism. Nihilism means "Nothing is true; everything is allowed." Contemporary morality is herd morality. We require now a transvaluation of values, and it must be beyond good and evil. The representative of these new values will be an Overman or Superman (*Übermensch*). Everything recurs eternally. There are no objective values or universal moral principles. All understanding is perspectival. Even "physics" is an "interpretation." "One law for the lion and the lamb" is unacceptable; true human excellence is possible only for an elite few. Our sense of conscious control over what to believe and what to do is an illusion. Consciousness itself is an illusion.

These ideas occur in works that often have hyper-dramatic, apocalyptic titles, as if to suggest some great historical moment was upon us, all written in a "loud," hyperbolic, often figurative style: *The Dawn*, *The Joyous Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Anti-Christ*, *The Twilight of the Idols*. There is even a book *The Will to Power*, often referred to and cited by scholars, that is not a book at all, but a collection of his notes, his *Nachlass*, arranged by his nutty sister to suit more her ends than his. Some of these books seem to be little more than collections of aphorisms; some look like sociological or historical essays; others read like religious sermons, or prophecies, or biblical imitations, or political pamphlets. Some seem to be all of the above at once. Moreover, these books are often treated as exemplifying phases in the development of Nietzsche's

thought; early, middle, and late, usually. And scholars argue about whether, and if so how much, Nietzsche changed his mind throughout these periods.

Such widespread notoriety for Nietzsche's ideas – that is, the way his ideas have become labeled, overly familiar, T-shirt material even – and the highly unusual and unprecedented literary form of his published works, and the uncertainty about what he believed when and about how to make use of his unpublished notes, have all understandably made it difficult for both friendly and hostile commentators and critics to settle on any common view of Nietzsche's philosophy and his legacy. In many significant cases, there is not even agreement about what the controversies, the opposing sides, are. Some of the terms and catchphrases are so familiar that they have become clichés and we take too much for granted in invoking them. How could God have died, for example? If Nietzsche means that the existence of God has become less credible for people, then for which people, and why not say that instead of that he died (and that we killed him but cannot own up to the fact)? Why is the Overman mentioned so infrequently if he is so important? For that matter why does Zarathustra, who first introduces him, stop mentioning him around the middle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? What could Nietzsche mean by the "will to power" for human beings when he denies that there is any psychological faculty like the will? Why does he say that "truth is a woman" and philosophers are clumsy lovers? And so on.

Not surprisingly, this has all led to wide variations in the reception of Nietzsche's works. He was largely unknown during his brief lifetime, or at least during his life of sanity. (Nietzsche was born in October of 1844, and went mad in Turin in January of 1889 at the age of forty-four. He lived another ten years before dying in August of 1900.) His books sold poorly, and he lived a somewhat isolated and lonely life. But as with the fate of some artists who start to sell only after they have died, after Nietzsche went insane, and during the period between 1890 and 1918, he became world famous, the originator of a kind of avant-garde philosophy, a philosophy in style and substance and atmosphere like avant-garde and modernist movements in art, music, and literature. Those who found official bourgeois culture philistine, materialistic, small-minded, smug, self-satisfied, and conformist found a voice in Nietzsche, as did those who found it sexually repressive, timid, boring, and hostile to change.

This all began to change during and immediately after the First World War, and the legacy of this change in the perception of Nietzsche remained until well after the Second World War. (For some critics it is still a justifiable association.) For Nietzsche was claimed during the war by the nationalist right in Germany as a philosopher who appreciated the glories

of "strength," war, militarism, and the need for a revival of the German *Volk*. And he was just as eagerly associated with those traits and views by the English propaganda machine. That common three-quarters profile of the glaring Nietzsche, with the huge moustache, became a staple of such war propaganda against "the Hun." The Germans had started the war because they were by nature war-mongers and power hungry, and you could see all those traits in that typical German philosopher, Nietzsche.[1]

