



*The* Agonist

Volume XIV, Issue I, Fall 2020  
with Guest Editor  
Dr. Martine Prange

NIETZSCHE  
& SPORT

# The Agonist

Volume XIV, Issue I, Fall 2020

## Nietzsche and Sport

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## Introduction to Nietzsche and Sports

### Introduction

According to a letter to his mother and sister, which Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) sent from Schulpforta in March 1863, there was a 'ball', on which occasion the older schoolboys played quite well, but his class didn't.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche is referring to a school festival here, and the play his class performed was Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager*.<sup>2</sup> Despite his veneration of the intoxicating and overly dramatic God Dionysus, Nietzsche was quite the opposite type, as a school boy; 'Fritz', as his mother and sister called him, was the typical introvert bookworm, who liked to read and play the piano, but couldn't stand noise and rough play, let alone sports. And whilst modern sports were upcoming in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe, Nietzsche indeed only mentions the word 'sport' once, in a reference to erotic chase.<sup>3</sup> 'Sportsmen' are referred to only once in his works, again in 1887, i.e., in *On the Genealogy of Morals* III 17, in a metaphorical sense.<sup>4</sup>

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1 KSB 1: 232.

2 Benders/ Oettermann, *Friedrich Nietzsche Chronik in Bildern und Texten*, Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000, 95.

3 NL 1887 – 10[53] (KSA 12: 482).

4 GM III 17 (KSA 5: 379).

So, Nietzsche's own lived experiences with sports seem to be confined to horseback-riding, which he learned together with his best friend Erwin Rohde in early 1868, and hiking, which he did daily and with fervent ardor after his early retirement in 1879 from university life.<sup>5</sup> Legend has it that Nietzsche was a rather talented horse rider and to his own surprise he was chosen for the horse artillery in fall of that same year, in spite of his severe myopia. His riding career ended prematurely in March 1868, though, when, during a too-quickly performed jump, he fell with his breast on the knob at the front of the saddle and ripped several muscles and ligaments and bruised some ribs.<sup>6</sup>

The 'and' in the title 'Nietzsche and Sports' of this issue therefore strikes us as odd: we cannot learn anything from the historical development of sports by looking at Nietzsche's life; Nietzsche doesn't seem to have had any substantial interest in sports, nor did he ever reflect on sports as activity of personal, social or cultural value. He never developed a 'philosophy of sports' e.g., a phenomenological account of movement or an ethics of fair play and a sport[wo]manship. So why this issue on the topic of Nietzsche and sports?

The justification for this issue resides in the application of Nietzsche's thoughts on play and *agon* to contemporary sports culture. Nietzsche's philosophy is marked by two elements that are key for sport studies: his aesthetics and ontology revolve around the concepts of 'play' and 'competition' or '*agon*.' What is more, his ethics rests on the stylization of the self and his anthropology and philosophy of culture are built on the idea of the moral and spiritual transformation of persons from 'camel' figure into 'lion' and

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5 Benders/ Oettermann, 162.

6 Bennders, R., and Oettermann, S., 174.

finally 'child' figure. One of the hallmarks of this transformation is the 'naturalization' and 'aestheticization' of personal belief systems and perception of self and world, turning the hierarchy between body and mind upside down. In so doing, he is the first philosopher of modern philosophy to attach more value to the body than to the mind in epistemological matters.

### *Nietzsche's philosophy of play and **agon***

In Nietzsche's ontology – following Heraclitus – conflict is the source of all things and his primary aesthetic interest lies in the transformation of life's pain and tragic events into beauty.<sup>7</sup> This is clear from his earliest works onwards. Nietzsche's inaugural lecture "Homer and Classical Philology" (1868) and his essay "Homer on Competition" – part of the "Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books" (1872) – attest to his idea that strife is at the core of all things – an idea that later returns in his famous and unfortunately often misunderstood concept 'will to power'. Artistic and sportive competitions made up a great part of the religious festivals in Greece, and Nietzsche refers to those quite a bit, especially in his early works. He claims that aesthetic competition in an international setting is of fundamental importance for the development of high art and that the Germans first need to master the Greek art of competition if they are to become of any importance at all in Europe's artistic culture.<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche's philosophy is permeated by the awareness of the dark side of everything that appears as light and the existential necessity for lightness, serenity, playfulness, and beauty to endure the deep, dark, and highly painful abysses of life. Developing an intense relation with his body, probably under the influence of his ever deeper and longer depressions, his mis-

sion becomes to introduce the body into philosophy. He does so by literally 'transfiguring' his personality, which he considers the product of his physiological-psychological well-being, into philosophical theories and methods of radical critique of Humanism, Christian and Kantian morality, rationalism and Cartesian philosophy of mind.

Had Nietzsche lived in the twentieth century, he might as well have been the first body-phenomenologist and/or philosopher of sports. Or we can honor him still with those titles. His idea of freedom as something that can only be attained by overcoming resistance, and his conviction that humanity can only thrive when approaching life like a child in play with destiny, further strengthen the idea that Nietzsche actually has much to offer to the philosophy of sports. In fact, if we are to develop a philosophy of play and sports, it would be quite an omission not to involve Nietzsche's thoughts on play, *agon* and their value for life.

### **Overview of the articles in this volume**

This is confirmed by underlying articles. These range from Nietzsche's *agonism* applied to the case of pro-wrestling to Nietzsche and sailing, and Phil Jackson's coaching style explained in Nietzschean terms. The originality of these papers shows the breadth of the philosophy of sports, and of the potential of Nietzsche's thought for its expansion and deepening. The philosophy of sports is a relatively new discipline within philosophy and therefore still very much in development. Unfortunately, the ethics of doping is so prominent in this discipline that other topics are often overshadowed by the question of fair play.

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7 Deleuze, 17.

8 See Prange, Martine, *Nietzsche, Wagner, Europe*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.

The articles in this volume show that the value of Nietzsche's thought resides foremost in strengthening other important topics in the philosophy of sports, such as the phenomenological, individual experience of sports and the athletic body; the value of competition for human flourishing; and the aesthetic experience of pleasure and pain as fundamental athletic experiences.

The first article in this volume, "Beyond Face and Heel: Nietzsche's Agonism and the Pro-Wrestling Spectacle" by Abelson, showcases this. Abelson argues that professional wrestling blends athletic and theatrical elements and that the story of a wrestling match is the story of values in conflict, reminiscent of Nietzsche's ideas about *agon*. In this way, wrestling models both the healthy contest (*Wettkampf*) itself and the threat of its disruption (*Vernichtungslust*).

A key point in Abelson's argument concerns the idea that the producers, performers, and consumers of pro-wrestling form a larger community because the spectators are a constitutive part of the spectacle. As such, he claims, the role of the crowd in pro-wrestling bears interesting similarities to that of the chorus in Attic tragedy as Nietzsche conceives it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Like tragedy, pro-wrestling is an idealization of reality, whose very artificiality allows for its aesthetic effect.

Abelson concludes that the character of the wrestlers and their stories as a reflection of the crowd's valuations may lead to new possibilities for the *agon*, and therefore meaning and value creation due to the recent transformation in the makeup of the crowd conducive to flamboyant characters such as Dalton Castle, and openly LGBTQ performers such as Sonny Kiss, Effy and Ashley Vox and women wrestlers entering the sports.

The second article, "Nietzsche, Zarathustra, and the Three Metamorphosis of the Spirit: Possible Contributions to the Concept of Game" by Odilon José Roble, Marcus Vinicius Simões de Campos, and Fidel Machado de Castro Silva discusses how the concept of 'game' is used at the end of the parable "On the Three Metamorphosis of the Spirit" in Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. They acknowledge that Nietzsche did not have in mind discussing the phenomenon of game but nevertheless they claim that his thought may open for us fields of reflection that have been little explored in the philosophy of sports. In the philosophy of sports, (analytic) philosophers follow the definition of Bernard Suits that "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, And Utopia*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2014, 43). With their article, the authors hope to broaden the perspective on our understanding of why human beings are inclined to play games with more of a continental philosophical approach. This is a very important undertaking for the philosophy of sports as a whole, given that Suits' account happens to be the dominant account in the philosophy of sports.

The authors ask, "What possible interpretations about game at the end of the parable could we realize?" "Would this excerpt have some contribution to the reigning notion of game?" They set the specific objective to present a vitalist, affirmative conception of the player spirit. The player spirit is represented by the figure of the child, who creates worlds rather than responding to the world in which it lives. While the camel and the lion still respond to a situation, the child is proactive. It is not interested in the past, only in creating out of the flow of abundance. She doesn't experience life and reality as something to be fled, rejected or changed, but as something she can play with and enjoy. Not the spirit of gravity but a lighthearted spirit rules her. As such, the child at play symbolizes the unity with rather than the fight against life, and affirms its continuous creation and destruction beyond any morality.

In “Sport, Instrument of Nihilism or Praxis of Lightness,” the author Luc Viet Anh Ha asks whether sports can be seen as a Nietzschean praxis. In order to qualify for it as ‘Nietzschean’, sports must be either life-enhancing or life-depreciating, and this depends on how whether they incorporate or expel instincts. The author derives from Nietzsche’s account of the triangular relationship between instinct, morals and soul in the *Genealogy* that “sport is an activity which enables a relief from a world of spiritual valuation and from its weight.” This is so, when sport is driven by ‘active forces’ and not ‘reactive forces’, as activity refers to vitality, health, and abundance and reactivity to sickness. Sports as driven by active forces “allow for a certain alleviation from our human-all-too-human condition,” it is argued, as sports, considered a creative process, “takes place in a reactive world and transmutes the reactive forces into active ones.” This doesn’t mean that ‘health’ or building character should be the justificatory reason for doing sports. On the contrary: that would be a ‘reactive interpretation’. The real justification of sports is an existential and vitalist one: to give way to ‘a surplus of strength’ and not to enhance vitality or health. Does the child not play out of this abundance of life, and not because it wants to be healthy?

However, sports are way more than a life-affirming activity, also in Nietzschean terms. The article “Nietzsche’s Collective ‘Will to Power’ and the Coaching Style of Phil Jackson,” written by Bradley Kaye argues that is also an activity aiming for gaining knowledge of the self. Socrates, it is remembered, was not only a philosopher, but also a wrestler. Any philosophical meditation, it is argued, “must be understood as immanently produced within the body and its impulses, instinctual drives, and primitive forms of affect which can be “trained” and directed through gymnastic athletic competition.” The agonistic, competitive spirit is part of the philosophical spirit, leading to a ‘deepening’ of the spirit. Understood as such, the job of a coach is ‘to inspire the agonistic, playful, and competitive “flattening” of the opponent, not by being caught up in the opponent’s game, but through the spiritual deepening of his players’. Phil Jackson is put forward as the example of such a coach par excellence, because he creates a ‘we-Über-

mensch’ team that “allows for the exertion of energy” in the most effective way, i.e., by ‘benching the ego’ and letting every player discover their own role. The ‘we- Übermensch’ team does not spill energy by working too hard, but it passes the ball so effectively that it doesn’t seem to cost any energy. Hence, while the opponent is exhausted and low, ‘flattened’ on energy, the ‘we- Übermensch’ team plays with energy without spilling anything.

In “The Waves Rise Around Your Mountain,” Daniel Brennan explains surfing in Nietzschean terms, referring to the dramatic interlocution between art and nature. Hiking and mountaineering seem obvious, but this paper focusses on surfing in reference to Nietzsche’s prosaic writings on the sea, inspired especially from this beautiful passage in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Am I sitting high and dry then?” — asked Zarathustra, laughing. — “The waves around your mountain,” answered the soothsayer, “are rising and rising, the waves of great distress and tribulation: and soon they will raise your boat and carry you away.” — Zarathustra was silent at this and marveled.

The most sought-after experience of surfing is riding a wave so that one becomes enclosed in the cavern created by the breaking wave. This is known in surf-culture as ‘barrel riding’ or ‘tube riding.’ Brennan argues that “the barrel is much like the description of caves in Nietzsche’s writing, especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.” Surfers describe the barrel as a place where time stops or where one meets god. It is a place of wisdom getting, where one emerges utterly changed by the experience. That Zarathustra could sit in a cave with the waves crashing below him, does seem to suggest an experience quite similar to surfing, he claims.

A whole different claim is made by Yunus Tuncel in his essay “Shooting with Arrows: Archery Symbolism in Nietzsche’s Agonism.” Nietzsche frequently uses archery symbolism throughout his writings. In fact, this symbolism may be “the most used sport metaphor in Nietzsche’s texts,” Tuncel writes, probably also because Nietzsche was exposed to archery in school. The arch or archery is also a symbol that turns up very often in mythical and



philosophical texts throughout world literature, of which Nietzsche may have been well aware. Tuncel indicates that archery in Nietzsche's work seems to represent a symbol of struggle and a symbol in Zarathustra's cosmology, but what interests Tuncel the most is the transformation of archery as a means of war into a means of 'contest':

"What is striking about contest in archery is how it best exemplifies Nietzsche's idea of transfiguration of war into contest; a weapon of annihilation turns into a weapon of competition. We may also list sports like shooting and fencing in this respect."

Tuncel discusses three uses of archery in the context of Nietzsche's agnostic philosophy: 1) truth-telling and shooting with an arrow; 2) tension and release of tension (or *Gelassenheit*); and 3) the rational and the non-rational, thoughts and maxims. Let me confine myself to the first use, which is most remarkable. In several texts, Nietzsche associates truth-telling with arrow-shooting. What does this association reveal about Nietzsche's concept of the truth? As Tuncel explains: An arrow "pierces, penetrates into depths, and shatters" and "Nietzsche often reserves this metaphor from archery for poetic or aphoristic truths:"

Rhymes are deadly little arrows.  
See the tremor, see the quiver  
When they pierce the vital marrows  
Of the lizard, or his liver! (*The Gay Science*, "The Poet's Call," 353)

As we know, according to Nietzsche truth at bottom is a metaphor, of which we have forgotten that it is a metaphor. Metaphors are "fluid and fleeting like an arrow, which can reach depths and heights." Tuncel points out six 'overhumanly' qualities of archery, from directness to target. Let's not

forget that Europe needs free spirits 'who know their goal' and aim at the target: "But ...we *good Europeans* are free, *very* free spirits—we still feel it, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow. And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and—who knows? — the goal." (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface, 3-4).

After reading the contributions in this volume, it is clear, to me, that Nietzsche has much to offer to the philosophy of sports. The philosophy of sports would do well to turn their attention more to Nietzsche's philosophy, especially if this discipline wants to expand its scope beyond the obvious (ethics of doping, fair play) and develop into the rich, exciting and promising discipline it can be by, for example, focusing more on its ontological and aesthetic qualities to affirm life, its *agonism* as part of it, and its creativity as life-giving power.

I hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue as much as I did!

Martine Prange, Amsterdam, August 2020.

Essays

on

Nietzsche and Sport



Illustration by Ryan Dunlavey: ryandunlavey.com

## Beyond Face and Heel: Nietzsche's Agonism and the Pro-Wrestling Spectacle

Ben Abelson

Wrestling, defined as the attempt to use one's own body to overpower another being, is perhaps the most fundamental form of combat, and has been used by writers as early as Plato (who was himself a wrestler) as a metaphor for all variety of contests and struggles, including psychological discord and philosophical disputation. This by itself justifies an attempt to understand how Nietzsche's ideas about *agon* might bear some relation to wrestling itself. Following, Acampora (2013), I see "agonism" as central to Nietzsche's philosophical project throughout his writings. On this view, Nietzsche takes *agon* or contest to be essential to the project of value creation that makes human life meaningful and drives the engine of cultural change. I argue in what follows that the modern phenomenon of pro-wrestling, which just happens to have its genesis during Nietzsche's lifetime, becomes especially interesting when viewed through the lens of Nietzsche's ideas, given that it reflects the values of those who watch and participate in it – values that are depicted as engaged in perpetual struggle, making pro-wrestling a mirror image of the contest that Nietzsche sees as intrinsic to culture at large.

First, clarification concerning the phrase “professional wrestling” is needed. Wrestling is a sport, dating back at least to ancient Greece itself, but likely has existed in some form throughout civilization. In a wrestling match, individuals attempt to defeat one another by forcing or “pinning” one another to the ground. The term “amateur wrestling” refers to the contemporary version of this sport, practiced almost exclusively by students and Olympians, i.e. people who aren’t paid, hence the “amateur” epithet. Until recently, if someone wanted a career in “wrestling” after graduation, they would have to become a pro-wrestler, which is another sort of thing entirely. Nowadays, many amateur wrestlers learn other fighting styles, such as Muay Thai kickboxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and practice Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), where the wrestling knowledge and training ethic accrued from their amateur experience often allows them to excel. What is called “professional wrestling” or “pro-wrestling” differs from amateur wrestling and MMA in one crucial respect: in pro-wrestling, the individuals are not actually *trying* to pin one another. The results of pro-wrestling “matches” are pre-determined, sometimes by individual “bookers” or “promoters”, and other times by large staffs of writers, with input from a variety of corporate executives. A pro-wrestling match is not actually a competition between two wrestlers, but a simulation of one. The “wrestlers” in a pro-wrestling match are not actually trying to defeat one another, but are working together to best appear as if they are, while eliciting a reaction from the crowd. For most of pro-wrestling’s existence, its purveyors portrayed matches as legitimate competitions, though they often faced media scrutiny and exposure. Within the past thirty years, there has been a shift toward admitting that it is a show – entertainment or even art, rather than a legitimate sport. Pro-wrestling<sup>1</sup> blends athletic and theatrical elements, resulting in a unique cultural phenomenon. Its drama is in large part an artistically accentuated representation of the spontaneous drama of sports.

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1 From here on I will use the word “wrestling” interchangeably with “pro-wrestling”.

However, pro-wrestling is competitive, just not in the same way that sports are. For one, pro-wrestlers compete with one another for relative positions of prominence within a wrestling organization (or “promotion”), with only the very top spots securing lucrative contracts and global exposure, similarly to how Hollywood actors compete for leading roles. Wrestlers use their athletic and other performative skills to put on the most engaging show possible so as to prove their value to the management of the promotion for which they are working. But in addition to competing for places of prominence within the show, there is another kind of competition going on: a competition of values. Wrestlers, and the people in the crowd who cheer or boo those wrestlers, represent different ways of life, different attitudes, i.e. different values. The story of a wrestling match is the story of these values in conflict. Typically, the principal characters in such a story include a “babyface” (or just “face”) and a “heel”. Babyfaces are the protagonists of the wrestling story, motivated by the cheers of the crowd (or by the expectation of cheering) to defeat their opponents. Heels, on the other hand are the faces’ antagonists and are despised by the crowd (the feeling usually reciprocated).

The traditional characterization of wrestling “faces” and “heels” is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s ideas about *agon*, particularly in, his early essay, “Homer’s Contest”, where he explains the flourishing of Greek culture as depending on its artistic and athletic contests being characterized by one of two versions of the goddess *Eris* whose name means “strife”. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days* a distinction is drawn between the two versions of the goddess, in terms of the kinds of actions and attitudes each *Eris* inspires in human beings. One *Eris* inspires envy or jealousy, which are seen by Hesiod as positive emotions, necessary for a society to achieve greatness, as they engender healthy competition (*Wettkampf*), while the other *Eris* motivates actions that are malicious and destructive and a desire to eliminate ones opposition (*Vernichtungslust*). The traditional dichotomy between faces and heels in wrestling neatly maps on to that of the two *Erises*. Faces, in nearly all periods of wrestling have been characterized by their desire to excel by outdoing their opponents through their own skill as well as the power they

draw from the audience's enthusiasm. By contrast, heels try to cheat their way to victory or injure their opponent before the match even begins. A face typically welcomes a challenge, while a heel avoids it. In this way, wrestling models both the healthy contest itself, as well as the threat of its disruption by the destructive *Eris*, who motivates those in her thrall to eliminate their opposition in order to win by default.

The content of a particular wrestling production is largely determined by the tastes of the crowd and which wrestlers they support or admonish. Together, the producers, performers, and consumers of pro-wrestling form a larger community built around the wrestling product. According to Acampora (2013), Nietzsche sees the nature of Greek agonistic activity as essentially communal:

For the agon to be an effective means of producing shared cultural values, the community itself must have significant involvement in virtually all its dimensions since it is the community that creates and sanctions the institutions or forums in which agonistic encounters can occur. Thus, it is the community and not any great individual competitor that founds this form of interaction. The community has this priority by virtue of the fact that it provides the conditions for the possibility of meaningful agonistic exchange—it provides the judges, the grounds for deciding outcomes, and the conditions for participation. And so the community defines and delimits the agonistic arena. As it facilitates and supports (or not) prospective competitors, relevant measures, and mechanisms to determine outcomes, it founds and grounds the ethos that supports the economy of agonistic exchange... (Acampora 17)

Pro-wrestling well represents this tight relationship between contest and community due to the unique role that the crowd plays in the production, for they are not mere spectators, but a constitutive part of the spectacle itself. What matters in a pro-wrestling performance is not only what happens in the ring, but also what happens in the stands, and the dynamic interplay between the two. The crowd is at once audience and also the varyingly compliant or recalcitrant material manipulated by the wrestlers, as well as an active creative participant. Crowds that contain manifold, conflicting sentiments bear the greatest potential for aesthetic failure, but also for unique and interesting successes, especially when such crowds somehow come together to express a uniform sentiment. The character of a particular pro-wrestling product is immanent to the relations of power between the different values represented.

Unlike athletic contests in sports, which have some significance in the absence of spectators, a pro-wrestling match in front of no one can be no more than a rehearsal. The role of the crowd in pro-wrestling bears interesting similarities to that of the chorus in Attic tragedy as Nietzsche conceives it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. There Nietzsche rejects the prevailing view derived from A.W. Schlegel that the chorus represents the "ideal spectator", "[f]or we had always believed that the right spectator, whoever he might be, must always remain conscious that he was viewing a work of art and not an empirical reality. But the tragic chorus of the Greeks is forced to recognize real beings in the figures on the stage." (BT, §7) Similarly, while most people at pro-wrestling events know the results to be predetermined and the dramatic situations fictitious, they also know to act as if they believe that what is happening in front of them is real. In this way, what is enacted in the pro-wrestling spectacle is a kind of ritual performed by wrestlers and crowd alike that has a nature akin to the instantiation of the mythical in tragedy.

Following Schiller's analysis, Nietzsche says the chorus is a:

living wall that tragedy constructs around itself in order to close itself off from the world of reality and to preserve its ideal domain and its poetical freedom... For this chorus the Greek built up the scaffolding of a fictitious *natural state* and on it placed fictitious *natural beings*. On this foundation tragedy developed and so, of course, it could dispense at the beginning with a painstaking portrayal of reality. Yet it is no arbitrary world placed by whim between heaven and earth; rather it is a world with the same reality and credibility that Olympus with its inhabitants possessed for the believing Hellene. The satyr, as the Dionysian chorist, lives in a religiously acknowledged reality under the sanction of myth and cult. (BT, §7)

Similarly, the conventions of pro-wrestling are such that drawing attention to its artifice, claiming it is unrealistic, is to miss the point. Like tragedy, pro-wrestling is an idealization of reality, whose very artificiality allows for its aesthetic effect. As Roland Barthes puts it, in his 1957 essay "The World of Wrestling"

in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the eyes of the spectators with the intolerable spectacle of his powerlessness... The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat, which, far from disguising, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to signify the tragic mode of the spectacle... What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theater. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. This emptying out of interiority to the benefit of its exterior signs, this exhaustion of the content by the form, is the very principle of triumphant classical art. Wrestling is an immediate pantomime, infinitely more efficient than the dramatic pantomime, for the wrestler's gesture needs no anecdote, no décor, no transference in order to appear true. (Barthes 24-26)

Nietzsche's discussion of tragedy, specifically the interplay between "Apollinian" and "Dionysian" forces that he believes give rise to the tragic effect, offers further resources for understanding the pro-wrestling spectacle. The Apollinian is identified with image, appearance, illusion, individuality, symbol, naïveté, sculpture, and "all plastic arts," (BT, §1) while the Dionysian is identified with intoxication, music, and an annihilating of the individual subject, who is swept away in the "feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature." (BT, §7) Nietzsche takes the chorus to be the Dionysian element in tragedy, and if the crowd is the chorus's analogue in wrestling, then it makes sense to think of it too as Dionysian. It is part of the experience of being in such a crowd, that at the moment of greatest fervor, when the crowd behaves as a unity, one feels oneself to be dissolved into the throng. The actions of the wrestlers, on the other hand, like the actors on the tragic stage, are all image, mask, and artifice, i.e. Apollinian. Hence, the interaction between the wrestlers and the crowd has the potential to generate something akin to the tragic effect in which

[t]he Apollinian appearances in which Dionysus objectifies himself are no longer 'an eternal sea, changeful strife, a glowing life, 'like the music of the chorus, no longer those forces, merely felt and not condensed in images, in which the enraptured servant of Dionysus senses the nearness of the god...' (BT, §8)

Barthes understands wrestling as a spectacle of excessive gestures, which represent a struggle between good and evil, governed by a logic of universal moral significance, such that wrestlers "are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible." (Barthes 32) He compares wrestling to both Ancient tragedy and the theatrical comedy of

writers such as Molière. This characterization is mostly apt. However, the moral dynamic of pro-wrestling does not always fit so neatly under labels of “good” and “evil” or universal conceptions of each. The values at play vary according to time, place, and generally, the values of the individuals that make up the crowd present at any particular wrestling event.

