

Introduction

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I

Although very few copies of Friedrich Nietzsche's published works were sold during the productive part of his life prior to his mental collapse in 1889 at the age of 44, in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century he quickly became the best-known and most influential German writer and thinker. This was especially, but not exclusively, so in German-speaking countries, where he gained fame primarily as a ferocious critic of Christianity, religion in general, traditional morality, and liberal democratic and socialist politics. He then quickly also became well known internationally as one of the first "avant-garde" philosophers – more, in his own words, an "artist, shaman and seducer" than a traditional philosopher. And he did not lack confidence.

My writings have been described as lessons in suspicion and even as lessons in contempt, but luckily also as lessons in courage and boldness. In fact, I don't personally believe that anyone has ever looked at the world with such thorough-going suspicion, not merely as a hypothetical devil's advocate, but moreover, theologically speaking, as an enemy and challenger of God. (*Human, All Too Human*, pref., 1)

Like many great German thinkers, Nietzsche's formative years were spent in a Protestant vicarage. He was born in 1844, and his father, a Lutheran pastor, died in 1849. For six years from 1859 to 1864 he

attended the famous Saxon boarding school Landesschule zur Pforte, where his extraordinary gifts for Latin, Greek, and German literature were readily apparent. Just as early on, however, Nietzsche's health began to show signs of frailty. Following intense and highly successful, even legendary studies in Bonn and Leipzig, at the tender age of 24 Nietzsche became a professor of classical philosophy at one of the oldest European universities, the University of Basel.

A decade later Nietzsche was forced to abandon his teaching post for health reasons. Supported by a small pension from the university, he became an itinerant, traveling between Turin in Italy, France, and Sils Maria in Upper Engadine, Switzerland. Despite his nomadic existence, or perhaps even because of it, he maintained an exceptional rate of productivity. The first volume of *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* appeared in 1878, followed by *The Dawn: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (1881), *The Gay Science* (1882), and the widely read philosophical poem *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85). In *Zoroaster/Zarathustra*, the founder of Zoroastrianism, Nietzsche saw an alternative to the prophets of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, a counter-gospel for men of the future who were capable of going beyond what was thought humanly possible. In his poem he announced the advent of the “overman,” the *Übermensch*, who proclaimed the goal of the cultivation, and in particular the *self-cultivation*, of “free spirits” capable of the project that would replace the formation of a moral character – a painful and pleasurable project in equal measure, of self-overcoming.

Nietzsche followed the anti-gospel of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* with the prose works now most often taught in university courses: *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morals: Polemic* (1887). This Nietzschean canon, encompassing the late works *Twilight of the Idols (or How to Philosophize with a Hammer)*, *Ecce Homo*, and *The Anti-Christ* from the period 1888–89, and including as well the early works *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872) and *Untimely Meditations* (1873, 1874, 1876), represents two decades of extraordinary creativity and productivity between the ages of 25 and 44.

The story of Nietzsche's reception in the twentieth century is one of the most fascinating episodes in intellectual history. Different aspects of his work were taken up in quite different ways in the UK, France, Italy, and other countries. In Germany he was immediately recognized as one of the great prose stylists of the German language, and his work was and today is still studied extensively in Germanic Studies departments. Heidegger's

lectures on Nietzsche in the 1930s and 1940s were also a decisive influence in philosophy, although the distorted and crude misinterpretations of Nietzsche by the propagandists of the Third Reich have acted as an impediment to his having full standing as a philosopher in the German academy.

In the postwar philosophy in the United States there has been a steady, growing presence of Nietzsche in academic philosophy, and now there is a lively and active community of philosophers writing about the bearing of Nietzsche's work on contemporary issues in epistemology, metaphysics, moral psychology, value theory, and political philosophy. This has also been the case in postwar German academic philosophy, but there are marked differences from the Anglophone approaches. This volume has been assembled to make this interesting work available to the English reader. The German scholarship is more focused on close textual readings, and because of this the interpretations are framed in a way that is closer to Nietzsche's formulations and thus less inflected with the terminology of standard modern philosophical problems. The book is organized as follows.