In effect this all led to the fact that Nietzsche would be ultimately claimed not by the traditional right in Germany, the aristocratic, religious (often Catholic), land-owning right, but by the *petit bourgeois* "radical right" and their "intellectuals," the core of what would become the Nazi movement. Their complaint was, they thought, Nietzsche's, that the West had sunk into nihilism, a diffident toleration of morally corrosive groups, a sterile cosmopolitanism, all the dangerous traits typical of democracies, and had adopted a foolishly narrow reliance on reason as a guide to life. And the solution was to create a new mythology and a radical reformation of German society. Such an association of Nietzsche with a "blood and soil" irrationalism would be cemented further by his popularity among the hacks and propagandists who became the official Nazi "philosophers." Nietzsche, who had nothing but contempt for nationalism and was often as brutal a critic of German culture and history as Heine, nevertheless found himself painted with the same anti-Nazi brush, and it would be some time before his thought could be discussed in any way not shadowed by this association.

It is also true that in this same period, Nietzsche had become important for social critics of bureaucratized bourgeois society (like Max Weber), and he would also become important for the "critical theory" brand of neo-Marxism. Nietzsche's genealogical method, applied to morality, was an important example of what they considered to be "ideology critique," and Nietzsche's suspicions about the Enlightenment, especially about the pretension of some social group to authority on the basis of some appeal to a supposedly disinterested, neutral standard of rationality, resonated with such thinkers. His influence was easy to see in later books like Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[2] However it would take a full generation after the Second World War before Nietzsche could be again

[1] I follow here the very helpful account by Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[2] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002). The book first appeared in 1944.

claimed by the left, especially by the "68'ers" dissatisfied with the prudent, rational moderation of traditional liberalism.

For after the Second World War, all things German were under suspicion of some sort of intellectual complicity with Nazism. Many thinkers like Hegel and Nietzsche and Heidegger (who became a party member) were listed as enemies of "the open society," and Germany itself was thought to be haunted by a dark, romantic, irrationalist, counter-Enlightenment specter. In the case of Nietzsche, his rehabilitation or decontamination in Anglophone philosophy in essence began in 1950 with the publication of Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*.[3] Kaufmann occupied a position of great academic importance in America (he was a philosophy professor at Princeton) and was a noted translator and critic as well. His book argued in detail against characterizations of Nietzsche as anti-Semitic, as a totalitarian thinker, or as a German nationalist, and he tried to show that Nietzsche was not just an avant-gardist of importance to the literary and artistic worlds, but that he was a challenging, even a great, original philosopher in his own right. Arthur Danto's 1964 book, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*,[4] was also an important if somewhat isolated event, and in the 1970s there finally began to appear high-quality secondary literature such as John Wilcox's 1974 book, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*,[5] and Tracy Strong's 1975 book on Nietzsche and politics, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*.[6] And when the Routledge "Arguments of the Philosophers" series brought out Richard Schacht's lengthy 1983 book *Nietzsche*,[7] the idea that Nietzsche, whatever else he was doing in his books, was making philosophical claims and devising ways to defend them, was becoming more firmly established.

By the mid-1980s, it was also widely known that Nietzsche had become an unavoidable figure in Europe – in France, Germany, and Italy especially. Heidegger's lecture courses on Nietzsche in the 1930s and 1940s had been published in German in the early 1960s and an English translation had appeared in the late 1970s. Books by Sarah Kofman, Giles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean Granier, Gianni Vatimo, Pierre Klossowski, and Karl Löwith had also claimed Nietzsche as a philosopher, but in a very different way from in Anglophone work. The latter tended to be organized in the traditional sub-disciplines of professional philosophy and so treated Nietzsche's epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, value theory, moral psychology, etc. as distinct separable themes, and he was said to have

[3] Princeton University Press, 1975. [4] repr. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
[5] Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974. [6] repr. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
[7] repr. New York: Routledge, 1985.