Barthes is somewhat sensitive to these axiological differences as he contrasts French and American wrestling, but gives no indication that he understands the play of values in wrestling to be generally fluid and dynamic. This omission is to be expected as changes to pro-wrestling’s character were glacially slow up until the past thirty years. Barthes describes American wrestling as “a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil (of a quasi-political nature, the ‘bad’ wrestler always being supposed to be a Red),” whereas “[t]he process of creating heroes in French wrestling is quite different, being based on ethics and not on politics. What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect ‘bastard’ [*salaud*]” (Barthes 30)

However, for most of wrestling history in both Europe and the U.S., faces and heels were primarily distinguished along the lines of norms of sportsmanship. Faces followed the rules, were hardworking, courageous, humble, honest, traditionally masculine, chaste, and merciful. By contrast, heels were sore losers, lazy, cowardly, arrogant, lying, effeminate, promiscuous, and cruel. It was only ever acceptable for a face to break rules as a receipt to an earlier transgression by the heel. The ethics of classic wrestling of both the U.S. and Europe bore much similarity to primitive principles of justice, such as the Code of Hammurabi. As Barthes himself puts it:

it is the pattern of justice that matters here, much more than its content: wrestling is above all a quantitative series of compensations (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). This explains why sudden changes of circumstance have in the eyes of wrestling habitués a sort of moral beauty... (Barthes 29)

Much of U.S. wrestling until the fall of the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup> was decidedly political on the surface. However, not all heels were Communists, and even those who were still earned their boos through cheating. A more radical transformation of what the crowd regarded as moral beauty came in the 1980s. That decade’s most popular wrestler, Hulk Hogan, often bent or broke the rules, behaved spitefully, was braggadocious and ill-tempered, yet was revered by the crowd in spite of, and even because of these qualities and behaviors. He fought against wrestlers who were bigger and stronger, more intelligent, and more athletic than he, yet most of the crowd preferred him to them all. Hogan embodied an American ethic of exceptionalism. His powerfully charismatic personality and superlative patriotism were such that he could do no wrong, especially when battling oversized monsters, smarmy wisecrackers, jealous cuckolds, the aforementioned Communists, and scheming foreigners of all stripes. He was beloved by the crowd less for his specific actions and more for his identity as a “real American”. A wrestler’s actions by themselves don’t make that wrestler a face or heel. Faces act to fulfil the desires of the crowd and because they believe that the crowd desires for them to win.

As the Regan era gave way to the more muted jingoism of Clinton, and the U.S. presented itself as less domineering, and more gentle and cooperative in the global arena, American wrestling followed suit. The top star of the largest American wrestling organization, the World Wrestling Federation (WWF, now World Wrestling Entertainment or WWE), became Bret “Hitman” Hart, a Canadian, whose popularity stemmed from his virtues of respect, fairness, loyalty, and devotion to his craft – a return to the traditional babyfaces of wrestling’s past, though without the modesty of those earlier heroes, as Hart shamelessly referred to himself as “The Best There Is, the Best There Was, and the Best There Ever Will Be.” This status quo didn’t last long, however, as a wholly different set of values was

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2 Contemporary purveyors of pro-wrestling try their best to present it as apolitical.

brewing within the cauldron of wrestling culture. In keeping with lurid late 90s counter culture icons such as Jerry Springer, Howard Stern, *South Park*, Marilyn Manson, and *Jackass*, the true top star of the 90s turned out to be “Stone Cold” Steve Austin: a disrespectful, beer swilling vulgarian, whose main appeal was his anti-authoritarianism.

I see the change from Hart to Austin as an example of revaluation by the wrestling community along the lines of what Nietzsche claims was achieved, first by Socrates and then Jewish and Christian morality – a “revaluation of their enemies values...,” an inversion of “the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God)...” saying ‘the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious... and you, the powerful, the noble, are on the contrary evil... there begins *the slave revolt in morality...*’ (GM I §7) While the specific values at issue are different, Austin uses the same tactic as the Judeo-Christian moralizers, taking Hart’s noble values of respect, discipline, and sportsmanship, and recasting them as cheesy, conformist, naïve, timid, and weak.

The example of Hart and Austin is particularly notable because their reversal of roles, or “double-turn” (Austin moving from heel to face and Hart vice-versa,) occurred in a specific match between the two at Wrestlemania 13 in 1997. Leading up to that match the tides were already beginning to shift, as an increasing number of fans were cheering Austin and booing Hart, but WWF owner Vince McMahon caught on to this change in sentiment and decided to catalyze it in dramatic fashion. In a masterful display of sensitivity to and manipulation of crowd psychology, under McMahon’s direction, Austin and Hart, through their actions in the ring, successfully transformed Austin into the arch-face and Hart the arch-heel of the company. Austin obstinately refused to admit defeat and submit to Hart’s “sharp-shooter” submission hold, instead passing out in a pool of his own blood, cementing his status as the new hero of wrestling. While not a complete inversion of values (Austin is courageous in refusing to give up and Hart is

petty and vindictive, attacking Austin after the match is over) Austin largely represents radically different values from Hart’s and other faces that preceded him. More importantly, the source of Austin’s values is *ressentiment*, as Nietzsche thinks is true of Judeo-Christian morality (c.f. GM I §10), for Austin’s “good” is defined in spiteful opposition to goods valued by others (Hart, and later, McMahon) that are unattainable for Austin himself. Given the ignoble origin of his values, Austin could hardly engender a pro-wrestling characterized by *Wettkampf*. In fact, the elevation of Austin despite Hart’s official win constitutes victory for the destructive *Eris*, “one who leads human beings into hostile fights of annihilation against one another” over the *Eris* who “provokes human beings to action – not to the action of fights of annihilation but rather to the action of *contests*.” (HS, p. 3)

Both Hogan and Hart (as characters), though in many ways opposed, wanted to be the best wrestlers they could possibly be – to rise above their opposition to greater heights. In Nietzsche’s terms their mode of action is *erheben*, an attempt to elevate above one’s opponent, as opposed to *herabdrücken*, or forcing back – trying to eliminate one’s opposition in order to attain victory by default. The latter mode, motivated by the destructive *Eris*, leads not to healthy contests, but meaningless violence, which, along with increasing vulgarity, is characteristic of the period following the “double-turn”, known in the wrestling community as the “Attitude Era”, which involved minimal technical excellence and an escalation of brutality that left many wrestlers crippled. McMahon seemingly realized that Austin as shining exemplar was untenable, so unlike most top WWF/E faces, “Stone Cold” was most consistently engaged in the chase for the gold, rather than holding it. By contrast with the Northeastern based WWF, the wrestling of the Southern U.S., governed by the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA), and then Ted Turner’s World Championship Wrestling (WCW), typically had a heel as the top star, rather than a face, the energy of its contests built mostly on the crowd’s hatred, rather than their admiration. However, even there, the babyfaces’ mode of action was closer to *erheben*, as they attempted to overcome the heel champion by excelling. Wrestling comes closest to



*Wettkampf* in Japan, especially the “King’s Road” style of classic All Japan Pro Wrestling (AJPW) in the 90s, which presents itself more like a genuine sport than does most U.S. wrestling. The audience responds primarily to the vigor of the contestants as they mutually attempt to rise above one another to ever greater heights of achievement. By stark contrast, the Attitude Era is the epitome of *Vernichtungslust*.

Nonetheless, just as Nietzsche claims that it was due to the slave revolt of the priests “that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*” (GM I, 6), the inversion of values that brought on the Attitude Era was necessary for pro-wrestling to become interesting. Shortly after the double-turn, in late ’97, McMahon himself became the principal villain of the WWF, due to the events of the infamous “Montreal Screwjob”, in which Hart was encouraged by McMahon to sign a lucrative contract with WCW (because McMahon could no longer afford him), and then was given an ignominious farewell, as he was misled about how his final match would end. I think of this happening along the lines of Nietzsche’s discussion of ostracism in “Homer’s Contest”

as, for example, the Ephesians express it in their banishment of Hermodorus: ‘Among us no one should be the best; but if anyone is, then let him be elsewhere and among others.’ Why should no one be the best? Because with that the contest would dry up and the perpetual source of life in the Hellenic state would be endangered... One removes individuals who tower over the others only to reawaken the play of powers... In a natural order of things, there are always *several* geniuses who incite each other to reciprocal action as they keep each other within the limits of measure. (HS, p. 5)

Hart, who completely outmatched everyone else in terms of his technical wrestling acumen, could not exist in the Attitude Era, in which all other participants attained dominance not by technique, but either brutish brawling or else the force of their over the top personalities, expressed mostly through insult and profanity. Though this was largely a degeneration of pro-wrestling’s agonistic space, it also allowed for a proliferation of myriad values in play at once as opposed to the strict dichotomy of face and heel that preceded it. The Attitude Era is known for the numerosity of its “geniuses” as titans such as Mick Foley, The Rock, Triple H, and The Undertaker, competed with Austin for supremacy. While Austin was near universally beloved, other wrestlers, embodying various kinds of values, were affirmed and rejected by different segments of the crowd, in contrast to the near monolithic uniformity of past wrestling crowds.

Perhaps most importantly, the Attitude Era, assisted by the developing internet wrestling community (IWC), engendered a new kind of self-consciousness amid the fanbase who became increasingly aware of their own role in shaping and promoting values within the production.

The wrestling public has an intuitive sense of potential disruptions to the *agon* as a conduit for meaning. On one level this manifests in their distaste for the traditional heels, who, motivated by *Vernichtungslust*, hope to win, not by outdoing their opponents, but by annihilating them. However, in recent years pro-wrestling crowds have also rebelled against what they take to be a forceful promoting of wrestlers as both top heel and top face who they believe are not best suited for those positions. It is then not the characters themselves that the crowd opposes, but the creative decisions behind their actions and place within the larger narrative. This calls to mind Nietzsche’s claim that Socrates corrupted the Greek rhetorical *agon*. As Acampora puts it:

Nietzsche concludes that the Platonic Socrates diminishes contestability, constricts the possibilities for agonistic engagement, and fixes in advance the potential outcomes; thus, the regenerative potency of agonism (the organizing powers he so admired in the Homeric and tragic contexts) was lost. (Acampora 11)

WWE viewers have begun to regard McMahon as like Socrates in this way – artificially, constraining the contest to his liking – which takes them out of their roles within the fabricated reality of the spectacle, reducing them to external critical observers, something more like the “ideal spectators” that Nietzsche claims to be quite the contrary of the tragic chorus. Furthermore, now as critics, the crowd no longer reveres the wrestlers as larger-than-life gods. The wrestling superstar has ceased to be an idealization, but instead a representation of the “ordinary person” as if they stepped out of the crowd themselves. Nietzsche blames Euripides for tragedy’s demise because he “brought the spectator onto the stage and thus qualified him to pass judgment on the drama.” (BT, §11) Similarly, wrestlers of the past decade, including Austin himself and later CM Punk in his “pipe bomb promo”, have, from within the wrestling narrative, complained of their misuse by management – not receiving the places within the hierarchy that they deserve. While initially an exciting “breaking of the fourth wall,” such maneuvers have had the effect of shattering the immersive spell of the wrestling spectacle.

At the same time, despite its origin in *ressentiment*, it’s hard not to see Austin and the Attitude Era as Dionysian in character – an orgiastic wave of sexuality, violence and drunkenness (with Hart embodying the Apollinian). Perhaps it is like Euripidean tragedy in which the Dionysian is itself made into a problem: “Is the Dionysian entitled to exist at all? Should it not be forcibly uprooted from Hellenic soil.” (BT, §12) McMahon does attempt to

constrain and/or ostracize Austin. Or perhaps the innovative characterization of McMahon himself as a villain is akin to Euripides’ novel representation of Dionysus. Regardless, WWE eventually became bloodlessly PG, with Dionysus nowhere to be found, having shriveled up and vanished under the withering gaze of self-consciousness.

However, wrestling seems to be surviving the period of nihilistic decay. Fans are learning again to play their roles within the ritual symbol world of the spectacle. This may lead to new possibilities for the *agon*, and therefore meaning and value creation. The past several years have seen a transformation in the makeup of the crowd and hence the character of the wrestlers and their stories as a reflection of the crowd’s valuations. For instance, as reported by Barthes, traditionally, any hint of effeminacy or homosexuality was nearly universally abhorred by wrestling crowds. However, the opposite is now the rule, as openly LGBTQ performers, such as Sonny Kiss, Effy, and Ashley Vox, are beloved heroes. There has also been a renaissance in women’s wrestling. Whereas until about 2015 women in American wrestling were primarily relegated to a titillating sideshow, now women’s wrestling is presented as of equal stature to men’s, with stars such as Sasha Banks, Becky Lynch, Charlotte Flair, and Ronda Rousey often main-eventing major shows, including “the grandest stage of them all,” Wrestlemania. Aside from changing attitudes about sexuality and gender, wrestling crowds have begun to embrace faces such as Kenny Omega, Asuka, The New Day, and Orange Cassidy who defy expectations about wrestlers and wrestling in myriad ways. Rather than tragedy, Nietzsche may have understood this new era of wrestling as more akin to “*New Attic Comedy*” in which “the degenerate form of tragedy lived on as a monument of its exceedingly painful and violent death.” (BT, §11) Nonetheless, while the shape that pro-wrestling will take in the future is uncertain, it may have the resources to drive revaluation and creation of values in ways that cast new meanings on our collective experience, and, as is Nietzsche’s ultimate aim (EH.iii.BT, §2), and wrestler Daniel Bryan’s rallying cry, allow us to say “yes” to life.

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# The Waves Rise Around Your Mountain

Daniel Brennan

*That is why I must descend to the deep, as you do in the evening when you pass beyond the sea and bring light even to the underworld, you over-rich star! (Z1 “Zarathustra’s Prologue”)*<sup>1</sup>

In Robert McFarlane’s *Underland*, the author describes a mountaineering trek he undertook in Norway to some stone-age cave paintings.<sup>2</sup> The caves were in an isolated, cliff-lined landscape bordered by a ferocious and unruly ocean and the figures, for McFarlane were an expression of deep-time, linking pre-history to the present. His recounting of setting off towards the cave as a storm approached is full of the human drama that mountaineering can produce. As he hiked through dangerous snow drifts and across risky precipices, he also reflected on the way that the original painter of the cave art would also have made a similar kind of risky journey to make the art. That is, for McFarlane the mountaineering was a necessary part of the human endeavor to understand oneself. That in order to grasp the meaning of the human condition some kind of ascension away from the town and its decadence, undertaken in a manner which forced the mountain climber to confront and overcome great challenges and potential suffering, is clearly some-

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2016) Retrieved April 25, 2020, from [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0070](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#link2H_4_0070)

2 Robert McFarlane, *Underland*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), 253-286.

thing that is also found in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and there is a strong Nietzschean tone to McFarlane’s prose. For example, while at the threshold to the cave where he is to descend to find the cave art, McFarlane pauses to look around, taking stock of the natural features which inform his conscious thinking. “Roar of waves on far reefs, the distant churn of the Maelstrom. A sea eagle turns overhead, wingtips near the cliffs that drop sheer to the water.”<sup>3</sup> For McFarlane, the mountaineer, this view of nature at its most extreme and threatening, punctuates his discovery of some of the earliest and most profound artistic expressions.

When we consider McFarlane’s observation alongside the epigraph of this paper, he seems just like Zarathustra on the precipice of a cliff, about to hear the abyss calling. At these high places, nature, in its raw and powerful state is all that can be seen from the vantage where the modern mind can reach back in to the past, beyond culture and history, to something more primal and essential about the human experience. For me what also stands out about this passage is the powerful significance of the sea. It borders and frames all the insight the mountaineer has before his descent into the cave. If we turn our attention back to Nietzsche, who also writes of waves breaking alongside mountains, waves of such height they can rise up the mountain and carry Zarathustra to a new state of awareness, we can discern a similar metaphorical significance of the sea. More than merely serving as a light pointer to slightly related meaning, there is an element of forceful argumentation through the employment of the sea as a metaphor. Laurence Hinman, in exploring Nietzsche’s understanding of metaphor shows that for Nietzsche the metaphorical process begins with a physical perception which is then used to express the relation of things to man.<sup>4</sup> The metaphor carries one sphere to another, and the metaphor in return carries us (if we are willing to dare to be carried by the metaphor) from one sphere to another, that

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3 *Ibid.*, 277.

4 Laurence M. Hinman, “Nietzsche, Metaphor, and Truth”, In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Dec., 1982), 184.

is, from the world to imagination. For Nietzsche, “the boldest metaphors” designate the most profound relations. Hence, in exploring the image of the sea in Nietzsche, we can learn much about his examination of the human condition and the role of striving in his philosophy of becoming. Where there is already an abundance of writing on Nietzsche and hiking and mountaineering, in this paper the consideration is of those individuals who seek out the natural space of the ocean as it flings mountains of water towards the shore, and who find pleasure, and knowledge in the insights gained through trying to ride those waves as expend their energy on the shore-line.<sup>5</sup>

In Nietzsche’s writing, when the sea appears he describes the sublime character of the moving body of water: its power, violence, and magnitude. He also dwells on the notion of a shoreline separating two worlds of experience - one seemingly solid where the crowd set up and live, and the other a wine-dark place of liquidity and journeying. The overwhelming noise and power of the ocean frame much of Zarathustra’s story. Besides travelling across the sea, Zarathustra, like McFarlane, wanders on cliffs beside raging seas that beat upon the solid rock, looking to descend to the abyss for the kind of wisdom that comes by thinking outside culture and it’s determined concepts of good and evil. However, the sea also comes for Zarathustra, rising up the mountain while he sits at the peak.

“Am I sitting high and dry then?” — asked Zarathustra, laughing. — “The waves around your mountain,” answered the soothsayer, “are rising and rising, the waves of great distress and tribulation: and soon they will raise your boat and carry you away.” — Zarathustra was silent at this and marveled (Z: 4 “LXII: The Cry of Distress”).

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5 See for example: John Kaag, *Hiking with Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

The image of the ocean taking Zarathustra away in a craft that rides the waves is reminiscent of the surfer’s actions sliding across a wave. When one considers the practice of surfing, much of the metaphorical significance of the sea in Nietzsche’s writing, and the ideas he was expounding, can be further illuminated. Furthermore, when we consider surfing in the light of Nietzsche’s ideas, a value of surfing can be discerned.

The most sought-after experience of surfing is riding a wave so that one becomes enclosed in the cavern created by the breaking wave. This is known in surf-culture as ‘barrel riding’ or ‘tube riding.’ In surf literature, the most poetic surf writing attempts to describe the sublime vision that the surfer is gifted while riding encased in the crystal cabinet of the breaking wave. It requires great skill attained through years of practice to be able to ride in a barrel, and it also requires a greater degree of risk in that the waves which are tall enough and breaking over a shallow enough reef or sandbank to allow a tube to form, are much more dangerous than other waves surfers ride. The barrel is much like the description of caves in Nietzsche’s writing, especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Surfers describe the barrel as a place where time stops or where one meets god. It is a place of wisdom getting, where one emerges utterly changed by the experience. That Zarathustra could sit in a cave with the waves crashing below him, does seem to suggest an experience quite similar to surfing. Where for Hinman, the metaphor leads from the physical world to imagination, we can also work backwards and have the insights of the imagination understand the perception that generated them.<sup>6</sup> In order to better understand what kind of wisdom the surfer might receive in barrel riding if we approach it from the lens of Nietzsche’s writing, it is first important to unpack the metaphorical meanings of the sea itself.

In *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche uses the metaphor of a wave to describe his disdain for modern understandings of the term ‘vanity’.

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6 Hinman, “Metaphor”, 199.

Thus that fundamental conviction that on the waves of society we either find navigable waters or suffer shipwreck far more through what we appear than through what we are (a conviction that must act as guiding principle of all action in relation to society) is branded with the general word “vanity.” (HH: §2, p. 319)<sup>7</sup>

Here the description of waves carries relevance for surfing. The allusion is to a kind of wave riding -- using the wave to traverse through the process of becoming -- which will result either in destruction (getting dumped or wiping out), or navigation to safe waters after an exhilarating ride. The shipwreck Nietzsche alludes to results from a kind of faith in appearances which take us away from how things actually are – how things really are is in a process of becoming, rather than fixed and stable. The underlying concept that draws out this difference between safe wave-riding and suffering the consequences of not navigating the wave or selecting the wrong wave is his idea of the dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces first elaborated in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Apollonian force can be a consciousness that suppresses chaotic and passionate versions of life with appearances of reason and balance (BT).<sup>8</sup> The suppressed and ecstatic force of the Dionysian is a kind of free and amoral drive which the Apollonian sense of good taste strives keeps at bay. For Nietzsche, the full experience of suffering, joy, and the loss of the sense of self that comes through such orgasmic emotion found in the Dionysian contrasts with the mere appearance of ordered reality that the Apollonian offers. For Nietzsche, the power of the Dionysian is to erode the boundaries of ordinary life.<sup>9</sup> Culture that promotes the Apollonian as the full experience of life, for Nietzsche rides the wave of society to shipwreck. Also, in another sense the sailor who risks shipwreck,

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7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All-Too-Human; A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Alexander Harvey (The Floating Press, 2013).

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism*, trans. William August Haussmann (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2016) Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm>

9 Ibid.

who skims the surface of the wave, potentially takes into themselves the Dionysian.<sup>10</sup> In my view the surfer taking the wave most likely to barrel risks shipwreck. If they fail they are engulfed by the swirling tendrils of the ocean which pull her down to the ocean floor. When the surfer emerges out of breath and scanning the horizon, she paddles back out and attempts the enterprise again. The most profound moment of surfing is when the Dionysian ocean surrounds the surfer and they continue to glide across the wave's surface. Such tightrope walking between two forces is indicative of Nietzsche's thoughts on the overman.

Before Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer also used the image of a ship returning to harbor to describe the futility of a life of appearance and the problem with a loaded term like vanity. In his essay 'On the Vanity of Existence', he writes:

In the first place, no man is happy but strives his whole life long after a supposed happiness which he seldom attains, and even if he does it is only to be disappointed with it; as a rule, however, he finally enters harbor shipwrecked and dismayed. In the second place, however, it is all one whether he has been happy or not in a life which has consisted merely of a succession of transient present moments and is now at an end.<sup>11</sup>

In both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the sea is a space of becoming. It is risky and in motion. In the *World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer describes the self as a two-fold consciousness in the midst of a rising monstrous sea – it is at once aware that the self is frail and can be damaged by the whims of

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10 Amy Mullin, “Whitman's Oceans, Nietzsche's Seas”, In *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Fall., 1998), 271.

11 Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Vanity of Existence' in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 52.

nature, and also as a knowing subject, aware of the connectedness of will.<sup>12</sup> The pessimistic notion of self is also celebrated by Nietzsche, but in his hands the focus is on the significance of the moment where the individual consciousness is aware of its being surrounded by eternal risk and becoming. Through the Dionysian which erodes the Apollonian cultural apparatus which are set to steer us on the wave of society, Nietzsche opens the potential for the bare moment that remains to be filled with the sublime potential of the Dionysian consciousness.

If I be fond of the sea and all that is of the nature of the sea, and even most fond when it angrily opposes me:

if that joy in seeking be in me which drives the sails toward the undiscovered, if a seafarer's joy be in my joy:

if ever my rejoicing cried: "The coast has vanished — now the last chain has fallen from me — — the unbounded roars around me, far out there time and space gleam for me, well them! come one! old heart!" (Z: 3 "The Seven Seals")

In the above extract, the sea, as the Dionysian, erodes not only Zarathustra's sense of the appearance of himself but the coastline as well – the stable, harbored culture from which his ship launched. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refers to the misplaced sense of certainty that passes for knowledge amongst the crowd as the "solid, granite foundation of ignorance".<sup>13</sup> The sea faring journey, the riding of the waves, is a dialectical struggle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and the joy of the ride is height-

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12 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane & J. Kemp (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2011) Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>.

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil; Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 35.

ened along with the intensity of the sea's opposition. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche opposes to the placid and calm sea a rider, who through relinquishing a desire for control and takes on greater risk finds a bliss (BGE §1). Similarly, the surfer, who, riding waves of great magnitude, seeks out the most critical parts of that wave and is rewarded with a sublime experience.

Such experiences in surfing and the risk required to attain them is well explained by Pulitzer Prize winning memoirist William Finnegan, who in his recount of his life surfing large and dangerous waves says the following about the almost mythical was that break on the coast of the island Madeira. "The shore was rocks and cliffs, which often multiplied the danger quotient, which was already high, by a large factor. We were mining a rich lode of bliss. But disaster never felt far away."<sup>14</sup> The "bliss" Finnegan refers to is captured in an observation he makes about the beauty of barreling waves in a good swell.