II

The essays that follow have been grouped into four sections in order to reflect the authors' concerns with the various "aesthetic dimensions" of Nietzsche's work; those more explicitly concerned with philosophical themes; four essays concerned with what may be the most important themes in Nietzsche, the nature of truth, our "will to truth," the "value of truth," and the relation between all these themes and power, especially the famous "will to power"; and a concluding section on Nietzsche's treatment of religion, especially Christianity and religiosity in his own work in general. Some of the essays are more scholarly and historical, some more systematic. All have been important in postwar German scholarship on Nietzsche.

The collection begins with a justly famous essay by Ernst Behler about the various treatments of, incorporation of, and critique of the literary trope of irony in Nietzsche's work. On the one hand, it is obvious that Nietzsche thinks some forms of irony, what he often called "romantic irony" (Nietzsche sometimes contrasted his own approval of classicism with Romanticism), were manifestations of and contributed to a widespread cultural enervation or weakness – "decadence." On the other hand, much

of his own work is saturated with irony, both as a rhetorical technique and in a more Socratic way, through the use of personae or “masks” in contexts and on issues where one might expect him to speak more straightforwardly in his own voice. Behler locates Nietzsche in the long modern tradition of German discussions and evaluations of irony, connects Nietzsche’s interest in this topic with the value of truth (or the value of speaking the truth), and then joins Nietzsche’s concerns with the German discussion of Constant’s famous treatment of a putative duty to tell the truth unconditionally.

This is followed by an important discussion by Richard Klein about a topic of great interest to Nietzsche, at once aesthetic, philosophical, and deeply personal: music. Klein wants to know the answer to a simple scholarly question: how good is Nietzsche’s music criticism, especially his famous enthusiasm and then contempt for Wagner? Klein notes that no one before Nietzsche, not even the most enthusiastic romantic, had ever claimed that the most important philosophical event of the era was a piece of music, and Klein assesses the implications of this remarkable early claim. The uses (and abuses) of Wagner are various, but Klein concentrates on how Nietzsche made use of Wagner as a kind of weapon against historicism, even while also finally accepting the modernism of Wagner’s music.

Volker Gerhardt, in the well-known and influential article reprinted here, addresses an early theme of Nietzsche’s that is perhaps the best-known element in Nietzsche’s inauguration of a kind of avant-garde philosophy, as avant-garde and revolutionary as modernism in the arts: the claim that the proper “justification” of existence is an “aesthetic justification” (and so, by implication, not philosophical or rational). In order to explore the obvious tension in this idea (how could an aesthetic presentation or treatment “justify” anything?), Gerhardt suggests that we try to appreciate the moral relevance for Nietzsche of the problem of meaning, and look deeper into the category of the aesthetic as understood by Nietzsche. Framed this way, the claim is that Nietzsche is conceding that life itself constantly raises the question “why live?”, and that he does not want an answer that comes from a theoretical or reflective stance (a kind of response that already assumes an answer to the question), but wants an answer that is continuous with participation in life itself. Pursuing this theme introduces such large issues as the primacy of the practical in Nietzsche, the connection between that theme and earlier German philosophy, and something like the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic and of aesthetic justification.

Annemarie Pieper focuses not so much on Nietzsche’s treatment of art and aesthetics as on actual literary elements in his work, especially the

important but opaque and unnatural kind of epochal transition suggested by the three “metamorphoses” announced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, from camel to lion to child. Pieper treats these figures as aspects of Nietzsche’s interest in typological psychology, one similar to explanations that assume a “character is destiny” guiding principle. The animal metaphors used by Nietzsche provide her with an opening for discussing the sorts of mindedness appropriate to distinct moral practices and the further literary images and metaphors that Nietzsche uses to express his most important psychological ideas (for the camel: weight, heaviness, existence itself as a burden; for the lion: lordship over its domain and an initial, rather crude sense of freedom – freedom “hunted as prey,” as Pieper puts it – and an internal struggle that will begin the transformation of the central maxim from “Thou shalt not” into “I will” and finally to a kind of refound innocence, or the second innocence of a child). This in turn opens out on a large tropological theater of sorts in which Nietzsche’s thought must be understood, particularly, in terms of a large array of animal images (not just camels and lions, but dragons, cows, eagles, serpents), for which Pieper provides a user’s guide.