a "perspectivist" epistemology, a relativist moral theory, and so forth. The European approaches tended to treat very sweeping issues in what might loosely be called accounts of possible meaning in language and thought (or even "the meaning of being") and the possibility of meaningfulness in action, and they portrayed Nietzsche as having much more radical positions, not subsumable in the traditional categories of the profession. An important book during this period was Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Literature as Life*.[8] Nehamas was able to show convincingly that Nietzsche's philosophy was not subject to the "self-refutation" and other paradoxes into which Nietzsche's critique of "truth" or his insistence that "there were no facts, only interpretations," or his anti-dogmatism were taken to have led him. And Nehamas also took up some of the themes of the European commentators, especially the importance of the unusual style of Nietzsche's writings and the omnipresent need for interpretation in any relation to the world and in the self's very relation to itself. Nehamas argued that these all needed to be modeled on the relation of an author to a text.

More recently, many philosophers interested in Nietzsche have focused attention on what appear to be Nietzsche's doubts about the transparency of consciousness to itself, doubts that the way things *seem* to a subject of thoughts and deeds, apparently "in charge" of what it decides to believe and do, can be correct. In some passages, Nietzsche appears to appeal to non-conscious and corporeal factors ("instincts" or "drives") as the proper *explicans* of conscious phenomena like believing or acting, and he appears to claim that these causal determinants of behavior operate, as it were, "behind the back" of what is accessible to consciousness. As the interest in "naturalizing" epistemology, moral theory, and aesthetics grows apace in Anglophone philosophy, interest in Nietzsche as a forerunner and interesting defender of such claims has also grown.[9]

II. THE NIETZSCHE PROBLEM

As already noted, Nietzsche does not state positions and argue for them in the manner traditional in modern philosophy; he does not write extended essays with chains of argument, considerations of counter-arguments and counter-examples, and there is widespread disagreement about how to understand his very different works, works which are different both from the tradition and from each other. But even though most of his work is

[8] Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

[9] Richard Schacht and John Richardson have published important interpretations of a "naturalist" Nietzsche but probably the most influential work has been by Brian Leiter.

diagnostic and critical, he does seem almost everywhere concerned with various dimensions of what he would recognize as the chief Socratic question (even though he disagreed vigorously with Socrates's supposedly "dogmatic" answer): how ought one to live? It is true that he denies there is any "one size fits all" answer to this question, but he clearly believes that some sorts of answers – a life of Christian piety, or Kantian moral rectitude, or a devotion to the "ascetic ideal" – cannot be successful answers, at least not *now*, and these arguments alone inevitably imply something about how one ought to live now. And he does explicitly, if often figuratively, sketch out some traits required for anyone to live well.

So even though in the early writings he was worried about many of the implications of an overly historicized perspective on ourselves, there is no question that Nietzsche thinks that something in the shared form of life characteristic of modern European societies – their inheritance of a Christian and so universalist view of morality, and both the Greek and modern enlightenments' "faith" in the value of truth – has gone dead in some way. Various propositions may still evoke assent; we avow belief and commitment, but, he seems to say, these are not deeply held commitments, capable of inspiring great sacrifice. (People may still go to church on Sunday but they do not live genuinely Christian lives, as Kierkegaard might put a similar point.) And so any possible answer we can give to such a Socratic question must take account of our living in the shadow of this event. The two most prominent names for such crisis are, in the published work, the death of God, and, in those works as well but especially in the unpublished notes, "nihilism." (In the Prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche also makes in a literary way the paradoxical point that one of the chief features of such a crisis, a feature that seems to drive him to rhetorical desperation, is that it is unnoticed. People are perfectly satisfied and experience no disorienting loss.) Sometimes the problem itself is described as a kind of failure of desire, as if there is nothing worth wanting, at least not badly enough to help organize a life, give it direction. People don't want the sorts of things that could serve this life-orienting function. They certainly want things, perhaps even greatly want them: security, peace, comfort, pleasure. But, Nietzsche seems to think, these are precisely the sorts of essentially unimportant things that must be risked if anything worthwhile is to be achieved.