To someone sitting in the lineup trying to decipher the structure of a swell, the problem can, in fact, present itself musically. Are these waves approaching in 13/16 time, perhaps, with seven sets an hour, and the third wave of every second set swinging wide in a sort of minor-chord crescendo? Or is this swell one of God's jazz solos, whose structure is beyond our understanding? When the surf is very big, or in some other way humbling, such questions tend to fall away. The heightened sense of a vast, unknowable design silences the effort to understand. You feel honored simply to be out there. I've been reduced on certain magnificent days to just drifting on the shoulder, gawking at the transformation of ordinary seawater into muscled swell, into feathering urgency, into pure energy—impossibly sculpted, ecstatically edged—and, finally, into violent foam. This solitary session at Four Mile does not contain that level of grandeur. It does, however, have a sweet, jewelled quality that leaves me

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14 William Finnegan, *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life*, (London: Corsair, 2015), 361.

peering from the channel into the last, cracking section, trying to hear what oceanographers call the entrainment of air burst free as the wave breaks—millions of air bubbles collapsing into smaller and smaller bubbles, from which the entrained air finally escapes with a barely audible hiss.<sup>15</sup>

This description of the sublime music of waves is for me similar to Nietzsche's consideration of Odysseus, and those with the ears to hear, listening to the Siren's music. There is the surfboard-as-mast that the surfer is strapped to, being paddled beside the abyss-like barreling wave which threatens destruction and shipwreck, and the surfer gazing wondrously at it all, calculating how best to ride – all so that sublime beauty can be experienced in what will, in the end, only be a moment of bliss that feels like eternity. If the surfer hesitates, like Nietzsche's interpretation of Hamlet, before the monstrosity of the Dionysian force before them, all is lost and the wave consumes them. If they apply skill, courage, and attunement to the conditions, then the full majesty of the Dionysian moment is taken into their consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

In Genevieve Lloyd's *Being in Time*, the author points to the startling potential of the moment in Nietzsche's thought. "Eternity enters the moment in the refusal to see the present teleologically, as if it were just a gateway to the future. Eternity is in the moment, not beyond it as the goal towards which mind moves. No moment exists for the sake of another."<sup>17</sup> The surfer knows intuitively to what Nietzsche and Lloyd are referring to. William Finnegan describes the wonder that surfers experience through their practice as heightened on days when the waves are especially large. On those

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15 Finnegan, *Barbarian Days*, 334-335.

16 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 62.

17 Genevieve Lloyd, *Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 118.

days, when wave heights are well over two or three times the size of an average adult, there is a kind of contraction of the experience into the moment. Nothing else exists except for the loud crashing of the waves and their terrifying beauty as they cyclically contort into new possibilities for human endeavor or destruction. Consider the following, again from Finnegan:

On smaller days, perseverance was usually rewarded. Bigger days were another matter. From the water's edge, looking out across a stepladder of six or seven walls of cold, growling, onrushing white-water, the idea of paddling out actually carried with it a whiff of lunacy. The project looked impossible, like trying to swim up a waterfall. It took a literal leap of faith to start... The waves as they approached sounded like bowling balls rumbling down a lane, and then like the crashing of pins as they slammed into and rolled over your bowed head and shoulders, inducing instant ice-cream headaches... Breathing turned to gasping, then rasping, and your mind began to play ever-shorter loops, turning over the same half-nonsensical questions: *Is perseverance rewarded?...* Meanwhile, underneath this aimless, half-hysterical activity, your brain struggled to detect the underlying patterns in the surf.<sup>18</sup>

In the above passage, Finnegan describes the way that the surfer's thought reduces to a cyclical repetition of irrational questions as they push through the trough of breaking waves. The quote was employed as evidence of a connection to Lloyd's consideration of Nietzsche's eternal return – what he calls, in *The Gay Science*, "the greatest weight."<sup>19</sup> For Lloyd, the eternal return in Nietzsche is a shaking of the privileged position being has over becoming.<sup>20</sup> For Lloyd, eternity is to be thought of in terms of movement – as

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18 Finnegan, *Barbarian Days*, 289.

19 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kauffman, (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 271.

20 Lloyd, *Being in Time*, 120.



a narrative.<sup>21</sup> Consider the movement of the surfer, as Finnegan describes it paddling out to large waves through the almost impenetrable trough of whitewater. As the surfer is immersed in the experience their thought becomes cyclical; it recurs. The reward is not a state of stable consciousness, but fleeting moments of wave riding that are best described as becoming, as the surfer is always in motion on the wave – to stop is to fall. Even then falling is to become a part of the cyclical movement of the water as it churns and rushes towards shore.

Who could possibly want to dwell in such a moment – it doesn't *seem* at all pleasant. Yet, as Finnegan writes, after enduring the crashing waves in the attempt to paddle out through large surf, if one has been attuned, or lucky enough to find a pathway through, the surfer immediately looks for waves to ride – “[t]hat after all, is what we were out here for.”<sup>22</sup> For my mind there is something of the overman in the surfer's struggle to experience beauty. That is not to say that all surfers are overmen, or even that all surfers who surf large waves are overmen. Rather there is a strong metaphorical significance in the way that some surfers reflect on their difficulties in accessing waves. Aaron James, in *Surfing with Sartre*, is somewhat dismissive of the relevance of Nietzsche to surfing; however it is a rather popularized version of idea of the eternal return that he bases his dismissal on.<sup>23</sup> On the more nuanced view suggested by Lloyd, the surfer's willingness to embrace recurrence, even the recurrence of intense danger and suffering, gives the idea that the surfer might have some overlap with the concept of the overman more cogency. The relevance of Nietzsche is made even clearer when we consider the surfer's reward for making it out to where the waves are breaking and choosing the right one: the barrel.

James describes the significance of the barrel, or tube, for surfers.

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21 Ibid., 120 & 122.

22 Ibid., 291.

23 Aaron James, *Surfing with Sartre: An Aquatic Inquiry into a Life of Meaning*, (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 295-296.

As every surfer will tell you, riding inside the tube of a wave is an ecstatic, even orgasmic experience (almost, anyway). “Time stands still in the barrel,” they'll say... - a thesis they'll corroborate by vividly retelling each moment of their best tube ever, even decades after the fact, as though they've just been reading Proust...

The towering, reeling deep-blue/green wall, with the surfer gracefully standing in the spinning vortex, is plainly its own ting of splendor, a feat of natural and human possibility, of attuned flow between person and wave.<sup>24</sup>

Lloyd, in reading Nietzsche's notebooks, finds interesting Nietzsche's use of the image of an insect frozen in amber to describe some implications of the eternal return.<sup>25</sup> For Lloyd, the insect analogy shows “the bearer of immortality is the movement, caught by another impressionable substance.”<sup>26</sup> However Lloyd suggests that the petrifying force of the amber does seem to pull against Nietzsche's meaning.<sup>27</sup> With James's evocative description of the importance of barrel-riding for the surfer, I suggest a better image for the eternal return and the overman as the bearer of the greatest weight. The surfer is locked in a timeless moment, but at the same time is also in fast motion. The wave seems to immobilize the surfer, but the surfer, through the graceful action, remains in motion. They are, in a sense, immortalized becoming. James is right when he claims that the surfer recounts these moments in the barrel with incredible vividness, even if they are apt to fall back on cliché. What they see, in the cave of the barrel, defines their desire to keep surfing, to endure.

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24 Ibid., 3-4.

25 Lloyd, *Being in Time*, 119-120.

26 Ibid., p. 120.

27 Ibid., p.120.

In 'Zarathustra's Prologue' the wanderer leaves the lake of his home for the mountain.<sup>28</sup> Abandoning the still waters for some more spirit sustaining location, he spends ten years living in a cave before emerging to wander back to the world to talk of what he learned. There is great commonality with the phenomenon of barrel riding where the surfer seeks solitude in the wave's sublime crystal cabinet and emerges, changed and elevated by the experience: the journey away from the lake of life to the rolling sea, the sense of time stopping in the cave of the cave of the wave, the getting of wisdom in that timeless moment and, finally, the emergence from the cave, changed by the experience. Zarathustra, in first announcing the overman, declares that "one must be a sea to receive a polluted river and not be defiled" (Z: 1 "Zarathustra's Prologue"). In the image of the surfer mastering courage, perseverance, and leaping into the Dionysian waters, this reference to the sea makes sense. What is so valuable about the potential of surfing to act as a metaphor, is that it offers an activity where one can dance with forces much greater than oneself and do it with grace.

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28 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 39.

# Sport: Instrument of Nihilism or Praxis of Lightness?

Luc Viet Anh Ha

## Overview on the problem of sport and the nihilistic civilization

In Nietzsche's works, the absence of meditation on the practice of sport, combined with his allegories of dancers, tightrope walkers and playful children creates a lack which prompts the question: is sport a Nietzschean practice? What are its qualities, in terms of life-enhancement or life-depreciation? One might be surprised by these questions because sport exists *de facto* in the contemporary alleged Christian societies, which are portrayed as degenerative by Nietzsche. In that sense, sport could be construed as a practice unrelated to morals. However, this assumption is often accepted without close observation. In fact, the coexistence of morals and sport is not necessarily a peaceful one, but it can also be either collaborative or agonistic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on my unpublished master's thesis, *Sport and Christianity: a Nietzschean genealogy* (2019), supervised by Pr. Niels Henrik Gregersen of the University of Copenhagen.

Sport can be construed as two contradictory processes—one which enhances the internalization of instincts, another one which enhances their externalization. From a Nietzschean point of view, this double way to deal with instincts is correlated to morals or, its opposite, lightness.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, the bad conscience is presented as a process of internalization of life. Self-control and moral values entail an elaboration of spiritual obstacles to replace the absence of obstacles which the body has to face (GM § 16, 99).<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the generation of internal obstacles, i.e. bad conscience, creates the disgust of oneself and the will to negate life (GM III §14, 157-161). Nietzsche writes: "All instincts which do not find a vent without, turn inwards—this is what I mean by the growing 'internalisation' of man: consequently, we have the first growth in man, of what subsequently was called his soul." (GM II §16)

For Nietzsche, the valuation of soul is the effect of a being who faces a lack of external *agon* and becomes unable to deal with concrete life, therefore he must create a supra-sensitive world. Morals are determined by a corporal *modus essendi*, a poor psychophysical condition and a low degree of life. On the one hand, sport activities disengage from bad conscience, as the obstacles which are proposed to the athletes are not spiritual but external. From this perspective, sport is an activity which enables a relief from a world of spiritual valuation and from its weight.

Nevertheless, sports are also composed of strict rules, etiquettes and a sense of fair play, which can be seen as subtle ways to internalize moral rules through outward movements. The alliance of movements and rules might be a way to control and civilize bodies. Instead of capturing the passions of the spirits with concepts and narratives only, e.g. with ideas of guilt, sin and redemption, the elaboration of structures of movement could prevent peo-

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<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Complete Works*, ed. by T. N. Foulis, transl. by Horace B. Samuel, vol. 13, Edinburgh, 1913.

ple from having uncontrolled bursts of violence. Hence, men could either be used for political reasons, e.g. war, or pacified in favor of life-depreciative values. In both cases, the energetic expression of a person is constrained to serve a specific purpose, and, in that process, is detached from its spontaneous expression.

Moreover, Nietzsche's understanding of movement is paradoxical because "mechanical activity" is also presented as the tool of priests, i.e. the masters of the bad conscience, to reinforce "absolute regularity", obedience and self-control in the Christian congregation (GM III §18, 174). The priests, like the athletes, perform repetitive movements which makes them malleable. Both of them forget themselves in their own asceticism. Not only is sport paradoxical, but so is movement as such.

In order to untie this double knot, it is important to understand the criteria which define the qualities of a will to power. The two differential qualities of the will to power are active and reactive.<sup>3</sup> Every being is a will to power which expresses itself in various forms, but the active forces proceed from an overabundance of vitality, whereas the reactive ones are those who belong to a minimum of vitality (HAH 4, 9).<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche equates active forces with the "forces of spontaneity, aggression, and encroachment with their new interpretations and tendencies" (GM II, 12). The reactive ones are those which are useful for adaptation of a being, conservation, utility, and comfort (Deleuze, 64). The latter do not exist by themselves, but are correlated to the active ones—they exist as an impoverishment of active elements and are a process of division (Deleuze, 100). For Nietzsche, people who mainly possess active forces have a strong constitution and a healthy physiology, whereas the ones who possess reactive forces are those who are sick and impotent (GM I §7, 29-31).

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2014, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Human All-too-human, A book for Free Spirits*, trans. by Alexander Harvey, The Floating Press, 2013

Nietzsche explains that the human history is one which is governed by nihilism, that is to say the reactive forces triumphed, with the hegemony of Christianity and its later derivatives, and the normal state of humanity is to depreciate life.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the active qualities exist and allow for a certain alleviation from our human-all-too-human condition. Creation is an escape door, but, it is not a pure form of deliverance from the reactive or nihilistic history. Instead, the creator, like the athlete, can only escape history by playing with his own chains. One must use one's context in order to transcend it. Therefore, I will argue that sport, *qua* a creative process, takes place in a reactive world and transmutes the reactive forces into active ones.

I will first study sport as an activity in tension between outward movements and inward regulation. Then, I will analyze the ascetic dimension of movement and the paradoxes of self-oblivion, as *ekstasis*. Finally, I will argue that sport is a process of creation, therefore it must be understood as an *ex materia* creation, where the matter is nothing but the nihilistic civilization, pushed to its limits.

### **Sport: Catharsis and Spiritualization**

Contrary to the Christian, the athlete is constantly coming back to a world of external obstacles, which provides him with joy. He seeks the challenge of objects, lines and rules which force him to modify his body *in situ*, to employ his tissues, members and breath according to a new goal. The sport philosopher Bernard Suits defined sports as a creation of useless and artificial obstacles.<sup>6</sup> In that precise sense, sport strives to recreate the external *agon*. The sportsman accepts to endure suffering, tiredness and efforts in his body, and, feels a pleasure linked to the overcoming of sporting obstacles. Moreover,

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre Faye and Michèle Cohen-Halimi, *L'histoire cachée du nihilisme: Jacobi, Dostoïevski, Heidegger, Nietzsche*, la Fabrique, Paris, 2008, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Life, Games, and Utopia*, David R. Godine Publisher, Boston, 1990, 48-49.

an athlete is likely to find and generate harder challenges for himself, as a way to *accelerate* this cycle, once it has become stagnant. His acceptance of the external world is such that the acceptance of chance must be its corollary. In many sports, chance is an inherent part of the game. For instance, the rugby ball is designed in such a way that it rebounds unpredictably, and, in sport climbing, weather conditions are constantly out of the climber's control and determine his ascent. Moreover, the athlete's way to manage his forces is precisely one which embraces its cycle of generation, dispossession and regeneration of vitality: he gathers his forces, uses them and eventually strengthens his body. In that sense, the athletic existence is a Nietzschean one "The higher man is distinguished from the lower by his fearlessness and his readiness to challenge misfortune" (WP Book II, I, 3, §222, Nov. 1887-March 1888).

This way of life is precisely the opposite of the Christians', the major heralds of reactive instincts, characterized by the internalization of instincts. Nietzsche paradoxically defines the original Christianity, as opposed to the ecclesiastical one, "as way of life, not a system of beliefs. It tells us how to act; not what we ought to believe" (WP, Book II, I, 2, §212, Nov. 1887-March 1888). The Christian idiosyncrasy is defined by the fear of the problematic aspects of life, he thinks: "I will do nothing that may disturb the peace within me: and if I must suffer on that account, nothing will serve better to maintain my peace than suffering." (*Ibid.*) Fear of life produces inertia and, in return, it creates a contradictory form of *eudaimonia* despite the agony. The formation of obstacles is internal, as it is the contradiction itself which reinforces the pain and makes the sufferer unable to leave his state between *apatheia* and *pathos*. The external inability of the body to challenge misfortune is turned into a stable condition of degeneration of forces, originating from the body.

The second contradiction of the Christian faith is that suffering becomes a constitutive element of life (GM III §11, 151) but, it is also questioned and requires justifications (GM II §7, 77). "Why is life so painful?" sighs the Christian. In the world of sports, enduring the pain of the efforts, of the

injuries and of the losses are nothing more but the conditions *sine qua non* of the activity, it does not come from a spiritual meaning or the essence of one's being, e.g. from the original sin. This way to consider pain as something external to oneself is similar to Nietzsche's description of the master's way to deal with pain, as Deleuze explains: the pain is identified, isolated in order to avoid its propagation—the meaning of pain is one which is external as it is not generated from within (Deleuze, 202). Hardship is a constituent of sporting ways of life, and the pain which derives from it remains unquestioned. The nihilistic hardship is different as it proceeds from the search of spiritual answers to the pain, which amplifies its effects, hence, Nietzsche states: "[before the triumph of the civilized man] pain did not hurt as much as it does nowadays" (GM II §7, 76).

Nevertheless, sport has also been celebrated by Christian voices, it is therefore necessary to understand how it is compatible with this way of life, from a certain point of view. The period of the Duecento shows an important turn in the Christian theological evaluation of sport because of the Aristotelian influence on Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas analyses the legitimacy of games and "outward movements" in his *Summa Theologica*.<sup>7</sup> After a first antithetic part where Aquinas presents the arguments against games, he answers that, according to Augustine's *De Musica* and Aristotle's *Ethics*, respectively, resting is sometimes necessary and games can have the virtue of *eutrapelia*, i.e. pleasantness or wittiness,<sup>8</sup> which is useful to rest from the work of faith. Sport is approved and portrayed as a neutral activity similar to sleep.

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<sup>7</sup> Second part of second part, question 168.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Father of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros., New York, 1947, Second part of second part, question 168, article 2, p. 2509. Aquinas quotes *De Musica*, II, 15; *Ethics* II, 7; IV, 8.

During the Renaissance, humanists went further in the institutional apology of sports. The renewal of the Greco-Roman spirit led Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius II, to say that “Games and exercises which develop the muscular activities and the general carriage of the person should be encouraged by every teacher.”<sup>9</sup> From this point of view, the lessons of discipline, courage, endurance, self-sacrifice, self-confidence and hard-work provided by sport contribute to build character. The sporting qualities were considered as the propaedeutic values of the Christian teaching, since they train the moral teachings *via* its physical expression. Nowadays, this mix of ethical values and moral values constitute the contemporary *doxa* defining the compatibility of sport and Christian life.<sup>10</sup> I believe that the conditions of possibility of this amalgam and of the Christian apology of sports are the fact that modern sports keep the Greek elements of athleticism but, severely reduces its violent nature.

As the sociologists Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning claim, the emergence of modern sports in Protestant countries, especially in England, shows an increase of self-control, moral code and institutional regulation of violence in the late XVIIIth century and the early XIXth century.<sup>11</sup> The quality of self-control became prevalent with the English idea of fair-play,<sup>12</sup> therefore, humanity witnessed a reactive-becoming of sports as the dimension of conservation partially superseded the aggressive spontaneity.

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9 Piccolomini, “The Treatise of Aenas Sylvius Piccolomini, Afterwards Pius II, De Liberorum Educatione”, In *Vittorino Da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, ed. by William Harrison Woodward, Teachers College Press, New York, 1963, 138.

10 Shirl James Hoffmann, *Good Games, Christianity and the Culture of Sports*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2010, 113-114.

11 Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, “An Essay on Sport and Violence” In *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the civilising process*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986, 150.

12 Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *op. cit.*, 151.

Even if self-control is reinforced, a certain discharge of instincts, i.e. a *catharsis*, is still possible, as well as an *ekstasis*, i.e. and escape of the self. The crowds engage in the emotions of the game, of the character of the sportsmen, while the athletes engage in the agonistic experience which is necessary to keep themselves away from self-created chimera. By doing so, the spectators and the athletes forget themselves in the joy of the game. Yet, the *catharsis* of the crowd and *ekstasis* of the athletes can be controlled and directed towards particular, political goals.

For instance, the ambiguity of the Church towards sports in the Middle Ages is significant. The sociologist Shirl James Hoffmann explains that the approval of sports by Pope John XXI in 1316 (four years after the ban of sports by Pope Clement V) is not issued after long theological debates but results from pragmatic opinions concerning the Crusades.<sup>13</sup> For Pope John XXI, the tournaments were seen as a means of elevating the popular sentiment for the crusades, as a source of income, and as a military preparation to defeat the pagans.<sup>14</sup> The pragmatic interests of conquest and the pressure of the popular sentiment counterbalanced the ascetic ideals.<sup>15</sup>

This socio-political function of sport is also analyzed by Marxists sociologists such as Jean-Marie Brohm who claims that sport is an apparatus of capitalism, bearing its value of oppression through the industry of spectacles which alienate people.<sup>16</sup> According to him, the stadia are political spaces where the crowd becomes foolish and mimetic, leaving an open door for the tyrannical control of the minds. Hence, sports also create the illusion of entertainment through the cathartic-mimetic effect of spectacles. From this

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13 Shirl James Hoffman, *op. cit.*, 52-53.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 50.

16 Jean-Marie Brohm, “Le spectacle sportif, une aliénation de masse” In *Mediapart*, 2 April 2013, URL: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/denis-collin/blog/020413/un-article-de-jean-marie-brohm-le-spectacle-sportif-une-alienation-de-masse>.

perspective, sport is only a display of external instincts because it performs the exact opposite: after the people have consumed the *panem et circenses*, after they are hypnotized, their instincts become more placid, and both the spectators and the athletes are more likely to be obedient. In Nietzschean terms, *catharsis* can be the tool for spiritualization.

### **Movement: Askesis and Ekstasis**

Mechanical activity and its corollaries, such as absolute regularity, punctilious unreasoning obedience, the chronic routine of life, the complete occupation of time, a certain liberty to be impersonal, nay, a training in ‘impersonality,’ self-forgetfulness, ‘incuria sui’—with what thoroughness and expert subtlety have all these methods been exploited by the ascetic priest in his war with pain. (GM III §18)

This quote shows that sport possesses more than one taming feature. The sporting rules and moral framework are completed by the mere ability of movements to lead away from the individual development of forces. Nietzsche refers to the ritualistic aspect of the monastic life and maybe to movements of circumambulation, which bring about “self-forgetfulness”, that is to say a specific *ekstasis*. The priest and the athletes have in common the fact that they have to repeat certain sets of movements during their physical and spiritual journey. Both are not governed by a specific point in time and space: wherever the athletes are, whatever are their emotions, they must repeat their rituals or their choreography. The desires of the moment are not heard. The term *askesis* itself shows its double belonging to the religious and the sporting worlds, as it means “exercise, training” in Ancient Greek.<sup>17</sup> Asceticism fosters “an active refusal to get rid of [a once indented impression], a continuing and a wish to continue what has once

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Hulin, “Ascèse & Ascétisme”, *Encyclopædia Universalis*, URL : <http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/ascese-et-ascetisme>.

been willed, an actual memory of the will”, which is an “opposition-power” to the robust health of forgetfulness (GM II §1, 62). Hence, *askesis* is the shadow of self-forgetfulness, *ekstasis*, and, one forgets daily life in order to embrace another routine. Sport, articulated in rules and mechanical repetition, bears similitudes with the structure of work, *negotium*. Training could strengthen auxiliary skills of work, and, far from being definitely relieved of the burden of social responsibilities, the individual would be conditioned to carry more duties.

Furthermore, since the obstacles of sport are artificial, i.e. they are fabricated, the microcosm which the athletes inhabit is somehow disconnected from the rest of the world and their daily life. Their behaviors in the *gymnasia* and the *stadia* do not coincide perfectly with their ability to show courage, strength, lightness in the other areas of life. Sport does not necessarily provide an everlasting solution to the negative affects which derive from the minimum of vitality; once the athletes leave the agonistic space, the normal nihilism resumes its path towards to enthronement. Precisely because sport benefits from a form of autonomy by defining sporting rules, space, time and ethical behavior, one can ask “even if a form of alleviation is possible in sport, does that make any difference?”

### **What is the meaning of the ascetic practice of sport?**

The possibility that sport, as movements and structures of games, is an instrument of a nihilistic society is darkening the portrayal of the *stadia*; but, these doubts derive from an extra-individual, historical point of view. However, if we change the perspective from a macro-social to a micro-individual one, the issue reveals itself under another light.

About the genealogy of the bad conscience and of the “memory of the will”, Nietzsche asks: “How thoroughly, in order to be able to regulate the future in this way, must man have first learnt to distinguish between necessitated and accidental phenomena, to think causally, to see the distant as present and to anticipate it, to fix with certainty what is the end, and what is the means to that end?” (GM II §1)

We saw that sport increases the type of consciousness which controls, analyzes and predicts, yet, an important difference separates the athletic life with the sacerdotal: the finality of the repetition. The priest acts towards the end of times, the end of history or the after-life, which appears as the justification of an ascetic and moral existence. With the idea that the after-life is eternal, it follows logically that the otherworldly future appears as the only important thing of existence—in mathematical terms, the future is attributed an infinite value, thus the value of the present decreases toward zero.