The next section contains three essays that deal with aspects of Nietzsche’s appropriation and critique of the prior philosophical tradition. Tilman Borsche shows us the significance of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the pre-Socratics; how he refused to see them as mere predecessors or foreshadowings of Socrates and Plato, but believed they represented a radically different way of doing philosophy altogether, and so a different engagement with the central ancient philosophical question: how to live. Borsche also begins to critically assess some of Nietzsche’s most famous specific claims about these figures, especially Heraclitus and the so-called innocence of nature (that the course of nature should be understood as being like the play of an artist or a child innocently building and then destroying sandcastles), and shows how much Nietzsche’s views about and use of these early philosophers (in his proposals for philosophical therapy) change over the course of his career.

Henning Ottmann’s wide-ranging piece discusses Nietzsche’s attitudes toward both the ancient or first philosophical enlightenment and the modern enlightenment, and shows us the misleading simplicity of labeling Nietzsche simply an irrationalist or anti-Enlightenment thinker. (Ottmann demonstrates that he is actually closer to the famous position of Horkheimer and Adorno – that the modern Enlightenment becomes a form of unenlightened mythology, that it turns against itself.) Once Nietzsche had decided that neither Wagner’s music nor his own

philosophy would be able to reanimate the tragic sensibility of the ancient Greeks, he came more and more, especially through his early notion of the free spirit, to recast himself as a kind of enlightenment thinker, albeit one concerned almost exclusively with *self*-enlightenment. Ottmann also shows us how much of Nietzsche's own attitude toward such enlightenment and liberation is an inheritance from Epicurean and Stoic themes.

Otfried Höffe focuses on one of the core issues in the institution of Christian and Kantian morality, promise making and promise keeping, and takes us deep into the heart of the opening sections of Essay Two of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche's naturalistic account of "breeding" an animal able to make and keep promises. Höffe shows us that Nietzsche's deepest objection to Kant rests on the claim that the ability to execute a promise "just because one had promised" is an *acquired* capacity, and that this has to change our understanding of the nature of the duty and the status of morality itself. For one thing, it certainly affects our egalitarian intuitions about promising if only *some* are entitled to promise. Höffe argues that there are three stages to Nietzsche's developmental account: the stage of premorality, the achievement of a certain sort of reliability, and, finally, the phase of autonomy and what Höffe calls "super-morality." So like Kant, Nietzsche has borrowed a concept from legal theory as his supreme ideal, not autonomy but *sovereignty*, and Höffe concludes by explaining this difference and its importance to Nietzsche.

The third section contains four essays that are concerned with the most philosophically controversial aspects of Nietzsche's corpus, his account of truth, the value of truth, and what appears to be his own theory about a deep or fundamental philosophical truth, the doctrine of the will to power. We begin with a seminal essay by one of the most important postwar German Nietzsche commentators, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter. Müller-Lauter wants to know to what extent what Nietzsche calls his account of the will to power is a metaphysical doctrine (given that, for many, Nietzsche should represent, epitomize even, the end of metaphysics). Müller-Lauter takes us through both the scholarly and conceptual issues associated with this doctrine: scholarly because the theme raises the problem of the use of Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, and the controversial "non-book," the purported masterwork that never appeared, *The Will to Power*; conceptual because, according to Müller-Lauter, there is not one "doctrine" but many doctrines, and he argues that we should resist the temptation for an easy assimilation of them all into one master thought. The consistency of any of these doctrines and Nietzsche's own

“perspectivism,” as well as his claim about the omnipresence of “interpretations” (not “facts”), also must be addressed, and Müller-Lauter does so.