Typically, almost all these points are made in an imagistic way. So in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, he notes that our long struggle with and often opposition to and dissatisfaction with our own moral tradition, European Christianity, has created a "magnificent tension (*Spannung*) of

spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals." But, he goes on, the "democratic enlightenment" also sought to "unbend" such a bow, "to insure that spirit should not experience itself so readily as 'need.'"[10] This latter formulation coincides with a neatly made point in *The Gay Science*. In discussing "the millions of young Europeans who cannot endure boredom and themselves," he notes that they would even welcome "a yearning to suffer something in order to make their suffering a likely reason for action, for deeds." In sum: "neediness is needed!" (*Not ist nötig*.)[11] Another imagistic formulation of the death of desire occurs in *Ecce Homo* in a passage that has not been much commented on, even though it is a concise expression of the uniqueness of his position. He notes what is happening to us as " . . . one error after another is calmly put on ice; *the ideal is not refuted – it freezes to death –*."[12]

In §38 of *The Twilight of the Idols*, a section called "Expeditions of an untimely man" in a passage called "My conception of freedom," Nietzsche offers a kind of counter-picture to the psychological complacency of "the last men," the rather bovine, self-satisfied creatures Zarathustra must try to rouse to action and a new way of life. By contrast what one needs is

> That one has the will to self-responsibility. That one preserves the distance that divides us. That one has become more indifferent to hardship, toil, privation, even to life. The man who has become free . . . spurns the contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats. The free man is a warrior.[13]

The passage goes on like this, praising danger, risk, and strength, but, as he tries to characterize what he calls "psychologically true" (*psychologisch wahr*) about freedom, Nietzsche adds something that is easy to overlook.

> How is freedom measured, individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay aloft. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome.

But such a constant self-overcoming, if left at this, is an oddly formal criterion. Nietzsche clearly does not think that Christian ascetic practices

[10] *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 4, translation altered.
[11] *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §56, p. 64.
[12] *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 116, translation altered.
[13] Ibid., p. 92.

such as fasting and self-flagellation, the constant attempt to overcome the desires and demands of the body, however difficult and even futile, are admirable. The struggle against resistance and the willingness to endure and persevere are obviously markers of a sort for the kind of commitment that Nietzsche is searching for under contemporary conditions, but such a picture is incomplete without some sense of the goal for the sake of which such struggle is undertaken.

And with that question we come to what must be the most frequently asked question, not just by long-time devoted readers but by students encountering Nietzsche for the first time. As anyone who has taught Nietzsche to the young realizes, he was not exaggerating very much when he described himself this way in *Ecce Homo*: "I am no man. I am dynamite." The confidence and rhetorical power with which he attacks the Christian religion and institutions like morality and the culture of commercial republics can be both thrilling and shattering to first-time readers. But almost everyone, when they have caught their breath and started thinking, always asks: "But how *does* he think we ought to live? What is he affirming?"

In one respect of course, such a question, if understood in a certain way, betrays a deep misunderstanding of Nietzsche. He clearly wants to answer, as Zarathustra does at the end of "The Spirit of Gravity" section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "'This – it turns out – is *my* way – where is yours?' That is how I answered those who asked me 'the way.' *The* way after all – it does not exist!"[14] But it would also be bad faith to pretend that we are left with *no* sort of Nietzschean response to the Socratic question, even if that response will not be a new catechism or rule-book. We have already seen that what he is dissatisfied with inevitably suggests something of what he approves of. And even if such an approval is "just an interpretation" or even "only his interpretation," and even if he is not trying to convince us that his is "true," that it is the only response and suggestion possible, he is clearly trying to change our minds about what is central to any state of living well. What is central is, characteristically, presented in a complexly figurative way.