On the opposite end, even though the athlete trains in order to improve some skills, he knows that there is no true finality to his training except the pleasure of the sporting act itself. I claim that there is no teleology of training, unless this teleology is synthetically inserted through a reactive reinterpretation. On the scale of one’s existence, the athletic life is doomed to fail, since the gains are ephemeral and that muscle tissues disappear with time and old age is inevitable. Even the professional athlete senses that his activity is not rational and bring about danger—there are easier, more secure and well-paid professions. Therefore, sport is active as it requires no existential justification—running, jumping, dancing, climbing, playing with object are childish actions which are primarily justified by the *hic et nunc*.

A reactive interpretation of sport is one which asks “should sport exist?” as it has been the case in Christian theology, for centuries.<sup>18</sup> The answer to this question is necessarily one which answers with functionalist, utilitarian theories, if it defends sport as something truly good, for example, with the idea that sport is good for health.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, health is secondary to the joy of sport, because the child does not think that he needs to play for his health, it is a spontaneous action. And this is the critical source of a misinterpretation of sport which prevails: the interpretations of sport in sport science and sport philosophy are still reactive interpretations as long as it seeks justifications for sport in the ideas that sport is good *for* character building, health, *eutrapelia*, to mention few arguments. Indeed, these justifications are merely *raison d’être* to prove that sport is needed for conservation; yet, life in its whole requires not only conservation but over-being: a surplus of strength and not a minimal vitality.<sup>20</sup> Thus, I argue that the *sui generis* asceticism of sport is one which has the structure of an eternal return which selects and destroys the reactive forces through the repetition of movements and moments of hardship.

Sports are not simple childish movements, but they increase the selectivity and hardship of movements by adding a surplus of rules. The sporting rules imitate the social, moral and political ones, even those of the war, i.e. *jus in bello*. Their subordination to the dogmas of our civilization is ambiguous *qua* sports emerges between the moral and the amoral realm, the Greek and

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18 Shirl James Hoffman, *op. cit.*, “Proscribing, Controlling and Justifying Sport”, 47-71.

19 Similarly to Herbert Spencer’s theory where the good coincides with the useful, described in GM I §3, 22.

20 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. by Aaron Ridley, trans. by Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 3.



the Protestant worlds and the Apollonian (controlling, shaping instincts) and the Dionysian instincts (*ekstasis* and *mimesis*). However, Nietzsche writes: “The ascetic ideal has at times, even in the most intellectual sphere, only one real kind of enemies and damagers: these are the comedians of this ideal—for they awake mistrust.” (GM III §27)

Sportsmen, *qua* comedians and joyful satirists of the ascetic ideal, are at the best place to deconstruct the values of our history, from the inside. The sporting realm is a *topos* of active-becoming of our instincts as it leads the process of spiritualization towards bodily games. To put it differently, the rules of sport increases our self-consciousness, but, by doing so, they reveal that the mastery of our being is not necessarily subordinated to a moral quest.

In order to play with the reactive forces, one must embrace the nihilistic world and lead it to its extreme in order to accelerate the self-destruction of the reactive forces, which is their inherent becoming (Deleuze, 109). The sporting *agon* casts a light on the weaknesses and the differences between each man, for their inequalities have direct consequences on the game. Hence, the athletes are granted a space where the “*pathos* of distance” (WP, II, 3, §221, Nov. 1887-March 1888), i.e. the pride of one’s individual difference, is possible, contrarily to the nihilistic values where the differences are levelled and impoverished (Deleuze, 70). The winner gains from his victory, while the athlete who loses accepts that he lacks a certain power and he accepts the pain of the defeat in order to *act* on his forces to come closer to victory. In the athletic life, the forces are questioned, valued and re-acted. Namely, the reactive forces manifest their lack of vitality in front of the victorious ones. The courage of the sportsmen is not to participate, but to have the courage to transmute the reactive elements into active ones. The active-becoming proceeds by the active negation of the reactive elements, their destruction (Deleuze, 281). The mere idea of training is selective: if someone who is alien to sport is being questioned to accept an existence of hard training, injuries and good health, ephemeral glories and disappoint-

ment, the inadequacy of the efforts and the results, would he be able to say “yes”? This question is similar to the Nietzschean question of the acceptance of the eternal return of all things, as it is the question itself which enhances the gap between those who affirm life in its whole and those who negate it (Deleuze, 106). Yet, the two questions differ *qua* the former concerns a microcosm of life, i.e. sporting life, whereas the second one is general.

Sport uses the context of nihilism in order to transcend it because the rules which are usually taming the individuals are now creating the conditions to play and to be creative. The Nietzschean model of creation and liberation is not one which is reactionary nor radical. Nietzsche does not have the nostalgia of the spontaneity of the first, naive men. The escape from history is not radical as there is no *deus ex machina* which will grant us an ahistorical solution. His conception of creation is antichristian because only an *ex materia* creation is possible, as opposed to the *ex nihilo* creation of matter in Christian theology:<sup>21</sup> the creative individual can only transcend his time, but he cannot abstractly fabricate a place which would be radically outside of nihilism. Therefore, one cannot be *purely* active, but can constantly act on the reactive forces, transform them. As such, sport is a significant example of this process where the material—the context of spiritualization and its codes—are exaggerated and amplified in order to create something playful out of it. Sport is thus the comedy of nihilism, but most comedians ignore themselves as such. The rules are arbitrary, as they are not determined by a higher power or a superior value. They require an overplus of vitality, as sport is not primarily a means of conservation, like a mere profession. However, as Nietzsche explains, the simple fact of having to respect a law, a rule, or even a moral code is necessary to “discipline and cultivate

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21 Fabien Revol, « Théologie de la création continuée », *Revue des sciences religieuses* [En ligne], 91/2 | 2017, mis en ligne le 01 janvier 2019, consulté le 26 juin 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rsr/3953> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/rsr.3953>.

a spirit<sup>22</sup> (BM, 188): “Whichever moral code we inspect in that light, its ‘nature’ teaches us to hate the excessive freedom of *laissez-aller* and instils a need for limited horizons, for immediate tasks—it teaches us to narrow our perspective, and thus in a certain sense, to be stupid, as a precondition for life and growth.” (*Ibid*)

In opposition to the severity and seriousness of the world-denying asceticism within Christianity, sport preserved the disciplining dimension of morals by reinforcing its “stupid,” arbitrary, insignificant aspects and added the stimulation of the game. The children who do not love sports are right when they ask why football players all run after a ball. There is no reason to follow the sporting rules, except the thrill. It is hard to believe that any sport can be as serious as the perseverance for the Christian crown of immortality. However, the mere fact of having rules is a generator of growth, as it restricts our possibilities. From this perspective, “excessive freedom” leads to dissolution whereas the “limited horizons” bring about games. One can only transcend the moral rules by creating new laws, and, our civilization with another form of culture. *In fine*, spontaneity can only be regained by means of playful discipline and mastery of lightness.

## Conclusion

The investigation on the quality of sport, in regard to the Nietzschean hierarchy of forces, led to several perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon. The comparison of an athletic economy of vitality with the Christian one shows a seminal difference. The athletes find joy in the apprehension

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22 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. by Marion Faber, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

and the pursuit of solutions of external, bodily difficulties, whereas the Christians, as nihilists *par excellence*, are founded on a fear and an inability to apprehend these obstacles. The need of *agones* is then turned into an internal labyrinth. In other words, sport accelerates the cycle of energy, whereas the nihilistic *modus* reduces it in favor of a pure escape in the spiritual realm.

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of its functions, sport coexists peacefully with reactive powers. It played a role in the preparation for the Crusades and, later, it adapted to the Protestant decorum by reduction of violence and increase of self-control. The analysis of the use of repetitive movements strengthens suspicion over its ability to create a world of lightness devoid of spiritual content. Does the ascetic face of sports hide behind the appearance of joy, as *ekstasis* for the athletes, and, *catharsis-mimesis* for the spectators? If the sportsmen, like the priests, shape their existence by the repetition of movements, are they united in a tamed form of nihilism? Or, worse, is this activity so independent from life, *qua* artefact, that its effects on life is negligible?

I answer that these questions are reactive as such. Following Nietzsche’s discovery of the active forces, as primary and spontaneous ones, I believe that reactive perspectives only bring about reactive answers: it is their nature to ask for justifications. Instead, it is necessary to understand that, on the scale of one’s life, sport is as absurd as Sisyphus’ damnation. Moreover, it is precisely in this absurdity that the world of sports mocks the moral one. In reality, the movements of sportsmen have different qualities than the priests’ because they are only superficially repetitive—they refine in time. Improvement *in the joy of games* is the only content of the otherwise empty laws of the stadium. In sport, the law precedes the content of the law, likewise, movements precede the reasons of movements. Sport can always be reinterpreted and reused by external actors: it is its weakness and strength to be of a somatic nature—the intellectual representations are secondary. Like children, sportsmen have a spontaneity which can be “perverted” by masked philosophers and priests. However, sport is independent from morals, as it

provides a rare place for games and valued differences, i.e for a development of vitality devoid of inverted values. Sport games enable an active-becoming of forces, i.e the transformation of the reactive ones and the action on them, as opposed to the levelling propagation of reactive forces. In virtue of this power, sport is a continuous creation of vitality through bodily gestures, which reveal that being non-spontaneous with all the instincts is the only way to conserve the strong, spontaneous ones. The sporting microcosm allows an earthly world alleviated from the content of our civilization, yet, it preserves the necessary discipline to remain on the brink between mortifying ideals and dissolution in extreme freedom. Perhaps, sport, as a disciplining power, can nowadays peacefully coexist with the Church precisely because the latter has abandoned its scepter and has left it for the satires of the jester.

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## Nietzsche's Collective "Will to Power" and the Coaching Style of Phil Jackson

Bradley Kaye

What does Nietzsche mean when he vacillates between the terms "I" and "we" throughout his writings? How might this apply to the philosophy of sports? Many coaches tell their players that there is no "I" in team and the cliché is intended to teach players to lose their egos in order to serve the interests of the team. For many readers of Nietzsche, one might respond by saying, "But, there is an I in will to power." This is true, except there is also "We" and it is obvious upon further inspection that will to power serves as both "I" and "We". For example, the preface to *Genealogy of Morality*: "We are unknown to ourselves, *we* men of knowledge - and for good reason. *We* have never sought ourselves." This way that Nietzsche beckons "we," especially in this context, can bear affinity with Jnana Yoga, the spiritual practice of self-knowledge, but in this case on a group level that maximizes the performance of the body through building sound-minded, self-mastery practices.

At the earliest phases of Western thought, Michel Foucault outlines<sup>1</sup> that there were two main poles of self-knowledge: *gymnasia* ("to train oneself") and *meditatio* ("an imaginary experience that trains thought"). *Gymnasia* is a training of the body for a real situation, and in Plutarch's *On the Daemon of Socrates*, one gives oneself over to very hard sporting activities and one places oneself in front of tantalizing foods only to then renounce them. Socrates as the wrestler and philosophical competitor congealed in the mind of Nietzsche an image of the philosopher as an athletic competition, rather than merely '*meditatio*'-discursive argumentation through the testing of validity or invalidity of logos (a speech act that articulates truth through language). There is no '*meditatio*' without also '*gymnasia*' hence, a philosophy of sport is fundamental to understanding the self-mastery of the body because mind and body are not dualistically separate, but inextricably connected. *Meditatio*, if it is contained within the realm of the mind and logos must be understood as immanently produced within the body and its impulses, instinctual drives, and primitive forms of affect which can be "trained" and directed through gymnastic athletic competition.

Nietzsche says throughout his work that Will to power is pathos rather than logos. Nietzsche is crystal clear on this point throughout his work. To reduce philosophy to propositions is to miss the corporeal aspects of training oneself. *Gymnasia* is not about domesticating pathos, or repressing pathos, rather it is about bringing the "we" within the self into "one" even if that one is a complete illusion.

Sports are the perfect terrain to truly gain a sense of Nietzschean will to power. Defeating an elite adversary means that a higher version of yourself and your team must emerge. Nietzsche knew that healthy competition was the pinnacle of philosophical pursuit and he describes philosophy as finding good fencing partners. Those who are successful in sport possess the will

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault. *Technologies of the Self*. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Pg. 240-41.

to power. Nietzsche describes his Übermensch Zarathustra summoning the courage to overcome the inner-cowardice of the 'inner-dwarf' which is the voice inside of everyone that raises doubts and uncertainty. An athlete who must step up in the big game and make a clutch play has to train the mind to overcome those self-doubts to perform under pressure when the game is on the line. Many players cannot handle the pressure and fold. As Nietzsche knew all too well, the work of philosophy is the work of the body in action. Competition can be a life enhancing enterprise that pushes consciousness to higher levels. By defeating an elite adversary a higher version of yourself must emerge.

A confrontation between Zarathustra and the dwarf in *On the Vision and the Riddle* makes this inner-conflict apparent, "Courage finally bade me to stand still and speak: "Dwarf! It is you or I" - courage is the best slayer, courage which attacks; for in every attack there is playing and brass." (Z, On Vision and Riddle) and his understanding that the goal of society is to create "a choice type of being, able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of being." (BGE § 258) It is also crucial to understand that good competition can elevate the skills of everyone involved, but a point that is often missed when discussing Nietzsche is that in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he makes a very clear distinction between competition and hunting.

Hunting for souls, or the destruction of embodied form,<sup>2</sup> and the fight to the death as the realm of religion and its psychologists of the soul who: "would like to have hundreds of hunting assistants, and fine trained hounds, that he could send into the history of the human soul, to drive his game together." (BGE § 45). Clearly, is making categorical distinctions between competition, playing, and hunting. Hunting with the intention of flattening and dominating the opponent is akin to earlier medieval forms of sport

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<sup>2</sup> I think Nietzsche has in mind the idea of the body and soul as described in the Phaedo. Where the philosopher is a despiser of the body who wants to free the soul from association with the body as much as possible.

which I will outline in a moment. It is crucial to clearly show that Nietzsche makes a distinction between hunting something to kill it and the agonistic spirit of athletic competition where adversaries live to play another round. This newer, agonist spirit of sports was only just emerging in the late 1800's. Agonism must be distinguished from taking lives and the process of hunting for souls which is akin to what Nietzsche defines as religion, and the latter category of hunting for souls was akin to the function of sports in the medieval era under the hegemony of Catholic power. In the modern era, sports would not take this life or death connotation and Nietzsche sees this process emerging as a 'kinder gentler' understanding of sports emerged in the modern era. Players in medieval "camp ball" games would be unconcerned about inflicting fatal attacks on the enemy in the way that contemporary concerns over concussions have been a recent cause of concern for the contemporary National Football League.

Hence, when Nietzsche says, "the spiritual flattening of a people is a compensation namely for the spiritual deepening of another people" (BGE, § 241) this indicates a way that the Übermensch's coach must inspire the agonistic, playful, and competitive "flattening" of the opponent, not by being caught up in the opponent's game, but through the spiritual deepening of his players. Most coaches make the mistake of leading from the outside-in, rather than from the inside-out.<sup>3</sup> What the exceptional coach does with the "we-Übermensch"-team is allow for the exertion of energy in his teams to be most efficient, by "benching the ego," and "letting every player discover their own role,"<sup>4</sup> effectively utilizing energy through passing, getting other involved in his famous 'triangle offense' and in doing so, his players moved

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<sup>3</sup> Phil Jackson. *Eleven Rings: The Soul of Success*. Penguin: New York, pg.11.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

“effortlessly and without a second-thought, there was no doubt, it was as reflex, no mind, and of one mind” (Jackson’s words) and yet, the other team is confused, working much harder to keep up, and by the end exhausted, i.e. energetically ‘flattened’ - this is the winning technique that Phil Jackson’s coaching style perfected. The players give everything to the game.

### **Sports in the late 1800’s**

The word sport most likely derives from the Latin word *desporto*, meaning “to carry away.” As some scholars have researched, early sports were a way of settling conflicts between communities, settling debts, resolving juridical disputes, and in victory the winning side might carry away the other team. Sometimes a juridical aspect existed in the form of absolving a debt, or enacting a catharsis, and other times sports enabled pure entertainment out of sheer boredom. Yet, the rules to the games are much more clearly delineated. As you go further back into history the line between ‘hunting and competing’ is far less obvious, and so lines from Nietzsche may have indicated an opinion on what would then fall into the category of “sports” but today might seem absurd to think of in those terms, such as the section three in *Beyond Good and Evil* “The Religious Nature” where he characterizes the psychologist as the lover of the “big game hunt” who seeks after souls. (BGE § 45)

Sports might have taken on a totally different trajectory had not the commercialization of all aspects of life swept through the modern era. There are three sections from *Dawn* that stand out as the middle period of Nietzsche’s thought give us insight into his trepidation over §173 - *Eulogizers of work*, §174 - *Moral Fashion of a Commercial Society*, and § 175 - *The Fundamental Idea of a Culture of Commercial Beings*. All of these clearly show criticism that Nietzsche explicitly articulated pointed attacks against the encroachment of

the modernist unreflective ethos of ‘work’ over ‘play,’ and these can shape our understanding of his views of what went completely wrong with the current status of sports in modern life. He is not just talking about playing sports within the defined rules, but creating new forms of sport, and discovering creative ways of utilizing sports as a way of creative self-mastery.

Gymnasia, or what Vedic philosophy calls *Jnana yoga*, as fundamental to the process of self-mastery. Sports becoming big business, takes the enjoyment out of the game and Nietzsche notices this, not in the context of sports per se, but all areas of modern life becoming subsumed under the efficient stupidity of the marketplace, as Nietzsche makes clear in those sections. It is a problem because it extinguishes free laziness and free play where one might “laze about and be idiotic and childish to one’s heart’s content.” (D, § 179) - if you look back at the context where the most popular modern sports were invented in the West these sports were all created in leisurely contexts.

Up until the late 19th century there was no business of sports in the way it exists today. Many of the ideas about sports were unformed because the great titans of the twentieth century, the *Übermensches* of Babe Ruth, Muhammed Ali, and Michael Jordan among others, had not yet cast their colossal shadow over our normative conceptions of what sport ought to be. A cottage industry of sports ethics and philosophy of sport has emerged a-posteriori in the modern era. It is crucial to keep in mind that for Nietzsche none of this had occurred yet, and his only reference points were the Greeks of antiquity, and the sports that existed at that time. Anything else was conjecture of the imagination. The major sports were boxing, cricket, horse-racing, and baseball, which had not yet obtained its status in the American nostalgia machine as its treasured “National Pastime.”

In Nietzsche’s day, sports were still widely considered hobbies and club activities among the wealthier classes for fun. The National Association of Professional Baseball Players had only formed in 1871, and Dr. James Naismith, who held a doctorate in divinity, would not raise his famous peach

baskets in the Springfield, Massachusetts YMCA until 1891.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that if you look back into the history of professional basketball, for example, the game was invented by someone with an advanced education and most of the earliest coaches were people with a high level of education in fields unrelated to sports. Since there was no “Egyptianized”<sup>6</sup> history within basketball at the time which would tell people what the patterns of success “ought” to be, sports were typically understood to be opportunities to teach teenagers and young adults about moral virtues through the process of play. It was not yet merely corporate team-building exercises, per se, but team building exercises that taught the innate value of team would eventually lead to success and winning, and not the inverse that we see today.

There is no better quotation in all of Nietzsche’s oeuvre that better describes the trajectory of modern life, and by extension modern sports than *Dawn* §175, the fundamental idea of a culture of commercial beings, in which we see the prophecy that the twentieth century will bring with it a society where commerce is just as much in the soul as competition was for the Greeks, and war, law, and victory was for the Romans. Value is now assessed, not according to individual personal need, but according to commerce.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Naismith, James. “James Naismith, Rare 1939 Radio Interview.” YouTube, uploaded 15 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yxk6pb64F8> - explains how he invented basketball and the original rules. Again proving my point that what begins as “contingency is retroactively understood as necessary” a recent publication where I go into further detail can be found: “What About Life? What Starts as Contingency is Retroactively Understood as Necessary” <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/1154>

6 By this I mean of course the Nietzschean sense of a “mummified” history, preserved, revered, reified, and thereby, completely limiting to new innovations in the field.

7 The recent airing of the documentary *The Last Dance* is so prescient on this point, in that the commercialization of professional basketball occurred during the 1980’s and 90’s and that process was all a contingency, much like the grandeur of Michael Jordan, Phil Jackson, and the great legends of that era. There was no guarantee that any of that had to happen and there were numerous interviews conducted by the leadership of the Chicago

Nietzsche’s philosophy lends itself well to a philosophy of sport, because it gives us a return to “beginner’s mind” - a clean slate view on sports, back when their existence was merely a contingency, and prior to the way people relate to sports now, as if “sport” is to be approached as a reified-object without realizing it as such.

### **Nietzsche’s “I” and “We”: What is a collective ‘Will to Power’**

One of many reasons is Nietzsche’s nuanced way of vacillating from beckoning his readers using “I” and “we.” Who is this we? Is he calling his readers? Those who find sympathy with his arguments, i.e. his ‘team’ in the fencing match that is philosophy? It also leads me to believe that many people have correctly started to assert that the ‘will to power’ can be understood in a plural sense, rather than as an isolated atomized individualized sense. In describing the “we”-will to power, it is by no means a nebulous, undifferentiated herd-experience. A ‘primal force of affects’ is put into practice through the practice of competitive sports—an agonism rather than the violent antagonism of war, that elevates the skill level in each competitor. The point of philosophy is not to produce dialectically efficient “sick hermits” (*BGE*, § 5), but finding worthy fencing partners.

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Bulls organization at that time that showed they sort of lucked into that situation and that Jordan’s work ethic, staying away from drugs and alcohol, made for a one-dimensional laser like focus necessary for him to surpass other competitors of his era. In hindsight it may seem like it was totally obvious at the time that Jordan was destined for greatness, but he was only a young man at the time when he entered the league and you can see a sort of youthful uncertainty about him that would only blossom later into the full mystique of what he would become later on, at that time, there were no guarantees, and he had to ‘earn his stripes’ as he said, through his actions not his voice, because as a rookie he had not yet earned the right to a voice as a leader.



It is crucial to remember that perhaps Nietzsche was positioning the “will to power” as tearing free from the eternal recurrence. Will to power truly became the central concern of Nietzsche’s philosophy in 1888. His final productive year. Subsequently, “the will to power is not a being not a becoming, but a pathos.” (WP, §635) a quotation he writes immediately after writing as follows: “We need ‘unities’ in order to be able to reckon: that does not mean we must suppose that such unities exist.”<sup>8</sup>

The will to power is a decentralization of ontology that springs forth from one point or term, from which differences are unfolded and recoiled back into itself as it seeks its most primordial possibilities of disclosure.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche then emphasizes the plurality of affects working upon the body by saying, “The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or of several other, affects.” (BGE, §117).

A decentralized will that can break out of the routinization of the being of beings: “If the world had a goal, it must have been reached. If there were for it some unintended final state, this also must have been reached...the fact of “spirit” as a form of becoming proves that the world has no goal, no final state, and is incapable of being.” (WP, §1062).

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<sup>8</sup> I am not the first to put forth this thesis. For a similar perspective on will to power see “Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power’: Politics Beyond (Hegelian) Recognition” by John H. Smith. *New German Critique*, no. 73. Winter 1998. Pg. 133-163. Smith claims, and I agree with his thesis, as follows: “Nietzsche redefines the terms of politics, since the will to power is not an individualized, self-identical entity modeled on a self-consciousness that engages in struggles with some other likewise self-contained individuals, but rather an internally self-differentiating force always experiencing affective interactions...” (pg. 133). This theme of necessary illusions stretches at least as far back in the Nietzschean oeuvre as *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense*. One can read Nietzsche’s writings as investigating the immanence of ‘necessary illusions’; as he matures as a philosopher, he moves further inward, interrogating the immanence of power as inscribed within the psyche of the subject.

<sup>9</sup> Probably the best book to not do this is Pierre Klossowski’s *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*. 1997. London: The Athlone Press.

Continuing with this theme, it is not unusual that when you find Nietzsche describing the will to power you also see him utilizing the plural sense of “we” and then a critique of a substantialized sense of the self, rather than a citadel of the self in the form of an identifiable “I” commanding the commonwealth of the soul, rather as a temporary unification of affects and drives. Prior to action there is not a thought that directs the action towards an idealized end as if the self were pre-directed by ideas, thoughts, and mental ideations. Will to power is about effective force of will, and a great coach would understand this, more than overthinking the X’s and O’s of schemes, tactics, strategies, which leads players to burden themselves with over analysis. Emphasis is placed on practicing solid team-affective training so as to loosen up and play the game at its highest levels. What Nietzsche says is absolutely true. If there is no discernible goal, or final state, then no understanding of being is possible, the telos is a trap if it becomes obsessively overdetermining of the process. If there was a goal, the world would already be there, because time is infinite in either direction, and eternally recurring. Goal and process is key. If there are no values, are you worthy of creating your own?