Perspectivism is the main issue of Kaulbach’s contribution. Here it is placed within a central conflict in Nietzsche’s thought, between the notion of an epistemic neutrality and the moral view that goes along with such a notion, all on the one hand, and a perspectival epistemology and morality on the other. The main issue Kaulbach wants to raise concerns how we should interpret the role of the will, or volition in general, in any genealogical account of the establishment of a perspective, an establishing often said to be done “for the sake of” some valued life. This, Nietzsche makes clear, cannot be understood as an arbitrary posit, or a *causa sui*, and this leads Kaulbach to Nietzsche’s frequent metaphors for understanding the internal dynamics of a perspective: the problem of commanding and obeying, something like the internal political dynamics of the soul.

In his contribution Alfred Schmidt makes use of a non-Nietzschean interpretive concept, dialectic, a concept that would appear to be in some tension with Nietzsche’s apparent emphasis on such things as chance, luck, blind fate, and so forth. But Schmidt points out the extraordinary claim of *Genealogy* ¶27, where Nietzsche writes that all great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation. (The Hegelian term for such a dialectical resolution, *Aufhebung*, actually occurs with some frequency in Nietzsche.) And he cites other similarities and parallels. Nietzsche’s critique of reason is actually a critique of a narrow, positivistic Enlightenment conception of reason; there is no such thing as pure, neutral, or disinterested knowledge in Nietzsche, but that is not part of an argument against genuine knowledge. There is even a kind of “chemistry” of interrelated concepts in Nietzsche’s accounts; a norm or value can be shown to develop out of its opposite; there is attention to the “falsifying” results of language use, while it is also clear that language itself provides the means of breaking its own spell. Schmidt concludes by pointing out similarities even between Nietzsche and Marx. For example, both are great critics of the “overestimation” of conscious life.

The third section closes with Rüdiger Bittner’s essay on Nietzsche’s concept of truth. Bittner carefully summarizes and classifies both the various apparently outrageous and self-contradictory things Nietzsche says about truth (for example, there isn’t any, or “Truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions” [TL 1]) and many of the interpretive attempts to, in effect, save him from himself. Bittner is not convinced by these attempts, nor by what he can find in Nietzsche, but he

does offer an original suggestion in closing about what Nietzsche may have meant by “interpretation.” Bittner suggests that, somewhat paradoxically, this language is actually part of a new Nietzschean view of nature.

In the final section, two essays discuss Nietzsche’s lifelong engagement with religion and the role of religiosity in human life. Jörg Salaquarda offers a sensitive interpretation of what might be called the most important religious (or at least mythical) element in Nietzsche’s own thought, the eternal return of the same. Salaquarda explores such unusual and neglected issues as the proper “addressee” of the thought experiment or expression of faith, or whatever the eternal return “thought” is supposed to be, the presumed psychological results of the experiment (especially its relation to solitude), and the role of the “demon” in its expression, and he concludes with a wide-ranging discussion of what he calls Nietzsche’s “mysticism.”

The collection concludes with Werner Stegmaier’s discussion of two late works, *The Anti-Christ* and Nietzsche’s autobiography of sorts, *Ecce Homo*. (Following Montinari, Stegmaier argues that these are the books Nietzsche decided to publish instead of *The Will to Power*. For Stegmaier, these two works are not just personal statements of Nietzsche’s hatred of Christianity and of his self-glorification; they have systematic significance for his work as a whole.) The themes that *Ecce Homo* force on us provide Stegmaier with an opportunity for a more general and systematic reflection on Nietzsche’s *oeuvre*; themes like self-knowledge, what Nietzsche expected from his audience, as well as his final reflections on “the Jesus type” and Christianity in general (that “progressively cruder misunderstanding” [A 37]). Nietzsche’s own understanding of Jesus, the church’s misunderstanding of Jesus, and the role of both in Nietzsche’s final understanding of himself as the “Anti-Christ” are woven together with a continuing reference to how Nietzsche understood what appears to be his central or master concept, the will to power. Stegmaier concludes with a discussion of how the later reflections on Dionysus bring Nietzsche’s project to a kind of self-conscious culmination.

The reader is asked to note that in several essays certain forms of language are used that reflect the era in which the essays were written.