III. NIETZSCHE'S IDEAL: "*AMOR FATI*"

This is the formulation he introduces in the *The Gay Science* and returns to ever after:

[14] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. R. Pippin and A. del Caro (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 156.

> . . . I, too, want to say what I wish from myself today and what thought first crossed my heart this year – what thought shall be the reason, warrant and sweetness of the rest of my life! I want to learn more and more to see what is necessary in things as beautiful – thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: Let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer![15]

In *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, the stress is on necessity again, and he insists explicitly that with respect to everything necessary, "one should not only bear it, one should love it. *Amor fati*, that is my innermost nature."[16] The key to all this, and so the key to being able to "love life" again, is, apparently, "only, one loves differently . . . It is the love of a woman who makes us doubt."[17] So this appears to add another condition to "learning to see the necessary as beautiful"; to wit: loving a different way, as in loving someone about whose love for us we are always in doubt. All this is intriguing, perhaps, but certainly not immediately helpful.

The two last published references occur in *Ecce Homo*. In the section on *The Case of Wagner*, he again says that what is "necessary" does not injure him and that *amor fati* is "his innermost nature."[18] In "Why I am so Clever," he concludes by stressing again that what is important to him is being able to love one's fate.[19]

> My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it – all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary – but love it.[20]

Now Nietzsche himself made up the phrase *amor fati*, obviously trying to allude to Spinoza's intellectual love of God, *amor intellectus dei*, and also clearly trying to suggest an ancient pedigree that might help us understand the key terms of necessity, beauty, and love as the chief requirements now for any sort of – however various – greatness. So we need to introduce elements of Nietzsche's treatment of the Greeks to understand what he was trying to say.

In 1870, in one of the several works and lectures that ultimately form the material of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the essay "The Birth of Tragic Thinking"

[15] *The Gay Science*, §276, p. 157. [16] *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ*, Epilogue §1.
[17] Ibid. [18] *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ*, §4.
[19] "Why I am so Clever," in *The Anti-Christ*, §4.
[20] *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ*, §10.

("Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens"), Nietzsche praises the Greeks for what in reality he himself invented as a category – the notion of a tragic view of life itself, *a way of life* embodied and worked out in the tragic dramas. He says, as he does in his first publication and several times later, that the Greeks did not have a religion of duty or ascetic practices or intellectuality (*Geistigeit*), but a "religion of life (*eine Religion des Lebens*)," one in which all their aesthetic forms breathed out the "triumph of existence, an abundant feeling of life."[21] This is something that, in the context of his critique of asceticism and his characterization of Christianity as "life turning against life," is high praise. It is in this context that he says the deepest wisdom of this religion was that "even the gods are subject to necessity" (*Ananke*), a remark that again seems to suggest resignation or at least something other than the "triumph of existence." But somehow the absolute inescapability of *Ananke*, even for the beings imagined to be as great as it was possible to imagine beings to be, made their enthusiastic and full-hearted embrace of such an existence *in spite of that* all the more beautiful and, to note again what we are trying to understand, *thereby* (because beautiful) affirmable, even lovable.

This notion of affirmation is not just the expression of the so-called "early Nietzsche." Indeed the role of the god who sums up this affirmation, Dionysus, grows again in importance in the so-called "late period." (Dionysus is an appropriate divinity to evoke fate and even the Eternal Return version of Nietzschean fatalism because of his status as a birth-life-death-rebirth god, a symbol of the indestructibility of life, even in its necessity.) One passage from (the late period) *Twilight of the Idols* (1888) is particularly telling:

> Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types – *that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge . . . but in order to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity – that joy which included even joy in destroying.[22]

So when Nietzsche appeals to *amor fati* (relatively early, or early middle, in *Gay Science* (1882)) and late (in *Ecce Homo* (1888)), we can expect a continuity of the same enthusiasm for this "religion of life," but we also

[21] *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), Bd. I, "Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens," p. 588.
[22] *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ*, §6.