Consider this passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, which is a very common theme throughout Nietzsche’s later writings when his thorough treatment of will to power began:

“Finally, let’s present the different way in which *we* (I politely say *we*) view the problem of error and illusion... Reason sees actors and actions everywhere: it believes in the will as an absolute cause; it believes in the “I,” in the I as being, in the I as a substance, and projects its belief into the I-substance to all things - that’s how it first creates the concept “thing”... Being is thought into things everywhere as a cause, is imputed to things, from the conception “I” there follows the derivative concept “being”... At the beginning there stands the great and fatal error of thinking that the will is something effective - that will is an ability... Today we know that it is just a word...” (TI, “Reason” § 5)

As Nietzsche is keen to remind us, the slave morality tries to ensnare the strong through pity and compassion and also by teaching the wrong lessons about free will. There might be freedom to choose between this or that act, however, the confusion over free will in the mind of the oppressed is that the ethical thing to do is to take mercy upon the weaker, meek little lambs. It is impossible to imagine athletic competition surviving at all in a world where the Übermensch is conditioned to second-guess the “will to power” as a competitive drive and give mercy to an opponent rather than flatten the adversary in pursuit of victory. To think neurotically, tarrying back and forth indecisively about whether or not to be compassionate is to mistake pity with ethics and this Nietzschean ethos of anti-compassion, anti-pity makes more sense in the context of sports and agonism than in other areas of life.

For example, the bird of prey must be the bird of prey and take nourishment from its prey. In many places, nature is this way because it must be that way, and amor fati is the embracing of these bare facts of life in authenticity, “not to speak of the stupidity of moral indignation, which is the unfailing sign in a philosopher that his philosophical sense of humor has left him...” (BGE, § 25) What is life? “According to nature you want to live?... Living - is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature?” (BGE, § 9) In living there is a transformative aspect to bios and nature. Nature changes as life activates, bios as mobile force activates a transformative effect upon nature, or what appeared once to be a natural stasis is nomadic.

Athletes know this firsthand, without having read Nietzsche, as active-power. Kobe Bryant shooting 2-5,000 jump shots every day in order to perfect his form changes the nature of his body through repetition and experimentation. Michael Jordan going into the weight room after a professional basketball game in order to improve his strength and stamina was activating bios as a mobile force that enabled transformations in his body pushing him above and beyond the levels of corporeal-physis in his competitors. Since we do not yet know what a body can do, “it is perhaps just dawning on five or six

minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and not a world-explanation.” (BGE, § 14) physics as the study of the capabilities of what a superior athlete can do, and how far the body can be pushed must be understood as a series of horizons, interpretations, traversing of thresholds, mobilizing the activation of bios moving beyond, and therefore changing nature, which is never in stasis. “We” are not identical with a hunting bird finding its prey. However, Nietzsche’s philosophy does compel us to think and act under the physical law of nature as vacillating between either active or passive power.

There is a primal drive within the hunting bird to find its prey. If a predator second guesses the instinct to seize its prey, the predator will not eat, and it will eventually die. The bird of prey is limited with the development of its mind which is fortunate for the bird because these limitations make it impossible for the bird to second guess its natural instinct. Humans are not like the bird. We possess logos, and in some ways, this is a curse because we can devise moral systems that tell us to second guess our instinctual reaction to a situation. Superior athletes tend to win or lose on the basis of instinctual reactions that occur at crucial moments in the competition. To second guess an instinct would be akin to negating the talent of the superior athlete/Übermensch.

We are told through Judeo-Christian ethics that humans have freedom and to draw this to its conclusion the strong are free to be weak, and should be like the meek, rather than as the natural form of a bird of prey, to act upon, how they say in professional sports, the “killer instinct” to attack an opponent during the course of a game when the opponent is vulnerable. The meek want to “make the bird of prey responsible for being a bird of prey.” (GM, First Essay, §13)

Great competitors in basketball history, Übermensch like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant would seize upon injuries in their opponents in order to create an advantage for their team. There is a 'bird of prey' attitude that a superior coach does not 'yoke' or 'harness' in any religious sense of *heilige*. Compassion and pity had no place in the athletic arena, not to try and end the others life, but to win the game. The only sort of compassion allowed, would be through Jnana yoga, the compassion of self-knowledge, to 'know thyself' is to have a tactical advantage.

A theme throughout Nietzsche's work is the decadence of Christian "compassion" seeping into all aspects of life:

Certainly one of the purest revelations of the impulse of culture and especially of the impulse to the ever-renewed production of the saint; but since it has been employed in a hundred ways to propel the mills of state power it has gradually become sick to the very marrow, hypocritical and untruthful, and degenerated into a contradiction of its original goal.<sup>10</sup>

The problem, stated throughout all of Nietzsche's writings, is that cultures that accept the virtues of compassion, pity, and humility are in a status of decline for many reasons. One of which is that it weakens the power of the strong who are the driving force behind creative and transformative values. In application to how this would affect a philosophy of sports, it is clear that a thriving society must place a high value upon competition in all areas of life, sports give us exemplary indications of how a society valorizes the performative aspects of those with exceptional abilities, those who are in the game, the political arena, the center-stage of life.

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<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *Untimely Meditations*. Schopenhauer as Educator, translated by R.J. Hollingdale, 1983, Cambridge University Press: New York, pg. 166.

## Phil Jackson on Coaching an Übermensch

When I teach Nietzsche, I often use Phil Jackson as the exemplary coaching style of the 'will to power' as described by Nietzsche. Phil Jackson utilized eastern philosophy and Lakota philosophy in his coaching methods. Nietzschean themes may be interspersed throughout his writings. Jackson has written several books about his coaching philosophy.<sup>11</sup> He coached Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, and Kobe Bryant sometimes pitting rivalries within the team through his knowledge of each player's personality as a way of executing the goal of winning games and maximizing the potential within each player. He claimed that his biggest challenge was how he motivated the team around the star players to develop a competitive spirit among the role players on the team and he knew that each season presented new challenges. There was no such thing as a one size fits all winning template. A great coach would have to adapt along with the team in accordance with creating motivational tactics depending on the needs of the team. These might be constructed as long term goals to set the tone for the month leading into the playoffs, he might start practice with a set of drills to create an atmosphere of amplified seriousness, or in a particularly critical game situation he might intentionally avoid calling a time out to teach the team that they would have to learn resilience in tough situations as a way to avoid panic the next time the game started to slip away. In despair, the coach would not bail out the players, they would have to be their own *deus ex machina* so to speak.

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<sup>11</sup> Notably, Phil Jackson's *Sacred Hoops*, *Eleven Rings*, *The Last Season*, and in this I will not have time to go into full detail about every aspect of his philosophy while addressing Nietzsche, but this will give you an idea of how successful "I" and "we" concepts can be used to inspire athletes to reach their fullest potential, and more importantly, how the rest of the team can stay involved while the Uber-human is performing at the highest level, and motivate a collective 'will to power' that creates a winning culture.

Jackson fuses philosophical practices into athletic performance in his teams and in return has become one of the winningest coaches in professional basketball history. One of the things from Nietzsche that Phil Jackson tacitly understood was that the will to power was not about a selfish, individual ego forcing power upon a situation, which is based on insecure intentions behind the will. We must avoid personal interpretations of the will to power and remind ourselves that interpreting the will to power as wanting or seeking power is the worst of inane platitudes misappropriated to Nietzsche, by those who have never carefully read his work.

To build confidence that the behaviors of the will consist of confident intentions that will return. This is the difference between a one-trick pony, so to speak, a team that wins once, just once, and is never successful again, and a consistent winning program. What strengthens the bonds of the team is what returns, and what strengthens those bonds is what affirms the innate character of the Übermensch, rather than standing in the way in a battle of wills.

“One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil.”

- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue” § 3

How do you coach a player who knows it all? You humble yourself and get out of the way! One gives up control as the coaching occurs. Perhaps nothing describes the philosophy of Phil Jackson’s Zen-inspired Triangle Offense than the line from *Dawn*: “Mastery - mastery has been attained at the point when, in the performance, one neither errs nor hesitates” (D § 537). This occurs because the team must play as active and passive power, acting and reacting to one another. If a player moves to set a screen, the other players must recognize this and act, or react.

Jackson often writes that the Triangle Offense is best understood in the context of what he calls “automatics” where the player with the ball, usually the star player, if there is strong focused defensive pressure placed upon that individual player, “then he can launch into an automatic play to shift the action to another part of the floor and open up new scoring possibilities.”<sup>12</sup> These automatic plays became the Bulls and Lakers favorite plays, because it allowed the players “to adapt to what the defense was doing in a coordinated way, without having to rely on (Jackson) to call plays from the sidelines.”<sup>13</sup> Phil Jackson even utilizes a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche to describe the effectiveness of team building as an after-effect of implementing these automatic plays: “As Friedrich Nietzsche said: ‘Invisible threads are the strongest ties.’”<sup>14</sup>

### **Championships and the Ring of Rings**

“Oh how I should not *lust* for eternity and for the wedding ring of rings, the Ring of Recurrence!”

- TSZ, *The Seven Seals*

“The symbol is the ring.” - Phil Jackson<sup>15</sup>

In professional sports, winning championships is the ultimate goal. Doing so will typically garner a championship ring that symbolizes status, power, and acumen. The ring indicates to others that the team has become the Übermensches of the league for that particular season.

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<sup>12</sup> Phil Jackson. *Eleven Rings*. Pg. 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 103.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 103.

<sup>15</sup> Phil Jackson. *Eleven Rings: The Soul of Success*. Penguin Press: New York. Pg. 2.

In Nietzsche's essay *Homer's Contest*, unpublished during his lifetime, has an astute characterization of the process of struggle that occurs through serious athletic competition, of which there is not necessarily ruthless antagonism fueled by naked primal bloodlust, but a channeling of the primal-affective-drives<sup>16</sup> into a competitive will to power. Nietzsche remarks, "thus the Greeks, the most humane men of ancient times, have a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate - a trait that is so very distinct in that grotesquely enlarged mirror image of the Hellenes..." and "the cruelty of victory is the pinnacle of life's jubilation..." while not espousing the virtues of compassion and humanity, Nietzsche does warn about the modern tendency to blunt the passions of these primal drives that would weaken the will, and yet, the successful teams are those where in a relay race, and the same might hold true of any competitive team game, "Every great Hellene hands on the torch of the contest; every great virtue kindles a new greatness."

In healthy agonistic competition, the spirit of competition even compels the losers to get back up and fight again, losing is a learning experience and a matter of bringing back what was lost in the bruised pride of the loser: "when a noted opponent of Pericles is asked whether he or Pericles is the best wrestler in the city, and answers: 'Even when I throw him down, he denies that he fell and attains his purpose, persuading even those who saw him fall.'"<sup>17</sup> "Every talent must unfold itself in fighting."<sup>18</sup> and this unfolding of talents is not separate from the politics of the community, it serves "necessary to preserve the health of the state."<sup>19</sup> With the physics of power in Nietzsche's work, traditional truth appearances are errors that must be overturned for the vitality of a society to remain vibrant. It is not necessarily kinetic energy merely for the sake of pointless motion, one of the worst things that can happen is that a subject loses its object: "Do you call yourself

free? I want to hear your ruling idea and not that you have escaped from a yoke. Are you such a man as ought to have escaped from a yoke?"<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche continues to say in *Homer's Contest* "the noble virtues were those espoused by Hesiod who claimed it was good that "jealousy, hatred, and envy, spur men into activity: not to the activity of fights of annihilation but to the activity of fights which are contests."<sup>21</sup>

Sports can give a yoke in the form of a rival. In the sense that the state can be strengthened by agonistic competition, there is a point that bears repeating, because from time to time you still hear these things in conferences tagging Nietzsche with the label of fascist sympathizer, and in lines like this, if you only read these quotes out of context and see that one way that the Geist of the political system can stay fresh is by keeping its opponents alive, by turning politics into an agonist sport, not a violent fight to the death: "Almost every party grasps that its own interest, its own self-preservation, depends on the opposing party's not losing its strength; the same applies to politics on the large scale... (which) needs enemies more than it needs friends; only in opposition does it feel that it is necessary, only in opposition does it become necessary..." (TI, "Morality" §3) perhaps Nietzsche had in mind a kind of athletic competition to strengthen the power of the state, as if the body-politics depended upon the kinetic power, and force that it can inflict upon its subjects while propagating life. A point that numerous Nietzscheans within biopolitical discussions have worked through, yet, sports has remained virtually untheorized in these discussions.<sup>22</sup>

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16 See my "Will to power as Primal-Affective-Forms" in *The Agonist: Nietzsche and the Affects*, Fall 2019/Spring 2020.

17 *Homer's Contest*. Published in the *Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, pg. 36.

18 *Ibid.* pg. 37.

19 *Ibid.* pg. 36.

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20 Thus Spoke Zarathustra. "Of the Way of the Creator." pg. 89.

21 *Homer's Contest*. Kaufmann, pg. 35.

22 With one possible exception, Ben Agger's *Body-Problems: Running and Living Long in a Fast Food Society*, 2019, Routledge: New York.

Think about what Nietzsche says here, in competition, even the artist hates the other artists, and in antiquity the noble virtues were those espoused by Hesiod who claimed it was evil to “lead men into hostile fights of annihilation with one another,” while claiming it was good that “jealousy, hatred, and envy, spur<sup>23</sup> men into activity: not to the activity of fights of annihilation but to the activity of fights which are contests.” It is the competition that spurs the becoming of the ‘Übermensch’ and all areas of life can be viewed as avenues for playful competition.

### **Jnana Yoga: Team-Being and the “Master/Slave” Morality**

In Vedic belief-systems there are four main practices of yoga. Karma, which is the yoga of actions and work. Raja, which is the yoga of exercise and training the body. Bhakti, which is the yoga of love and devotion. Jnana, which is the yoga of self-knowledge and wisdom. The term “jnana” is translated from Sanskrit by some as “deepening self-knowledge.” This seems to be the least utilized yoga in the limited western understanding of “sport” as a life enhancing activity. Practitioners are supposed to keep the mind and body in balance

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23 Jacques Derrida’s work *Spurs* is crucial here in that the ‘spur’ is not a marginal concept in Nietzsche’s thought, but the spur is, much like Socrates as the stinging-gadfly of Athens, the provocation that awakens the truth. In athletic competition this would be the exceptional opponent who competes with the übermensch at the highest level and pushes the rivalry to get the best out of the superior athlete. In professional basketball there are these exceptional rivalries from Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain, to Larry Bird and Magic Johnson, and even the Detroit Pistons ‘Bad Boys’ of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s getting the best of a very young, not yet fully mature Michael Jordan to defeat him in the NBA Playoffs, seasoning him through the bitter taste of defeat to come back stronger, faster, and with a sharpened sense of determination to beat them next season. One can also see this sense of rivalry rekindled in the NBA in recent years with the Golden State Warriors, led by Phil Jackson’s protege coach Steve Kerr, and the best shooting tandem the “Splash Brothers” Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson facing off against the Cleveland Cavaliers led by LeBron James and his teammates Kyrie Irving and Kevin Love. Interestingly enough on this see Kobe Bryant’s video “Cavalier Kingdom: The Two Crowns” to see him break down how a lesser talented Cavaliers team devised a plan to defeat a record-breaking Golden State Warriors team in the 2016 NBA Finals.

through the disciplined control offered by these four styles of yoga. Over centuries, innumerable forms of each yoga have emerged to help people stay on the path to self-awakening. There must be harmony in these four areas of life which one can attune from within oneself. The exceptional coach will offer spiritual practices that give players the chance to attune themselves so that during the games the pleasure of competing is the gratification itself, winning occurs as a result of the “ananda” (inner-bliss) that one experiences while in the flow of the game.

Coaching the Uber-athletes through a series of purifications, simplifications, and self-examinations, the coach allows self-knowledge to create the team-being as one co-operative entity. Echoing a sentiment found in the Bhagavad-Gita we see one of the earliest descriptions of Jnana Yoga:

“A harmony in eating and resting, in sleeping and keeping awake: a perfection in whatever one does. This is the Yoga that gives peace from all pain. When the mind of the Yogi is in harmony and finds rest in the Spirit within, all restless desires gone... Then, with reason armed with resolution, let the seeker quietly lead the mind into Spirit, and let all his thoughts be silence.” (BG, VI, 17-18, 25)

Simplifying these techniques allows for the single-mindedness of the team to develop, with the crucial ingredient to competitive success is the grounding of restless desires to keep the team focused on the task at hand. In order to do this the coach must allow the competitive seeker (the ‘Übermensch’) to lead the mind of the team into a spirit of winning. Jackson often sounded like Nietzsche in the way he describes his team meetings as less frequently about “X’s and O’s” or technical strategizing, and more about harnessing the team’s inner vision of where they wanted to will themselves to be.

Examples such as these from Nietzsche's writings are too numerous to list. Especially the last portions of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which are laden with the subtext of Jnana Yoga. Nobody has ever written about this, perhaps Nietzsche did this as an homage to Vedic 'gymnasia/meditatio' as a rebuking of the 'despisers of the body' in the Platonic tradition.

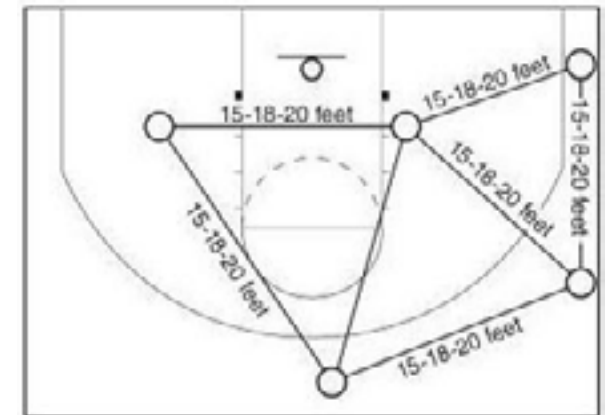
The coach, especially the coach of an "Übermensch"-talent like Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, or Kobe Bryant has the special challenge of melding the various talents of each player into a cohesive "we" and in thinking about what the numerous writers of the Bhagavad-Gita may have had in mind in describing Jnana Yoga in this way we might better understand how Jackson's Triangle Offense became such an effective way to coach numerous Übermensches. Keep in mind that God in the Ancient Vedic scriptures means an inter-connected God.

The famous Ashoka Chakra on the national flag of India is named after King Ashoka, who many believe to be India's greatest spiritual monarch in its history. The Chakra looks like spokes of a wheel with dharma resonating outward from a central hub that connects all, through space between the spokes and the substantive being of the spokes itself:



It contains twenty-four spokes each of which represents the twelve stages of suffering, and the twelve stages of conditional, interdependent arising. Another well-known saying in Taoist thought derives a similar metaphysical point that carries this idea well beyond the terrain of sports into the metaphysics of the cosmos itself: "Many spokes, one wheel, it is the nothingness at the center that turns the wheel." (Tao te Ching, verse 11).<sup>24</sup> Compare this with the spacing in Phil Jackson's famous Triangle Offense where players space the floor with enough room to give each player a chance to improvise while working together as a "we".

Players have spots on the floor that the Jackson gets each player to become accustomed to get to, and the player with the ball can improvise, call for screens, players can move without the ball, set screens away from the ball, do backdoor cuts, and as long as players are gravitating back to this a-priori formation the players are allowed to improvise. This flow to the game that is achieved through perfect team harmony actually occurs through *amor fati*, or love of fate. Each player must love themselves to know what talents they were destined to have, and realize



<sup>24</sup> Verse 11 of the Tao Te Ching was very influential on Martin Heidegger's "Das Ding" and the understanding of the nothingness surrounding the thing as that which brings forth the thingness of the thing.

that authentically amplifying what is, you can only become more of what you are and there is an acceptance of being comfortable with yourself that allows the team to play at a higher level. When players take on unfamiliar roles the “we” of the will to power falls out of harmony and the team becomes dysfunctional.

He claimed the intention was not to turn players into Buddhist monks but to build more alert awareness of themselves as part of an entire team. In a way, Jackson was balancing passive and active power in a way that was most productive for the team. It is exactly the kind of sedentary Buddhism, the anti-Jnana yoga, that Phil Jackson was trying to avoid, the nefarious docile-body Buddhism that Nietzsche describes: “Brahmin-like self-hypnotizing - Brahmanism as crystal ball and fixed idea - and the final, all-too-comprehensible general disenchantment with its radical cure, nothingness” (GM, bk. 1§6). Sedentary nihilism of the docile body is important from time to time, but it must be punctuated with active power to balance it back out.

If players are standing around watching the “übermensch” putting the team on Jordan, Shaq, or Kobe’s back then the team loses and vice versa. If a lesser talented player forms ego and feels humiliated by lack of playing time and scoring opportunities, then a resentment arises. One can think of the many sayings that Nietzsche produced to describe the imbalances of a “slave-morality” that if applied in his situation can rot the “we” mentality of a winning team: “I do not like him, because I am not equal to him.” (BGE §185), or a call to confidence where Nietzsche says, “As long as you still experience the stars as above you, you lack the eye of knowledge.” (BGE §71), or more potently, the *ressentiment* of the slave-morality who “denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge...” and by keeping players involved this *ressentiment* does not fester to the point where, “it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all.” (GM, bk. 1§10) The coaching style of Jackson’s winning teams always emphasized the internally driven motivation.

Throughout his books he describes teams that he coaches who veer from the path of inner-power and get their ego and desire ensnared with their adversary. It is precisely this attitude that Nietzsche shows is the difference between a “master” and “slave” morality. The master morality dictates the flow of the game through inner-driven will to power (the flow of the game). The slave morality often associated with losing teams rely on “external stimuli to act at all” (GM, §7).

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# NIETZSCHE, ZARATHUSTRA, AND THE THREE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE SPIRIT: POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF GAME.

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## Introduction

This text will reflect on the use of the word game at the end of the parable “On the Three Metamorphosis of the spirit”, in Friedrich Nietzsche’s masterpiece *Thus spoke Zarathustra (Z)*<sup>1</sup>. With this, we think we are able to contribute to the accumulated discussion in philosophy of sport<sup>2</sup> from an indirect stimulus, meaning, it is evident that Nietzsche did not have in mind discussing the phenomenon of game but, in using the term, even if allegor-

1 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

2 Philosophy of sport constitutes a relatively new discipline in the area of Philosophy, Kinesiology and correlate areas (such as Physical Education and Sport Sciences). We could trace the institutionalization of the discipline and the concentration of research under this nomenclature starting in the early 70s.

ically, the acuteness of the German philosopher’s thought may open for us fields of reflection that have been little explored in the area. With this, we do not wish to rewrite the concept of game, and even less so to reveal imperfections in its historic rubric. Rather, Nietzschean reflection may foment debates and increment perceptions. What possible interpretations about game at the end of the parable could we realize? Would this excerpt have some contribution to the reigning notion of game?

The reception of Nietzsche in the philosophy of sport is still incipient, having as one of its major representatives Yunus Tuncel<sup>3</sup>, but it appears in works of more applied and thematic character, such as those of Aggerholm<sup>4</sup>, Aggerholm and Larsen<sup>5</sup>, and Kilpatrick<sup>6</sup>, to name a few. The reasons of this incipient effect may be traced back to the predominance of research coming from analytic philosophy in the discipline<sup>7</sup>, although this distinction from continental philosophy was more eminent in the initial years of philosophy of sport as we know it nowadays.<sup>8</sup>

3 Tuncel, Yunus. *Agon in Nietzsche*. Marquette University Press, 2013; Tuncel, Yunus. “Defeat, Loss, Death, and Sacrifice in Sport”. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 409-23.; Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, pp. 349-63.; Tuncel, Yunus. “The Aesthetic and Ecstatic Dimensions of Soccer: Towards a Philosophy of Sport”. *Soccer & Society*. vol. 18, no 2-3, 2017, pp. 181-87.

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6 Kilpatrick, David. “Nietzsche’s Arsenal”. *Soccer and Philosophy*, edited by Ted Richards, Open Court, 2010, pp. 37-46.

7 McNamee, Mike. “Sport, Ethics and Philosophy; Context, History, Prospects”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-6.

8 Moe, Verner F. “The Philosophy of Sport and Continental Philosophy”. *The Bloomsbury Companion to the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Cesar R. Torres, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 52-65.

Many authors have delved into the game thematic through the years.<sup>9</sup> Although this is a topic of broad debate inside philosophy of sport, the definition of Bernard Suits<sup>10</sup> has without a doubt been influential in the area's international academic scene, which maintains in its shortest version that: "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." There is also a large number of works destined to comprehend the game phenomenon, as well as some initiatives encompassing the work of Nietzsche, such as Hyland<sup>11</sup> and Tuncel<sup>12</sup>. Nietzsche uses the term game in his work a few times, although authors such as Tuncel<sup>13</sup> understand that play is a key-notion to understand his thought.

Having done this preamble, we will present the paths treaded to achieve the purposes intended here. We will begin with the presentation of the metamorphosis of the spirit and the concept of game presented in the excerpt of the Nietzschean work. Concomitantly, we will explore other terms, such as innocence, active forgetting, among others used by Nietzsche to build the passage that serves as inspiration and motto to the reflection proposed here. Afterwards, we allude to the concept of free spirit and thus produce nexuses of intelligibility for that which we propose here as player spirit, which serves as an antidote to the herd morality and to a kind of passive resentment. That said, the objective that emerges is to present a more vital and, in turn, more affirmative conception before life's vicissitudes and paroxysms, out of the player spirit.

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9 Some studies such as Meier's (1981) point to a continuum between play-game-sport in many works, while others such as Carlson's (2011) detect metaphysical confusions in classic authors in the area and suggest a clarification and conflation between terms. To avoid eventual confusions: we will margin ourselves by the term "game" comprehending that, here, it also carries aspects of what some interpretations would perhaps state as being more accurately described by spirit of "play", since the German term originally appearing in the passage (*Spiel*) conflates both meanings.

10 Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, And Utopia*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2014, p. 43.

11 Hyland, Drew A. *The Question of Play*. University Press of America, Inc., 1984.

12 Tuncel, Yunus. "Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture". *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no 4, 2016, pp. 349-63.

13 *Idem*.

## Reflections and Developments

Let us start by highlighting the passage in question, at the end of the parable "On the Three Metamorphosis of the Spirit", after the philosopher has communicated to us how the herd individual, facing the desert, metamorphizes first into a camel, then into a lion, and finally into a child. The Camel is the one who stands the weight of the thou-shalt and does not perish, while the Lion is the one who frees themselves from the weight of the thou-shalt, opening space for creation. But, in this unfolding, of what is the child able that the Camel and the Lion could not? Let us read Nietzsche (Z: 1 "On the Three Metamorphoses"):

The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying. Yes, for the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred yes-saying is required. The spirit wants its will, the one lost to the world now wins its own world.

It is important to underline that the mention of the child does not correspond to a nostalgic vision maintained by the author. On the contrary, the philosopher sets himself against this attempt at returning. We think the Nietzsches's intent is to work on the acting of the child, comprehend this dynamic, this movement. In order to do so, Nietzsche begins the paragraph with a provocative and controversial term. Inside the discussion, what could be characterized as innocence? Would it be a romantic connotation? Would it be one of the distinctive elements of the child? Would innocence be a basal condition to the activity of creation and affirmation of becoming?

Maybe we can start from the comprehension that innocence presents itself as a necessary characteristic to the acting of the child and, through this path, assume a certain freedom and detachment this child has in the face of the "Thou-shalt". This innocent state reveals itself thus, as a certain detachment from what is established as good and correct, good and evil. An acceptance

and affirmation of the inexorable march of the becoming. An active and affirmative innocence to create new values. An action that does not possess, in such an imperative form, the weight of gravity that compels towards the absence of movement or towards the morbidity that invites to renunciation. It seems to us that moral values, when facing innocence, present themselves as sandcastles close to the sea and, thus, regardless of the effort to raise them, there is no braking the movement of uninterrupted creation and destruction. The child's innocence plays with this game of creation and destruction not because of a presupposition of the castle's ephemerality (which would be of the order of reason), but rather of its lightness, its precarity, placing ephemerality on the game, not on the castle. Certainly, a form of affirmation of life and a legitimizing of becoming.

The philosopher – in his first writings, dating from the 1870's – mentions the forgetting, a term dear to Nietzsche's thought, and he uses it from some distinct perspectives that, in a first glance, may look contradictory or paradoxical. Forgetting, conceived in a passive way, may be comprehended as the tendency to the maintenance of truths. The attachment to the feeling of security and control which the concepts associated with the sensation of truth, may provide is an illusory one. We were the ones who built the concepts ourselves and, thus, attributed transcendental or absolute values to them, enslaving the creator to the creature. For Nietzsche, this perspective of passive forgetting collaborates to our tolerating and not affirming the inevitable contradiction of the world.

Forgetting, in the philosopher's thought, can also be comprehended as an active and affirmative faculty, as a force promoting life.<sup>14</sup> It is not, therefore, a facilitator to escape reality, which would be more related to the capacity of forgetting oneself as a being of the herd. The forgetting of the man of cre-

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14 Niemeyer, Christian, editor. *Léxico de Nietzsche*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2014.; Tuncel, Yunus. "Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture". *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, 349-63.

ation is of another order which is not that of the herd apathy. The detachment from the fixation of models and beliefs demonstrates that it is sometimes necessary to forget the effort to comprehend suffering, say yes to life even when facing the incomprehensible, without the recourse of metaphysical palliatives, while in other others, a vital action of play in the face of existence is necessary.<sup>15</sup> This attitude appears to be, in the parable, an attribute of the child and, of course, not an attribute of the Camel, neither of the Lion. The thou-shalt holds from the innocence and from the game, for the obligation occupies the space of creation. A superficial reading or counterargument could assume that the child spirit, as it does not bow to the moral weight of the thou-shalt, frees itself from all obligation, of all social contract, which is, at its extreme, impeditive to the game itself and an attitude non-compatible with social life. But it is necessary for us to understand that, for Nietzsche, "spirit" does not entail a metaphysical comprehension, on the contrary, it inscribes itself in the history and in becoming as energetic and technic.<sup>16</sup>

In *Human, all Too Human* (HH),<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche presents the "free spirit" in tune with these forces we here see in the Child of *Zarathustra*. For our philosopher, these "free spirits" do not in fact exist, meaning, it is not a matter of finding them in reality and separate them from the horde of their contraries, as a segregationist reading could assume. It is rather a matter of a search or quest, which leads us to understanding that these are also the figures of the Camel, the Lion and, above all, of the Child. Spirits are at play in the search of a technical disposition that is energetic and affirms life. An active forgetting that positions itself as a no-more-wanting the moral tablets' tradition, a freeing oneself from its weight. The insidious load of gravity dilutes itself in the forgetting, without stoic apathy or ascetic suppression, however, but by an active forgetting that also plays with this weight.

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15 Aggerholm, Kenneth. "Existential Philosophy and Sport." *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

16 Beardsworth, Richard. *Nietzsche*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2003.

17 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, all Too Human*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Comprehending that values are arbitrary and contingent constructs makes it possible for us to forget and build another tablet of values that possesses life as base element<sup>18</sup>. However, this process does not occur through the path of denial, but through the affirmation and recognition of the herd condition. It is a condition that, once again, is not stable, just as the ones of the Camel, Lion and Child also aren't – whence the notion of spirit metamorphosis, which in itself certainly engenders mixed states, gray zones and hybridity. Can the very metamorphosis that name the parable be read as a game? Is playing an attitude of the free spirit? In pragmatic terms, game, here by us underlined, appears structurally in every facet of the argument when we avail ourselves to the concepts Nietzsche employs abundantly in his work, demonstrating, so to speak, the potent articulation with the ample concept of play in Nietzsche's philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Further on, we read that this game of the child is “a new beginning”, a “wheel that spins on its own”. Facing a tradition that compels the resounding “thou-shalt” and, with this, many times embargoes creation and movement, active production of a new beginning is all that is left, a “search” in the sense we have already explored. A philosophy which sees “that becoming outstanding has primacy over being outstanding.”<sup>20</sup> A wheel that spins on its own alludes to a creating movement, not happening due to the imposition of external driving forces, namely, moral. In a time of narcissistic tendencies such as ours, in which self-help and self-sufficiency speeches proliferate, once again this passage might be read through distorted lens. We also argue that the moral sense may be recovered by the idea of game. Here, the metaphor would lead us to think that, despite the presence of the rules, what motivates a game is the player spirit of its participants.

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18 Aggerholm, Kenneth. “Existential Philosophy and Sport.” *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

19 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, 349-63.

20 Aggerholm, Kenneth. “Existential Philosophy and Sport.” *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

In accordance to the ends intended here, this player spirit dialogues with the free spirit. For the game spirit to be affirmatively active and realized, there is no space for restraints and neither for the weight of gravity that compels to stagnation. The constant flow of becoming is a fundamental premise concerning the impermanence of the very game, and, above all, of life. What interests us here is the strict approximation with multiplicity of forces that the dynamics of the encounter, of the contact and even of the conflict present in playing and in this dynamic of the contradictory which manifests itself in losing and winning. The element of uncertainty and the distancing from the illusory idea of safety are the constant and incessant invitation of the movements. The action mediated by the great noon and other developments may result from this locus of play. In this manner, a strict dialogue with the free spirit is established, which by a restless way of seeing has destroyed morals and has also so done away with religion. Freed from the shackles of conformity, it enters game's nebulous and unstable terrain without the need of previous confirmations. Immersed in the experience's intensity, it fulfils and breaks free of its dependence on metaphysical crutches and, taken by the instant's potency, dignifies life in the here and in the now. As a recourse of autonomy, beyond the destruction of the traditional tablet of morals, proposes new values margined by dispositions of the power and of the “yes to life”. This would be a task of the “free spirit”, a type of nomad spirit, which has in movement and suspicion its operating mechanism. Avid for vagrancy and for what is unwonted, the free spirit is inebriated on the ecstasy of movement and uninterrupted creation and destruction and intoxicating in an immanent way. It affirms, categorically, life's paroxysms and vicissitudes and thus moves on in the process of suspicion, deconstruction, creation and new suspicion. It walks in search of the new and as a good inquisitor, questions every construction that has totalizing pretensions. It questions and escalates the structures which support the lasting maxims and

perceives the hollow innards of such constructions. Imbued with an agonistic and combative behavior, the free spirit tends to hammer all these edifications. Nietzsche (HH) comments that it was not conflict and clash what made society a violent place, but, above all, the convictions on the beliefs that preceded, on many occasions, these conflicts.

We highlight that in no way does this player spirit resemble an inert posture, settled down and passive, that positions itself reactively before norms, as we have already explicated when we discussed the idea of resentment. Even if modern society searches voraciously for stabilization and cries out for a life anchored in safety and stability, the presence of the free spirit baffles and causes an ill-feeling.

There is no way this “game spirit” can be found in the rules themselves and a strict adherence to them does not guarantee playability (which does not mean that their transgression does either). We can also consider that it is common to the practice of games (and here we use plural to designate the various episodes of game) the characteristic of always restarting. A wheel that ceases spinning by the end of the match, but begins again in the new game. Each match is a new reality, that certainly nulls (forgets) previous victories. Favoritism is a rational exercise, but the experience of the game is open at every time the game begins again, also to contradict any expectation or rationality, for “all forms of games, formalized expressions of play, are *interpretations* [...] the act of interpretation can also be construed as a form of play”.<sup>21</sup>

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21 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, p. 353.

Here we face one more turn in which adequation or transgression are equally distinct from technic and energy, spirit’s components that search being free. Now, if the search for this free spirit is made by the game, in order to deepen our specific question, could we here name this search “spirit of game”? Repeating our strategy, we ask a generous patience from the reader: we cannot go so far without entering original affirmations about such an established philosophy as is Nietzsche’s, which is not our objective. But it seems to have been demonstrated that the approximation is pragmatically productive in order to think game as a spirit resembling a certain conceptual constellation of the philosopher, thus constructing intelligible nexuses between Nietzschean philosophy’s potency and possibilities of understanding in the field of game.

But what risks might the “spirit of game” face in a way that is not spontaneously present in the game? Would it be possible to assume threats or a decadent configuration that results in the corruption of such a spirit? As a spirit of power, would it not be plausible to assume that it would always impose itself?

What the philosopher reminds us – and which once again is here relevant – is that the forces of resentment are also voracious and, in their struggle for power, they impose themselves over an affirmative vision of life. By extension, resentment forces in the game are those which would somehow aim to suffocate the spirit of game. Thus acting, resentment forces would have the role of diminishing the potency of the game, relegating it to a superfluous plane, affirming it as empty fun, and negating it as a world view. These forces point to a type of bad conscience that would result in a simplistic moralism justified by the fetish of rationality. Moreover, such elements flirt in a repugnant way with a paternalistic behavior, an unreasonable formalism that looks for a unique justification and the true answer to all questions springing from experience. What’s more, intents to solve and neutralize conflicts may come to rise. And to what end would such demobilizing forces act? To execute a transvaluation similar to the one our philosopher

denounces in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>22</sup> we may assume that the elevation of Judeo-Christian moral values in secular life and in ordinary conduct forced a shadow over affirmative expressions, in a way that in the game, the anguish of the losers, incapable of dealing with the wheel of victory and of defeat opted for suppressing the competition of the game. If there are no more winners and losers, as proposed by the most varied pedagogical approaches that argue in favor of cooperation and against any competition, there will be no one dissatisfied. The problem with it is that, by doing so, one also annihilates the game that, now predictable and without danger, can no longer be affirmative, for there is no longer risk and without risk the game is puerile theatrics—a byproduct of a rationalization and the domestication of the instincts.

The game thus domesticated by the forces of resentment does not allow the “Spirit of Game”, because it is robbed of the essential *daemon*, this personified spirit of Greek mythology that animates the transit of forces and of happenings in the *Mythós*. This *daemon* is the Agon, of which the splendor was carefully understood by Yunus Tuncel, revealing to us the marks of this spirit not only in the Nietzschean conception of the Greek universe, but the inheritance it bestows all over the German philosopher’s thought: “What is striking in Nietzsche on agon then is how he makes focused and insightful observations on agon based on what was known at the time, how he retains its symbolic significance, and how he later uses this symbolism in his work.”<sup>23</sup>

If we return to this primordial energy the Greeks had present around the concept of Agon and how it guided distinct aspects of collective life, we will notice that the game seems to be an element contained in this agonistic spirit, which reveals to us much about its dynamic and corroborates a for-

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22 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the genealogy of morals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

23 Tuncel, Yunus. *Agon in Nietzsche*. Marquette University Press, 2013, p. 9.

native role of the being’s very autonomy. In other words, the role of resentment over the game spirit, creating obstacles to the formation (Paideia) of the Greek man, as we read in Hawhee:<sup>24</sup> “In the name and spirit of the *agōn*, bodies not only came together, they became bodies, bodies capable of action and (hence) identity formation”.

The spirit of game may be a potent and immanent opening for the becoming. “Play is an arena in which, if left in its immanence, the innocence of life can be *restored*.”<sup>25</sup> A way of affirming life’s misfortunes without the need for the cosmetics of moral and religious delineations, with universal pretensions anchored in the beyond. The game opens a possibility for the transfiguration of the pains and the displeasures into potentiality for beauty and affirmation of life. Affirm the movement of birth and death, light and shadow, creation and destruction as an antidote against resentment and Manichean polarization.

### Possible Conclusions

The game is made, such as we understand in the usual sense of the term in the area, in the experience of movement permeated of order and disorder. The game occurs, thus, in the recreation, given the characteristic of destruction and displacement of the experience of movement. A continuous flow in the experience of reality. About this dynamism of the real, Onfray<sup>26</sup> corroborates: “The cyclic nature of the Real implies that the maximum of wanting and desiring the chosen act be carried.” This is a way of celebrating the existent without deluding ourselves with a utopian idealized tomorrow.

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24 Hawhee, Debra. *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Kindle Edition, p. 308.

25 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, p. 352.

26 Onfray, Michel. *A Sabedoria Trágica: Sobre o Bom Uso de Nietzsche*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora, 2014, p. 99.

If it is not possible to overcome things, neither to transcend them in an idealized conjuncture extricated from the world of here and now, it is possible to inhabit them and take them on. A possibility of affirming life such as it is, and therefore also of a possible transvaluation: to affirmatively inhabit the instant, which was deprecated for ages, so that it can now become an ethical and aesthetical task to be operated by the presence of the spirit of game.

Still concerning this excerpt of the Nietzschean work, attention is necessary to the expression “game of creation”, in the final half of the passage. The expression gathers part of the elements into which we have already delved here, both about game and creation, also advancing into what we may associate to the important Nietzschean concept of transvaluation, not fortunately associated to the very finality of all of Nietzsche’s philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, up to that point, facing the validity of the “Thou shalt”, the holy “saying no” has reigned. Confronting and making justice to his provocative and aphorismatic style, the German philosopher uses the sacred term with an ironic tone, for it satirizes the transcendent character and presents it in an immanent manner. Facing the chaos of the world and life’s absence of meaning, man does not retrocede, neither is he paralyzed: instead he dives, and, by doing so, he abandons metaphysical crutches. This way, he avails himself only to his will as spear and shield. Saying “yes” does not presuppose linearities and certainties, the only guarantee is the movement of creation and destruction. It is, so to speak, the beginning of his own game. Nietzsche alerts and invites us to a sacred saying “yes” to the present moment. An acceptance of the instant as if it would return infinitely. An ethical appeal for life to be lived in its integrity.

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27 Abbagnano, Nicola. *Dicionário de Filosofia*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003, p. 935.

From these movements, the individual is lost from her/his world, because s/he is no longer adequate to the reigning values. After the movement of the three metamorphosis of the spirit, this individual goes beyond moral values of tradition which try to dictate the forms and norms of the game. The world with which Nietzsche is concerned is the one of the “Thou shalt”, trespassed by decadent and sick values inviting to a lack and to a denial of life. Actively affirming life by means of this movement that incessantly creates and destroys itself is the conquering of the autonomy in effect on the affirmation of the instant, in the perennial flow of the contraries, as the Heraclitean dialectics – so dear to Nietzsche – had already announced. As Tuncel<sup>28</sup> puts it, “Life must be taken as a game.”

The game occurs in the constant becoming; in the continuous tense; in the playing; in the movement of the action. Rooted in the world, human being enjoys its presence and accepts the forms which inhabit it. Against the renunciation, the lack and the excess of order, this being practices the overflowing, and an enthusiastic reuniting of the body with itself, or an inebriation, an ecstasy. The game is a constant exercise of creation and destruction and a categorical affirmation of life. It is a way for us to be authors-artists of our own lives, starting with the integral affirmation of the paroxysms and vicissitudes of living (Z). Inspired by the metamorphosis, what would we summarily affirm about game? Its essential component is inebriation, the “Spirit of Game”.

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## Shooting with Arrows: Archery Symbolism in Nietzsche's Agonism

Yunus Tuncel

*The bow's name is life, but its job is death!*

(Heraclitus, Fragment 48)

Nietzsche frequently uses archery symbolism throughout his writings. Archery may be the most used sport metaphor in Nietzsche's texts, whether he uses it in a sport context<sup>1</sup> or not. The bow is one of the oldest and deadliest weapons in human history;<sup>2</sup> it was used in military warfare for millennia until firearms were invented in the modern age. Bow was also used as a weapon or a tool of contest in ancient times. It is known that Egyptian pharaohs and Chinese kings entertained archery tournaments at their courts. Ancient Greeks used archery in their warfare, but did not compete in this field at their Panhellenic sites. This is especially odd—or maybe due to the marginal role given to archery in Greek warfare—given the prominence of the use of bow in ancient Greek history and mythology. From Homer we have at least two stories; the first one is Odysseus' shooting of Penelope's

1 Nietzsche was exposed to archery at a young age: "...The school curriculum included archery..." Hayman's *Nietzsche: A Critical Life*, New York: Penguin, 1980, p. 21.

2 For the history of archery, see Theodore R. Whitman's *The History of Archery*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2017.

suitors after he returns to Ithaca; Penelope incites all the suitors to compete with Odysseus' bow and when it is Odysseus' turn he shoots all the suitors with his own bow. The second one is the story of Philoctetes, who is stranded on Lemnos due to a snake bite, but who is needed with his Herculean bow for the capture of Troy.

Archery symbolism<sup>3</sup> appears in many different world myths. In Ramayana, one of the oldest Hindu myths, Rama must pick up the giant bow of Shiva and shoot with it in order to gain the hand of Sita. In *Mahabharata*, there is an archery contest. Nietzsche may have been aware of the presence of archery in different world myths in addition to those of ancient Greece and medieval Germany; notwithstanding this awareness, for Nietzsche archery becomes yet another symbol of struggle and a symbol in Zarathustra's cosmic symbolism. Nietzsche also refers to the myth of Philoctetes in his writings; in one of his notes, he responds to Philoctetes by saying: "Without my arrow the Troy of knowledge will not be conquered." Prior to this, he writes: "With higher types of beings, knowledge too will have new forms, which are not yet needed."<sup>4</sup> Here the emphasis revolves around 'knowledge,' while Philoctetes' bow and arrow stand for the key or the passage to that knowledge that conquers. In another passage, it is simply a symbol of conquest: "Every Philoctetes knows that without his bow and arrow Troy will not be conquered."<sup>5</sup> Finally,

3 As for the etymology of related words, 'bow' is a Germanic word connected to the German *bogen*, which derives from *biegen* (to bend or bow). 'Arrow' is also Germanic, possibly from Old Norse. And 'archery' is a Latin based Anglo-French word, which means maker of arrow or someone who shoots with arrows. The 'bow' both in German and English *knows* how to revere and yet how to destroy, summed up mythically in the idea of godly destruction, as in Shiva or Poseidon. Whatever bends must also *unbend* itself, hence the functions of tension and release.

4 KSA 11, p.211 (translation is mine).

5 KSA 12, p.89 (translation is mine).

archery symbolism appears in Stoic writings.<sup>6</sup> Epictetus, for example, uses archery within the context of correct judgment; a good Stoic should be concerned, not with wealth, health or office, but rather with the care of one's mind and the improvement of judgment, and, with correct judgment, ought to hit the mark better than the archer (*Enchiridion*, Chapter VI).

What is striking about contest in archery in relation to other forms of contest is how it best exemplifies Nietzsche's idea of transfiguration of war into contest; a weapon of annihilation turns into a weapon of competition. We may also list sports like shooting and fencing in this respect. All three sports are now fields of competition in the Olympic games.<sup>7</sup> In this essay, I will study Nietzsche's use of archery within the context of his agonistic philosophy<sup>8</sup> and highlight three areas for this investigation: 1) truth-telling and shooting with an arrow, 2) tension and release of tension (or *Gelassenheit*), and 3) the rational and the non-rational, thoughts and maxims.

## I. Truth-Telling and Arrow Shooting

How the Persians are raised: to shoot with a bow and to tell the truth. (KSA 7, p. 795)

How the Persians were educated: to shoot with a bow and to tell the truth.

(CWN 11, p.350)

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<sup>6</sup> For this reference, I am indebted to Joshua Hall who brought it to my attention in a recent meeting in May 2020; he also mentioned Pierre Hadot's writings on the Stoics in this context.

<sup>7</sup> For information, one may visit the official site of the Olympic Movement at <http://www.olympic.org/archery-equipment-and-history?tab=History>.

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive study of Nietzsche's agonistic philosophy, readers may consult with my book, *Agon in Nietzsche*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2013. For a shorter study, a prolegomena to this book, my essay "Agon Symbolism in Nietzsche," published in *Nikephoros* would be more appropriate.

In many different texts Nietzsche associates truth-telling<sup>9</sup> with arrow shooting. This association may reveal some aspects of Nietzsche's conception of truth. The arrow pierces, penetrates into depths, and shatters. It is painful for the human body and can injure or kill. Nietzsche often reserves this metaphor from archery for poetic or aphoristic truths:

Rhymes are deadly little arrows.  
See the tremor, see the quiver  
When they pierce the vital marrows  
Of the lizard, or his liver! (GS, "The Poet's Call," 353)

This is consistent with Nietzsche's notion that truth at bottom is a metaphor, which we have forgotten is a metaphor, not in poetic language, but in conceptual language. Metaphor is fluid and fleeting like an arrow, which can reach depths and heights. Furthermore, the overhuman must be an arrow and a longing for one's friend (TSZ I, "On the Friend"): the context here is enemy-friend; in a friend one should honor the enemy and have one's best enemy. In agonism, the enemy is the measuring stick through whom one strives for higher goals; through the enemy one learns one's weakness and strength. The enemy is the mirror for the agonist. Nietzsche here brings the two ideas together, bridging the gap through the metaphor of *Bogen*; one bows before the enemy/friend and yet one also fights against that enemy/friend as the arrow creates an intimate link<sup>10</sup> between the two.

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<sup>9</sup> This essay is not about truth in Nietzsche. For a discussion of this topic, I refer readers to Jean Granier's *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche* and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's *Metaphysics without Truth*.

<sup>10</sup> I will not enter into a discussion of phallic symbolism of the arrow and the eroticism implicit in this passage from TSZ, "On the Friend;" I will leave it to psychoanalysts. Let it suffice here to say that in Greek the friend could also be the lover; therefore, there can be an erotic bond among enemy/friends, an association that often eludes the modern reader.

The association between archery and overhumanly goals is repeated in different parts of *Zarathustra*. Right at the outset, Zarathustra warns the people at the market place against the *last man* and the complacency of his not whirring bow: “Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whir!” (TSZ I, 129). The bow here is a symbol for struggle and creation, fitting with the goals of the overhuman, but one must beware of the last man who becomes an impediment to struggle! While this passage emphasizes the struggle and its pitfalls, like the last man, the passage in “On Old and New Tablets” underlies the goals in a cosmic symbolism: “—That I may one day be ready and ripe in the Great Midday:—ready for myself and for my most hidden Will: a bow lusting for its arrow, an arrow lusting for its star:—a star ready and ripe in its midday, glowing, penetrated, blissful with annihilating sun-arrows:—...” (TSZ III, 187) Here the bow and the arrow have to do with distant and higher goals that would take the overhuman to victory, to midday or the high noon, the point of high transformation under the bright sun. The arrow then stands for that strife for those heights. Finally, Nietzsche explains the main character of his book, Zarathustra, by way of archery symbolism and what was precious to Persians: truth-telling and shooting well with arrows (EH, “Why I am a Destiny,” § 3, 328). Here Nietzsche turns Zarathustra upside down: He now has to re-learn how to use the bow and how to shoot well so as to undo his initial metaphysical/moral lie, which he paradoxically presents as truthfulness, and this time shoot for *truthfulness*.

In another passage, Nietzsche relates archery to silence. “One can remain silent only when one has the bow and the arrow: otherwise, one chatters —and squabbles.” (KSA 10, 117, translation is mine). This note is from the time period when he was writing *Zarathustra* and many passages around this one passage have to do with overhumans, creators and gods. One must speak truthfully, for which one needs the bow and the arrow; otherwise, one must remain silent even if that silence entails suffering (when necessary, one must suffer in silence, a sign of noble character, lest

the expression of suffering of one’s own or others turn into pity). Silence is a theme that appears in different parts of *Zarathustra* and plays a significant role in Zarathustra’s journey. Zarathustra too suffers in silence in his cave, usually surrounded by his animals who cannot chatter. It is not a coincidence that the declaration of pity as a form of illness also appears in this passage: “I presuppose pity [in this context it is better to translate *Mitleid* as pity] to be a brain- and nerve-illness.” (KSA 10, 117, translation is mine). Finally, silence relates to steadiness which is discussed below.

In the following passages I will emphasize six points to illustrate how the use of archery symbolism in Nietzsche’s works squares with his agonistic philosophy.

*Directness*. Arrow shooting is transparent and direct, as it happens in an open field. This is similar to agonistic struggle between approximate equals. Unlike other forms of contest, in an archery contest opponents do not target each other, but rather compete for distance and precision (the former in ancient archery contests). Nonetheless, one faces one’s enemy openly and under the agreed upon norms of contest.

*Stillness*. One must concentrate on the shooting and maintain stillness to be able to hit the target. This is one of the crucial things archers learn in their training, and it is cultivated in meditative silence. However, this is not a silence that is devoid of agonism—this is where Nietzsche departs from many religions and their conception of non-agonistic meditation or peacefulness<sup>11</sup>—but rather a silence that leads to victory, a silence with victory: “Let your work be a struggle. Let your peace be a victory! One can be silent and sit still only when one has bow and arrow: else one chatters and quarrels. Let your peace be a victory!” (TSZ I, “On War and Warriors.” p. 159). This is a stillness of strength for overhumanly victories!

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11 See TI, “Anti-Nature Morality.”

*Strength.* The bow stands for strength; one can shoot arrows in all directions and from long distance. In ancient warfare armies that had an archery division had tremendous advantage. The Persian army was deadly because of its superior division of archers.<sup>12</sup> One can even use the bow against gods, as Nietzsche writes in his notes shortly before he started writing *Zarathustra*: “I have a bow, gods! What a bow — a good bow against gods themselves!” (KSA 10,184, translation is mine). As much as the bow is a sign of strength, it is also a sign of danger; it is dangerous for the archer and his enemy/friend.

*Danger.* To have a bow or to hold a bow is dangerous; it is already a sign of height from where one can inflict pain and destruction. In his poem “From High Mountains, Aftersong,” Nietzsche the poet sends deadly threats to his enemy/friends:

A wicked archer I've become.—The ends  
Of my bow kiss:  
Only the strongest bends his bow like this.  
No arrow strikes like that which my bow  
sends:  
Away from here—for your own good, my  
friends!— (BGE, 243)

*Distance.* With an arrow one can reach remote goals and targets. Distance also connotes yearning; the overhuman yearns for higher goals. ‘Arrow’ and ‘yearning’ (*Pfeil* and *Sehnsucht*) appear together in three passages in *Zarathustra*: Part I, Preface, §5; “On Friends;” and “On Child and Marriage.”

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<sup>12</sup> Miltiades had close knowledge of this fact because he had once worked for the Persian army. According to Herodotus, at the battle of Marathon he came up with a stratagem that undid this superiority of the Persians. Centuries later archers mounted on horses became deadly weapons in Mongolian and Turkic armies.

This is a specific type of yearning, as one yearns for a higher goal than one can achieve; in terms of the archery metaphor, one can yearn for a goal insofar as one can reach it with an arrow, or else one may meet one’s untimely death or the death of one’s youthful visions. One must *know* one’s distance. Arrows can kill, they can kill visions. “Indeed, after you, my dearest friends, malice has ever shot its arrows—to hit my heart. And it hit!” (*Zarathustra* II, “The Tomb Song”)

*Precision.* Precision is an essential aspect of archery; one must shoot as close to the target as possible. Not only a sharp eye and alignment between the eye and the target, but also stillness is necessary to achieve this goal. To this end, the archer must know his bow and its range very well. Ancient archers were positioned strategically to achieve the greatest impact on their enemies. In archery contests the winner is determined by the proximity of the hit to the target. For Nietzsche, his target was his epochal enemies and his readers.

*Target.* Again the theme of overhumanly goals comes up with archery symbolism, this time in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here Nietzsche raises the flag of rebellion against the epochal values of Occidental Civilization since Plato, as he speaks of tension, the tension of the bow, which stands for epochal conflicts. He calls this tension a “magnificent tension of the spirit.” These conflicts have their ups and downs like the Renaissance and Reformation, but Nietzsche mentions the Counter-Reformation and Enlightenment which come after them: “To be sure, European man experiences this tension as need and distress; twice already attempts have been made in the grand style to unbend the bow—once by means of Jesuitism, the second time by means of the democratic enlightenment..” But these were not sufficient to deal with the tension or to overcome the highest values; what are needed are the overhumans and free spirits who know their goal and who know how to aim at the target: “But ...we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits—we still feel it, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow. And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and—who knows?—the goal—. (BGE, Preface, 3-4).

Now we have completed a circle, the circle of overhumanly qualities and tasks from directness to target. Every one of them can be treated more at length than we have done here, but this was a survey of these qualities borrowed from archery.

## II. Tension and Release: the Art of Bending

*They do not understand how, while differing from, it is in agreement with itself. There is a back-turning connection like that of a bow or lyre.*  
Heraclitus, Fragment 51

Agonism can be considered as, on the one hand, a reflection of tension and conflict in human life, and, on the other hand, release and resolution of that conflict. One can see sport, play, sex and many other functions in the same way. The bow then is a symbol of this transfiguration of built-up tension into externalization of that tension. As I discuss in my work, *Agon in Nietzsche*, Nietzsche considers this *transfiguration* (*Verklärung*) a genius of agonistic wisdom and expresses it in different ways. It is necessary to have cultural formations in and through which our destructive energies, or what Freud calls the “death drive,” can externalize themselves; or else, we will destroy each other and our planet, which seems to be the dominant trend despite this agonistic wisdom and its revival in our age. Nietzsche’s dictum “Art exists so *that the bow shall not break*”<sup>13</sup> succinctly exposes this eternal problem. Of course, art can be replaced with a variety of cultural formations, but the context here is Wagner and his project. Like agonism, art too lies in the pathway of transfiguration, and to go even further, we shall not uphold an opposition between art and agonism. The tension that Nietzsche emphasizes in this discussion of Wagner lies in the conflict between the general and the

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13 UM IV, sec.4, 213 (emphasis is not mine).

singular, specifically “the tension between the general knowledge of things and the spirited-ethical power of the singular.” (213) Clearly, there are many sources for tension in human life; but this tension between the general and the singular remains a major one.<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche then proceeds to relate this tension to the *tragic*:

The individual must be consecrated to something higher than himself – that is the meaning of tragedy; he must be free of the terrible anxiety which death and time evoke in the individual: for at any moment, in the briefest atom of his life’s course, he may encounter something holy that endlessly outweighs all his struggle and all his distress – this is what it means to have a *sense for the tragic*; all the ennoblement of mankind is enclosed in this supreme task...(213)

Consecration to a higher goal, despite suffering, is what redeems the individual; here the tension between the singular and the general is sustained (the bow is strung) but pushed higher (the bow is released) for the singular who justifies the whole of existence through his/her struggle for the higher goal. Tragedy in this sense forms an uncanny form of transfiguration and scholars are still puzzled at the question of its origin. Along with the individual, the whole community and the spectatorship, are also transfigured, as was the case with Wagner and his spectacle at Bayreuth, according to the young Nietzsche:

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14 Time and again we see the subjugation, subsumption, reduction, suppression, and eradication of the singular by the general. This is an endemic problem of the *comédie humaine*.

Und so, wie Wagner sich den Musikern mittheilt, wird sich der Geist und Rhythmus seines Bayreuther Werkes den Schauern und Hörern mittheilen müssen, so daß ihre Seele ausgeweitet, ihre Bogen schon ausgespannt sind, wie nie zuvor: nur dann erst wird das Ungeheure ganz gethan sein, wenn es auch in's Ungeheure wirkt und eine Furche hinter sich aufreißt, welche nicht wieder zugefüllt werden kann. (KSA 8, 227)

This is the tension in the creative deed, which implicates both the artist (in this case, Wagner) and his audience. But the tension must be released so that the bow does not break; hence the cycle of tension and release emblematic of rejuvenated energy: "Allmählich entsteht aus dem solchermassen angeregten – ächten, weil nicht erzwungenen – Nachdenken eine gewisse allgemeine Gefühl der geistigen Erholung, als ob der Bogen wieder mit neuer Sehne bespannt und stärker als je angezogen sei. Man hat mit Nutzen gereist." (KSA 8, 474)

Nietzsche also uses the idea of tension when he explains types and changes from one age to the next along with new types that are bred. Tension must be released so that a new type emerges; this is how out of a warlike aristocratic age a new type of individualism emerges. "Eventually, however, a day arrives when conditions become more fortunate and the tremendous tension decreases; perhaps there are no longer any enemies among one's neighbors, and the means of life, even for the enjoyment of life, are superabundant." (BGE, Aphorism 262) At these turning points of history the initial tension dissolves, yielding a new type of human being, hence a new form of *individualism*. Nietzsche concludes this aphorism by stating what may also come out of the release of such tension: moralizing trends, mediocrities, etc. "Again danger is there, the mother of morals, great danger, this time transposed into the individual.." (BGE, Aphorism 262). The *danger* always presents itself at such turning points of history.

The aphorism quoted above was Nietzsche's *suprahistorical* reflection on history; it was not specific to one historical period, as he gives examples from the Greek *polis* and Venice. In a passage from the *Genealogy*, however, Nietzsche's reflection on tension and danger is specific to the death of God and the *danger* that it poses: "For this is how things are: the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary.—" (GM I, §12, 44). Nietzsche presents his metaphor of danger with the image of a bow that oscillates between being strung and released:

How much one is able to endure: distress, want, bad weather, sickness, toil, solitude. Fundamentally one can cope with everything else, born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle; one emerges again and again into the light, one experiences again and again one's golden hour of victory—and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new, even harder, remoter things, *like a bow that distress only serves to draw tauter*. (GM I, §12, 44, emphasis is mine).

Now the danger lies in a historical turning point; the arrow that comes out of the released bow can go in many different directions. Only the thinker, the visionary, knows the target, because he has mastered the bow. He knows the pain and the joy which the shooting of an arrow can create: the joy of shooting as an expression of the will to power and the pain from a wound inflicted by an arrow. The anxiety of such a pain is invoked by Nietzsche in many passages (KSA 11, 302, 305, 335, 475, and 480); it is the fear of a strung bow the arrow from which can pierce the good and the virtuous. Despotism operates with the strung bow while using fear and tension as the dominant form of ruling. "The pressure of the Church has created a

magnificent tension of the bow, similarly the monarchy...” (KSA 11, 475). But such a strung bow is bound to fall apart. “The meaning of longer despotic morals: they draw the bow if they do not break it.” (KSA 11, 480). Great human beings, on the other hand, recognize the necessity of tension and release, and their concomitant feelings, including those of pain and pleasure.

Finally, it should be added that tension and release are two significant aspects of competition and sports. One must build tension to be able to compete, hence the heightened emotional state of anxiety when one is before and in the heat of contest, and one must release the tension during the game. Neither tension nor release is linear; therefore, they may be interwoven into each other.

### III Maxims and Aphorisms as Arrows

*And thunderbolt steers the totality of things.*  
(Heraclitus, Fragment 64)

Nietzsche often refers to maxims as arrows, as the title of the first section of *The Twilight of Idols* indicates. Thinking and writing as an agonistic platform is pervasive to Nietzsche’s works, but Nietzsche considers the pithy style of aphorisms even more incisive and profoundly painful. In a note from 1885, he writes: “Arrows. Thoughts on and against the European soul” (KSA 11, 474). The title of the collection of poems that Nietzsche appended to *The Gay Science* is indicated as “Songs and Arrows of Prince Vogelfrei” in his notes (KSA 12, 83), but the word ‘arrows’ is deleted from the published version. Nonetheless, the association between the poetic and the aphoristic style of expression and the practice of arrow shooting persists. What does this association mean for Nietzsche?

In Aphorism 617 of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche views Rousseau’s activity as a thinker under this association. Rousseau shoots his poisoned arrows because he is an embittered thinker. There is an analogy here: while the thinker shooting criticisms at his society reflects his character; the archer shows his talent in marksmanship. The metaphor can be extended to other instruments, but Nietzsche often chooses arrow-shooting as his metaphor. In the Nachlass from 1888 (KSA 12, 219), the association between maxims and arrows is made, which is also used in *Twilight of the Idols*. Why does Nietzsche see maxims as arrows? Maxims are poignant, as they are precise and must hit the target. They are insightful and profound and may go deep into the reader’s heart.

Finally, aphorisms and maxims can sink the readers down just like arrows. Although the context in which it appears applies to archaic times when magic and religious cults ruled, the “irrational hand” of the arrow and its capability to sink still apply. “When someone shoots with the bow, there is still an irrational hand and force at work in it...it must be the arrow of a god through whose invisible action a man suddenly sinks down.” (HAH Aphorism 111, 63). I do not suggest that the aphorist engages in sorcery, but rather shoots deadly arrows at the reader the effect of which can be analogous to those of magic and sorcery. Therefore, one must be properly armored to dodge those deadly arrows and not be enamored by the spell of their magic. Nonetheless, their affect may still be felt deeply.

### Epilogue

Archery symbolism in Nietzsche is yet another area in which his agonistic rhetoric shows itself. As I argued in my other writings, *Agon in Nietzsche* and “Nietzsche’s Agonistic Rhetoric and its Agonistic Affects,” there is a plethora of agonistic gestures in Nietzsche’s works. Despite my comprehensive treatment of this subject in my book, archery symbolism had not crossed my mind at the time. What makes archery, like fencing and javelin, stand



out in a reading of Nietzsche on agon is the fact that it highlights the power of transfiguration (*Verklärungsmacht*); in all three cases, you can kill your opponents with your weapon if you are in a war, or if you transfigure this drive to kill into sports, you can compete with them, and, if you win or lose, you can still keep competing in the next rounds. When it comes to the bow, there is a backward turning, as Heraclitus says, which most mortals do not understand: “They do not understand how, while differing from (or: being at variance), <it> is in agreement with itself. <There is> a back-turning connection, like <that> of a bow or a lyre.” (Fragment 51) This problem of transfiguration is also addressed by Nietzsche when he discusses the “good Eris” versus “bad Eris” in his “Homer’s Contest,” a theme many scholars, including myself, have addressed. Such transfiguration remains one of the challenges in human life, whether it is in sports or elsewhere; archery as a symbol stands in the midst of it, whether they are gods or athletes or warriors who shoot arrows. Nietzsche captured this human dilemma with his insights and with the arrows he shot as aphorisms, and there is still much uncharted territory for such transfiguration.

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# Miscellaneous

# Myth and the Problem of Initiation in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Callum Blake

Art, in which lying sanctifies itself and the will to deception has good conscience on its side.

– Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, 3.25<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction:

*The Birth of Tragedy* is a peculiar book. Its basic thesis, and the consequent reasons for Nietzsche's retrospective criticism of it, were long considered a simple matter in the literature, where the predominant reading saw the work as committed to an essentially Schopenhauerian metaphysics that contradicted Nietzsche's later anti-metaphysical inclinations (Han-Pile, 373). However, the last twenty years have seen a focused re-examination of the book, spearheaded by Peter Poellner and Beatrice Han-Pile, that conclusively renders this convention unsustainable. Not only does a close exam-

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by C. Diethe in Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

ination of the *Birth's* metaphysics reveal it to be distinctly different from Schopenhauer's (Han-Pile, 1), due consideration of the relationship between this metaphysics and Nietzsche's other early concerns demands we understand the text as *not* committed to the *truth* of this metaphysics in any normal sense. It seems to be a kind of *myth*, unlikely to be literally true but advanced as a part of a pragmatic project concerned with 'redeeming life' in the realisation of a new tragic culture (Poellner, 2).

This 'new' *Birth* complicates the conventional story of the break between the 'early' and 'later' Nietzsche's - a turn against the possibility of metaphysical knowledge does nothing to explain a break from a project uncommitted to such possibility. Alternative possibilities have been suggested – Poellner points towards a tension involved in believing a redemptive *illusion* whilst recognising that reality is such that it requires redeeming in the first place (Poellner, 75), and Han-Pile argues that even the mere the *symbolic value* of metaphysics rests upon a belief in *intuitive* access to metaphysical knowledge (Han-Pile, 4).

This essay aims to conclusively resolve this question, building upon prior 'mythopoetic' readings of the *Birth* by grounding the belief in its myth in the *personal aesthetic experience* of tragedy. This then engenders a tension between the myth's pretensions to universality and the fact that a *specific character* is required of the spectator to access the experience that enables belief in its healing illusion. This breakdown of this solution rooted in universality then points towards the need for a *plurality of methods* for the affirmation of life, encapsulated in Zarathustra's declaration that "*the way – does not exist!*" (Z 3: "Of the Spirit of Gravity", 2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by R. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.

Part One presents the content of the *Birth's* metaphysics whilst Part Two shows why this metaphysics must be understood in a *particular* mythopoetic sense. Part Three then exposes an irreconcilable problem with the *Birth's* project and demonstrates that resolving it naturally points one towards positions held by the later Nietzsche.

### 1 - Metaphysics of Tragedy:

It bears remembering that the *Birth of Tragedy* is in fact concerned with discussing the birth of tragedy. The metaphysics that permeates the work is inexorably intertwined with this question, and any reproduction of it should not detach it from this concern. At the centre of this picture is a duality of fundamental artistic “drives” and their characteristic artworks - the “Apollonian” and the “Dionysian” (BT §1)<sup>3</sup> - with tragedy involving an interplay between the two (BT §5).

The Apollonian concerns the presentation of individuated figures that, whilst carrying with them a feeling of “complete intelligibility,” are recognised as mere ‘semblances’ or representations, and *always* understood as being *distinct from the spectator*. The pleasure in Apollonian art is the cool contemplation and understanding one experiences wandering through a portrait gallery, expressing an “imperturbable trust” in the ‘principle of individuation’, the way the world appears as a collection of differentiated objects – this includes both you and I, understood as fundamentally separate beings. Consequently, it is associated with arts that involve the presentation of images and symbols, and with the “art world” of the “dream” (BT §1). It is on the *stage* that we find the Apollonian aspects of tragedy, the actors representing the exploits of gods and heroes (BT §8).

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3 Translated by R. Spiers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

The Dionysian, in stark contrast, does not concern the *presentation* of anything *understood* as distinct from the spectator, but rather ‘losing oneself’ in a kind of delirious state, a fusion of “enormous horror” and “blissful ecstasy” when one *thinks* they are experiencing a *breakdown of individuation*. In the Dionysiac experience, like the delirium of dancing at a club, “all the rigid, hostile barriers [...] established between human beings break asunder,” and one feels themselves to belong to a “primal unity,” a “higher community with all of nature”. At its apex, one’s individuated subjectivity ‘vanishes’ “to the point of complete self-forgetting” – from the perspective of the reveller, there is no separation between them and others, nor really a ‘them’ or ‘others’ at all anymore. Consequently it is associated primarily with arts that, like music, don’t involve the presentation of images, and the “art world” of “intoxication” (BT §1). The Dionysian appears within tragedy in the form of the *chorus*, a group of singers that sang dithyrambic hymns narrating the events on stage (BT §7).

It is essential though that we understand these drives “as artistic powers which erupt from nature itself”. Here lies the significance of those ‘art-worlds’ of the dream and intoxication – nature, in giving rise to these states, automatically produces Apollonian and Dionysian experiences. When a human intentionally creates art work they don’t simply produce it from nowhere but reproduce the character of these art-worlds - hence “every artist is an ‘imitator’” (BT §2). This process is described as one in which the ‘original subjectivity’ of the artist melts away as they become a “medium” through which the real creative force, distinctly other to us, is ‘channelled’ (BT §5):

we are not one and identical with the essential being which gives itself eternal pleasure as the creator and spectator of that comedy of art. Only insofar as the genius, during the act of artistic procreation, merges fully with that original artist of the world does he know anything of the eternal essence of art (Ibid).

We human subjects do not really create artwork then, the true source of artistic creativity is “that original artist of the world,” the mysterious “one truly existing subject” that pops up throughout the text with little explanation (Ibid). The retrospective ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’ provides some much needed clarification. Here Nietzsche tells us the *Birth* recognises a ‘hidden meaning’ behind the world, an:

amoral artist-god who frees himself [...] from suffering the oppositions packed within him, [...] becom[ing] conscious of his autarchic power and constant delight and desire, whether he is building or destroying, whether acting benignly or malevolently. The world as the [...] eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most suffering being of all, [...] able to redeem and release itself only in semblance (BT §P5).

Nature is itself an artistic creation. The ‘artist-god’, the ‘one truly existing subject’, is prompted by its suffering to create and destroy these worlds of individuated ‘semblances’ like ours. That feeling of primordial unity in the Dionysiac experience is closely associated with this divine figure. In that ecstasy one is ‘carved’ by “the chisel-blows of the Dionysiac world artist” - one ‘feels thy creator’ (BT §1).

#### - The Affective Machinery of Tragedy:

So how exactly do these two artistic drives interact within tragedy, and why does this produce the “prophylactic healing energies” that Nietzsche labels its “supreme value” (BT §21)? Firstly, this interplay between the Dionysian and Apollonian produces a special kind of spectator. Conventional aesthetic theory, at least according to Nietzsche, saw the spectator as characteristically Apollonian - always “conscious of the fact that what he saw before him was

a work of art and not empirical reality” (BT §7) - and consequently captures how we might expect tragedy to be experienced were we to see the events on stage as its primary component. However, the Apollonian stage was in-fact a *later* innovation, supplementing the originary *Dionysiac* chorus by representing the content of their hymns (BT §22). Nietzsche takes this seriously.

The immediate effect of the chorus is to induce in the audience a sense of “metaphysical solace,” a feeling that “despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable”. This solace is an effect of the Dionysiac experience - the feeling of absorption into a ‘primordial unity’ - and cannot normally last beyond it, the return of ‘normal perception’ being “experienced [...] with a sense of revulsion,” bringing with it a “longing for a world beyond death” (BT §7). However, as we shall see, the intercession of the Apollonian elements of tragedy allows for this solace to be carried into sobriety, saving the spectators from this “ascetic” hangover. For now, in their rapture of delirious oneness, the audience experiences the figures on stage not as semblances *distinct from them* but as *real figures identical with themselves*, equally sharing in that ‘primordial unity’. The original tragic experience involved “seeing oneself transformed before one’s eyes and acting as if one had really entered another body”. This effect becomes more profound when we remember that this Apollonian element was added to *supplement* the chorus. The actors are in the service of the dithyrambic hymns, they concretely visualise the religious narratives that before could only be imagined by those listening. The drama then presents the content of the Dionysiac delirium transformed into images, the spectators witness what they feel inside them played out before them - the stage is like a projection of a vision that originates from the chorus (BT §8). The result is that the audience feels as though they created the events on stage, their ecstasy “discharges itself over and over again” into the dramatic presentation (BT §7).

It is not immediately clear *why* this intervention of the Apollonian in tragedy produces a healing, life affirming force that ‘redirects’ “repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live” (Ibid). Nietzsche tells us that the teaching of tragedy is something that seems like a purely Dionysian insight, the kind that before produced an ‘ascetic hangover’ - “the view that individuation is the primal source of all evil; and art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken, a premonition of unity restored” (BT §10). Elsewhere though we are told the “peculiar effect” of tragedy is “an Apollonian deception, by means of which we are to be saved from direct oneness with Dionysiac music, while our musical excitement can discharge itself in an [...] interposed, visible, middle world” (BT §24), and that, in it, the tragic hero “lifts the whole Dionysiac world on to his back, relieving us of its burden” (BT §21).

The idea seems to be that the Apollonian elements of tragedy shield the spectators from the negative effects of the Dionysian whilst allowing the positive ones through. This shielding effect owes to the ability of the Apollonian to introduce *myth* into the aesthetic experience: between the audience and the Dionysiac music “tragedy places a supreme symbolic likeness - myth”. The myth then “shields us from music,” but, and this is crucially important, music also *empowers the myth*, granting it “a convincing metaphysical significance to which word and image alone [...] could never attain” (BT §21). Since the Dionysian works though “purely affective content” and “unreflective action” the ‘metaphysical solace’ it generates cannot ordinarily be sustained outside its grasp (Han-Pile, 385), but the Apollonian element of myth can capture that affective content in a *symbolic* form, a meaningful story that can survive beyond the trance. This myth might not be very persuasive on its own – you probably haven’t been convinced of this

metaphysical picture simply by my relaying it in text – but *precisely because it is relayed via tragedy*, with the powerful Dionysian force of music behind it, one becomes convinced of its truth when normally one would not, “overcome by that certain foreknowledge of a supreme delight reached by a path leading through destruction and negation” (BT §21).

To reiterate, the unique effect of tragedy is to transform the intuitive, non-representational metaphysical solace of the Dionysian trance - faith in the possibility of escaping individuation into a ‘primordial unity’ and awareness of our status as aesthetic creations of an artist-god - into a *meaningful symbolic representation* of that solace whilst simultaneously inducing the spectator to *believe in that symbolic meaning*, and hence carry it with them in their normal life, preventing a lapse into asceticism. The further question of *why* believing this myth produces a ‘healing power’ will be addressed in the next section. Before this though, it is essential we remember that this analysis of tragedy means more to Nietzsche than mere abstract historical knowledge. At the time of the *Birth* he saw in German culture the possibility of a *rebirth* of tragedy in a *new* tragic culture – tragedy could again perform the same vitalising social function for the Germans as it did for the classical Greeks (BT §20). There was a *transformation of life* at stake in the *Birth* then, a hope for a society permeated by performances of works like Wagner’s, where *everyone* would incorporate the tragic myth and receive its solace, producing a powerful, optimistic people that could achieve great feats.

## 2 - Myth and Metaphysic:

As mentioned earlier, early Nietzsche’s talk of Apollonian and Dionysian has often been interpreted as a wholehearted acceptance of Schopenhauerian metaphysics. To briefly summarise, Schopenhauer developed a somewhat strange version of transcendental idealism. On his view, following Kant, our familiar world of individuated objects causally interacting in time and space was *constructed* by our minds as they process and interpret the mind-indepen-

dent, unindividuated and non-spatiotemporal *fundamental reality* of things in themselves. But whilst for Kant positive knowledge of this realm was fundamentally impossible, concepts only being applicable within the bounds of our phenomenal reality, Schopenhauer claimed we could have *intuitive* insight there. For him, the thing in itself was 'the Will', a kind of blind striving, eternally unfulfilled and therefore essentially suffering. Importantly, music is privileged in Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory, for whilst other art forms operate by presenting copies of mediated aspects of the Will - 'Ideas' that are somehow 'in between' the unindividuated independent reality and the fully individuated phenomenal world - music is a "copy of the will itself" (Schopenhauer, 374).

It's easy to see how the *Birth* could be interpreted within this schema, the Dionysian corresponding to the unindividuated reality of the Will presented through music and the Apollonian to this individuated world of representation - Nietzsche even explicitly says that Dionysiac music "appears as will" (BT §6). On this reading, tragedy would 'work' because it conveyed real metaphysical truths through real experiences of the breakdown of individuation. There's a small problem though - Poellner conclusively demonstrates that by the time Nietzsche wrote the *Birth* he rejected Schopenhauer's metaphysics.

In a fragment written two years prior, Nietzsche attacks Schopenhauer on a number of points. Broadly though, his critique is Kantian - placing the Will as thing-in-itself is "logically arbitrary" as there can be no rational demonstration of anything beyond representation, only, as Schopenhauer freely admitted, a 'poetic intuition'. Furthermore, he suggests that predicating attributes to things in themselves, even speculatively, could be *meaningless* - when we lift terms out of their familiar context and apply them to something "totally foreign" to *anything* we could ever encounter, it's hard

to see what meaning they could convey (Poellner, 63). In-fact, Nietzsche endorses an even stronger prohibition on talk of independent reality than Kant - we can't know things in themselves exist *at all!* "There *might* be a thing-in-itself" and said thing "*might* be the Will," but that *might* is all we can say (Poellner, 64, emphasis mine).

A closer look at the *Birth's* metaphysics reveals other elements incompatible with Schopenhauer. Firstly, if it is the Will, eternal *suffering*, that lies at the heart of the *Birth's* reality, how could *solace* be produced from merging with it in the Dionysiac delirium (Han-Pile, 377)? Following Han-Pile, Nietzsche's 'primordial unity' must contain pleasure as well as pain (Han-Pile, p.379). Secondly, on the Schopenhauerian reading we should expect the Dionysiac state to be epistemically privileged, a revelation regarding the *true* nature of reality - but we find the opposite, it is consistently characterised as *illusory* (Han-Pile, 378). Lastly there's that 'artist-god'. Unlike Schopenhauer's blind, impersonal force that is *represented* to subjects by their minds in the form of individuated reality, the world-artist at the heart of the *Birth's* reality is a personal figure that *intentionally creates* individuated worlds (Han-Pile, 380). This metaphysics actually has more in common with the pre-socratics than Transcendental Idealism - rather than being created by our minds, the world is produced *independently of us* by an ontologically primary creative force (Han-Pile, 382). If anything though, this new picture flaunts the prohibition on mind-independent reality *even more* than Schopenhauer's. What exactly is going on?

Here Poellner is incredibly useful, situating the *Birth* within a much broader picture of the young Nietzsche's concerns. At the time of writing, Nietzsche ascribed to a kind of pessimism grounded in two *facts* about reality that together he labelled the "evil original constitution of being" (Poellner, 70). Firstly, "the accidental character of our existence" - the lack of a kind of purposeful grounding to our lives that would be bestowed by, for example, Christianity, if only we could know it to be true (Poellner, 69) - and, secondly, the "egoism" of human nature - that *all* human desires are fundamentally



“self-directed” (Poellner, 70). Now Nietzsche saw a solution to this problem - ‘redeeming’ nature through the achievement of a “higher self” in which our natural egoism is supplanted by a “form of eros” (Ibid). Unfortunately, he also thought this eros was *impossible* (this even being empirically demonstrable, with Darwin’s work on evolution supposedly providing one proof of this). This curious joint commitment to both the necessity and impossibility of the ‘redemption of nature’ produces the fundamental guiding thought of Nietzsche’s early period - that “human greatness” lies in a struggle with reality itself, acting as if this ‘higher self’ was attainable despite the ‘tyranny of the real’ (Poellner, 72). In Poellner’s words, “the will-to-live cannot deny itself, but it can create for itself the illusion of doing so” (Poellner, 73).

Considered in this context of this struggle the *Birth’s* metaphysics becomes a *healing illusion* – a myth (Poellner, 67). Poellner relays three characteristics of ‘myth’ in the *Birth*: Firstly, “a story [...] which connects the temporal flux of appearances to an underlying ontological ground” in a manner not capturable by rational explanation; secondly, a story that connects “human experiences [...] to a purposeful non-temporal order of reality”; and lastly, an illusion, a literally false story (Poellner, 64-65). On our reading the *Birth’s* metaphysics fits all these characteristics. The ‘world-artist’ at its centre forms an ontological ground for the ‘flux of appearances’ but importantly, and unlike Schopenhauer’s Will, it does so in a way that grants our human lives a non-accidental character – we are art, the product of a god that creates in order to discharge its suffering. But if Schopenhauer’s metaphysics was ‘logically arbitrary’ then this ‘artist’s metaphysic’ must be too - that is to say it is also a myth in the third sense, at the very least incredibly unlikely to be literally true.

Belief in the *Birth’s* metaphysics addresses both prongs of the ‘tyranny of real’. The ‘world-artist’ addresses the first prong - a created existence is not accidental - and as for the second - the ‘egoism’ of the human subject - this is precisely what the ‘metaphysical solace’ of the Dionysiac experience, translated into the symbolic myth by tragedy, underwrites. Incorporation of

‘the premonition of unity restored’ would lead to exactly the ‘higher state’ Nietzsche describes, life lived ‘almost no longer individually’. Incorporation of the tragic myth convinces us “that even the ugly and disharmonious is an artistic game,” the product of a kind of transcendent playfulness not dissimilar from that of the famous Heraclitian child. Having felt oneself, and the whole individuated world, to be the product of this artistic play, and, equally, having felt oneself dissolved by it, life, and the world as whole, can be grasped not just as *an* “aesthetic phenomenon,” but as *one* “aesthetic phenomenon,” unified as a single work by a single creator, and, furthermore, also a pleasurable one, sharing in that “primal pleasure” that one can “perceive even in pain” (BT, §24). To experience the tragic mode then is to first feel the truth of this pleasurable unity of primordial aesthetic play within and without oneself, and then to “justify by [that] play the existence of even the ‘worst of all worlds” (BT, §25).

Now, Poellner contends that since the *Birth’s* metaphysics is *intended* to function as myth, its actual content represents a somewhat arbitrary “filling in” on the mythic schema (Poellner, 68). Han-Pile responds that it is not arbitrary insofar as it is designed to promote certain beneficial effects for life (Han-Pile, 395). But they both miss another crucial aspect in which the metaphysic is resolutely *not* arbitrary – that is precisely how it *describes and captures the experience of tragedy*. In the later sections of the text Nietzsche always supplements his descriptions of the effects of tragedy with the request that the reader relate them to their own experiences of the works that constituted its rebirth, namely those of Wagner (BT, §§21-22). I would suggest that the metaphysics are best understood as *capturing this experience* – not describing the true nature of reality, but what that *would be if* how tragedy made you feel was ‘real’.

Because of course the problem with a healing illusion is that one must believe in it for it to work, particularly challenging in our case because we must believe something that contradicts our rational knowledge of reality. But tragedy, evoking powerful aesthetic experiences as it does, is *incredibly*

proficient at installing beliefs – the music bestows a ‘convincing significance’ that symbols alone could never achieve. But, of course, it cannot install *any* belief, they must ‘match up’ to the aesthetic experience; the myth-to-be-believed must seem to symbolise, preserve in a fixed meaning, the affective experience of the spectator – but this is precisely what the *Birth’s* metaphysics does.

A consequence of this is that, from our ‘rational perspective’ outside this belief, the aesthetic experience seems to come *prior* to the world-picture that is meant to ground it. This will later produce a disastrous problem for the whole project, but for now we should note it solves the problem of the ‘illusory’ nature of the Dionysian trance. The text itself is written from this external ‘rational’ perspective, hence the ‘assumptive language’ Han-Pile notes at several points in the text (Han-Pile, 393). From ‘outside’ *of course the Dionysiac is illusory* - the revellers feel precisely what we *know* to be impossible.

To summarise, on our interpretation the *Birth* is a strategic work, it sees in its subject a power strong enough to make us believe what we ordinarily couldn’t – a healing illusion that, in our incorporation of it, counteracts the evil nature of existence precisely because we can now heroically believe it to be otherwise. This does however pose a problem for our broader understanding of Nietzsche’s intellectual development. For now, the *Birth* is not committed to the possibility of ‘true’ metaphysical knowledge, only to the fact that people can *believe* metaphysical claims, and hence the conventional view that a turn towards the impossibility of such knowledge, or at the very least a distaste for such beliefs, marked Nietzsche’s transition into his later works is now unsustainable. We will end then with a new account of the motivations behind Nietzsche’s departure from his early project.

### 3 - The Problem of Initiation:

An immediate doubt we might have about this mythopoetic project concerns how someone like Nietzsche, within the ‘rational perspective’ and convinced of the impossibility of eros, could ever receive the healing effects from the illusion tragedy produces – how can value ‘beyond the self’ motivate the actions of a subject “once it is clear-headedly recognised as illusory” (Poellner, 74)? This problem dissolves though once we take the affective power of tragedy seriously. When Nietzsche provides an example of the “pure and unalloyed effect of musical tragedy,” he is presumably reporting his own experience:

watching the myth as it moved before him, he felt himself elevated to a kind of omniscience, [...] as if, with the help of music, he were now able to see before him, in sensuously visible form, so to speak, the undulations of the Will [...] He comprehends events on the stage to their innermost core, and yet he gladly flees into the incomprehensible. [...] He shivers in horror at the sufferings which will befall the hero, and yet they give him a premonition of a higher, far more overwhelming delight (BT §22).

Clearly Nietzsche did receive from tragedy the effects he ascribes to it. One can imagine him being affected so strongly in the wake of such experiences that he temporarily found himself doubting the ‘tyranny of the real’, at least until he returned to the question with a rational philosophical mindset. But in a new tragic culture, where the tragic experience permeated daily life, this resurgence of the real would be avoided, faith in the healing myth being regularly renewed by the power of music. There is in-fact no contradiction between believing the ‘illusory’ content of the myth and the real nature of reality because, contra both Poellner and Han-Pile, *the subject never believes both at the same time.*

There is, I think, a different insurmountable problem, grounded in the fact that, from the ‘outside’, the aesthetic experience precedes the healing myth, and that belief in the myth demands access to that aesthetic experience. See, Nietzsche explicitly admits that he can only expect a specific kind of spectator to share these experiences with him - “those who have a direct affinity with music” (BT §21). But what would it mean to have this ‘direct affinity’? Presumably to experience in music what the text describes, to feel like it presents you with an insight into the bubbling heart of reality – in other words, to relate to it in such a way that it convinces you of the picture of reality that the myth-metaphysic is supposed to represent.

Nietzsche retrospectively described the book as “for the initiated [...] who, from the very beginning, are linked to one another by shared, rare experiences of art” (BT §P3). If one must already be ‘initiated’ to have the aesthetic experience required to be ‘healed’ by tragedy, then the establishment of a new tragic culture demands a mass ‘initiation’ of society. One might think this is the role the *Birth* was intended to play, but we’ve already seen that its metaphysics is not convincing without the persuasive power of that aesthetic experience *only available to the already-initiated*. Albeit by a different route, we have arrived at a criticism Han-Pile levels at the *Birth* – “it is almost impossible to be convinced by [myth] unless we already have had the kind of experience conveyed by the myth” (Han-Pile, 396).

Why is this so problematic though? Surely, it’s just so much worse for the ‘uninitiated’? It’s because, as we already know, maintenance of the ‘redeemed state’ demands its suspension *in a culture*. When we connect this fact to a *fourth* aspect of myth in the *Birth*, one not mentioned by Poellner, a point of failure is revealed, the resolution of which naturally leads one to certain positions held by the later Nietzsche. That fourth aspect is its association with *universality* – it “needs to be felt keenly as a unique example of something universal and true which gazes out into infinity” (BT §17).

Since one who believes a myth must believe it to be universal, addressing everyone identically since, from the perspective of the believer, everyone occupies their world, their continued belief in said myth demands that *everyone can receive the same experience the myth symbolises*. From the perspective of an ‘initiate’ ‘within’ the *Birth*’s metaphysics *everybody* should receive from tragedy the same power aesthetic experience they do, since for them this has nothing to do with their particular character but simply follows from the laws of reality. But we’ve already seen that this simply isn’t the case, and so a new tragic culture, full of ‘uninitiated’ individuals unable to access the tragic experience that enables belief in the healing myth, would undermine itself – precisely this failure to affect everyone identically would dispel the illusion in those for whom it ‘worked’.

Nietzsche later remarked that “behind my first period grins the face of Jesuitism: I mean, the conscious holding-fast to illusion and its compulsory incorporation as the *basis of culture*” (KSA 10:16[23], 507, emphasis in original)<sup>4</sup>. As well as indicating a general movement towards a greater scepticism regarding the usefulness of illusions, this comment also captures the problem we’ve just exposed. It is an unavoidable issue for any attempt to affirm life through the incorporation of ‘universal illusions’ - including the mythopoeic project, as we have described it - that they simultaneously demand they be embedded in social practices, in a culture, and that all in said culture can believe in them. It’s not surprising then that in the later Nietzsche the task of cultivation towards the possibility of affirming life is consistently portrayed as a *personal* one, sensitive to the unique character and constitution of the individual concerned. This commitment to particularity is encapsulated in Zarathustra’s response to those asking for ‘*the way*’, a universal solution to ‘bearing life’: “this – is now my way: where is yours?” he asks, “for *the way* – does not exist!” (Z 3: “Of the Spirit of Gravity”, 2, emphasis in original).

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<sup>4</sup> Translation by G. Waite in: Waite, G. *Nietzsche’s Corps/e*. Duke University Press. 1996, 314.

The mythopoetic project, committed to universality at its core, is one such doomed attempt to construct 'the way', in this case a new tragic culture wherein everyone affirms life by the same method – belief in the healing myth bestowed unto them by tragedy. But not everyone is an 'initiate', and those who aren't have no choice but to affirm life by another method. The project fails precisely because it tries to work for everyone. With this retrospective clarity we can now see Nietzsche's early project embodies a movement in which 'the way' automatically shatters into *many different ways* – the failure of an approach grounded in universality gives way to a demand for a plurality of methods with fidelity to the particular.

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## “Bad Boy Nietzsche!?”: The Literature of Alienation in the Late Writings: Ivan Soll on the Chapter Titles of *Ecce Homo*<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Steinbuch

Ivan Soll's Nietzsche is an egoist who was always egotistical in his writings and only became more so in his later writings, especially in his autobiography *Ecce Homo*. For Professor Soll, and many others, Nietzsche was prone to self-delusion about his self-worth. Nietzsche was out of touch with the real world and his standing in it and stubbornly affected a false sense of superiority to it, compensating for his failures with the delusions we read about in *Ecce Homo*, with its self-promoting chapter titles. His view represents a wider reading. Daniel Breazele in his paper *Ecce Psycho* states that there is something “alarmingly unbalanced” about *Ecce Homo* and suggests Nietzsche had lost his grasp on reality (Breazeale 1991). *Pace* Professor Soll, the chapter titles are compositions, not compensatory egotistical outbursts. A rhetorical strategy is at work in the chapter titles, what Bertolt Brecht called the

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<sup>1</sup> “Bad Boy Nietzsche!” is the title of a play about Nietzsche's madness by Richard Foreman, first performed at St. Mark's Church, New York, 2000.

*verfremdungseffekt* (the alienation or, distancing effect), and they are compositions. They are not helpfully read as the rhetoric of irony or either of its cousins, satire or sarcasm. More importantly, the chapter titles make reference to the empirical subject matter of the evolutionary development of life. Nietzsche's wisdom, the topic of chapter one and on which I shall focus, is knowledge of how to develop life in himself. His wisdom refers to a theory of evolutionary development. “I am wise in having the know-how of the development of life, in praxis and (up to a point) theoretically” to reconstruct, makes a statement that could be true or false. How did Nietzsche get this knowledge? I propose an epigenetic reading of Nietzsche's claim to have engaged “death in life” (to borrow the phrase from Tennyson that would seem apt) inherited from his father as a resistance, the overcoming which brought him to the “highest rung” on the ladder of life. It is likely that KL Nietzsche suffered trauma during the course of his deteriorating brain disease. Trauma-induced epigenetic alterations can be passed from traumatized individuals to subsequent generations of offspring (Youssef, Lockwood [...], Rutten). Nietzsche's statement of achieving the highest rung on the ladder of life signifies the reversal of epigenetic alterations, but obviously not just those that were *sui generis* in his epigenetic inheritance. My hypothesis is that there was an overlay in the epigene of KL Nietzsche of trauma from his brain disease, and likely also alterations from whatever underlying condition caused it, and a historically conserved profile of alterations associated with vengefulness and vindictiveness in our species, and that in dealing with the former Nietzsche was actually dealing with the latter and reversed the ancestral coding to mark an advance in our evolution. F Nietzsche engaged the conserved profile, not so KL Nietzsche. Of course, fathers with TB meningitis have children who do not claim a decisive role in advancing our evolution, so there must have been something unique about this inheritance situation, either in the underlying condition of the brain disease or unique in the trauma from the brain disease that introduced a new alteration in the species-level profile that F Nietzsche then came to inherit. My other main point is in regard to the criticism that Nietzsche's exceptionalist claims in *Ecce Homo* are self-delusions. I will draw attention to the use of the language

of illusion and reality in this charge and argue that this language is not following everyday or scientific use and produces nonsense statements. I will further argue the metaphilosophical point that a rejection of use for a class of expressions is driving the illusion/reality language in this criticism and speculate that it is because Nietzsche's project calls for autonomy in the development of life in ourselves that *Ecce Homo* has aroused this kind of antagonism.

Soll's claim is not just that Nietzsche was an egoist in *Ecce Homo* but that he was a refractory egoist.<sup>2</sup> Certainly we encounter people similar to whom Soll is characterizing Nietzsche as being in our trafficking with others, and it would seem that we should consider that this was Nietzsche's personality type as well. Nietzsche says that he never wanted anything to be different, that he never wanted "money, or women or honors," and even though he had these, his statement that he never had any desire for them is make-believe.<sup>3</sup> We are cautioned by commentators not to naively take him at his word, that we should consider that he really did want these things just as do all others but did not get them and is now disprizing them as being "sour grapes." He deceives himself that he is indifferent, and then goes on to imagine that he has alternative and superior value predicates. At the head of these surely must stand his contrarian happiness that his inheritance of "death in life" was a good fortune because he made it the occasion to grow stronger in life, that he created *ein Mehr* of life in himself by the overcoming of it. His contrarian happiness is the subject of the riddle of his existence, which I propose to formulate as a riddle of identity: "whose happiness is death in life?"<sup>4</sup> bringing it in line with the subject of identity in Oedipus, as Nietzsche calls

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2 In a conversation with Professor Soll.

3 In EH, "Clever" 9.

4 In EH, "Wise" 2 Nietzsche tells us that his decadence was a stimulus to *Mehr-leben*, and in a variant to the epigraph to EH he writes that his books present *ein Mehr* of life that came from out his will to life „als Schöpfung, eine wirkliche Zuthat“, KSA 13: 23[14], p. 613f from line 26. Also, see the definition of happiness at AC 2 as "the feeling of becoming stronger, the feeling of resistance overcome." In the same variant to the epigraph he says that the "highest prize life can win is that it also opposes us with its highest opposition" („aber das ist die höchste Auszeichnung des Lebens, daß es uns auch seine höchste Gegnerschaft entgegenstellt“ 614, 1 7-8). Nietzsche

himself "the last Oedipus."<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche's contrarian happiness contrasts with the contrived happiness of the *Gesindel* of the Motley Cow we read about in Z: "Prologue." These alternative value predicates are a self-delusion, so goes the critical reading, and by them Nietzsche is egotistical in compensating for the blow to his ego in failing to secure the things we all want. I take Soll to be saying that the claim to be a worthwhile self is falsified outside of a specific circumstance. Note that Muhammad Ali's "I must be the greatest", said after winning the heavyweight championship from Sonny Liston at 21 years of age, strikes us as quite different from Nietzsche's claim that "a new reckoning of time should begin with *Ecce Homo* as Year One", and that he "breaks the destiny of humanity into two."<sup>6</sup> Ali is egotistical but it is not the same as the refractory egotism Soll imputes to Nietzsche. We feel that the autonomous self-ascriber is somehow unreliable: I cannot "just decide for myself" what the context of my value is and what my place is in that context indifferent to what the world around me has to say. The feeling of unreliability comes up because if we treat "trying to be" as real we are being naïve in allowing the self-ascriber to cheat in getting around winning by legitimate competition to get what he, just as we all, want, and the self-esteem that comes with it. By presenting the autonomous other as refractory in "trying to be" by illicit winning, the culture of competition justifies itself in power struggling against it, although the power struggle in competition is a proxy for a power struggle against autonomy which, because it is rejected, is not addressed directly. But is Soll just reporting the social reflex of competition as his criticism of Nietzsche? If so, it is not enough because it is really just folkish knowledge and does not rise to philosophical criticism. For this thought not to be just the social reflex it would have to contain an account

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was opposed by the highest opposition of death in life. He won the highest prize of the happiness of resistance overcome. This is the solution to the riddle of his identity: the happiness of him who faces death in life is the happiness of the highest resistance overcome. This is also how he is a „Mensch des Verhängnisses“; letter to Georg Brandes, KSB 8: 1170, 500, December, 1888

5 WZ II, 49.

6 KSB 8: 1181 513f, letter to Heinrich Köselitz, December 9, 1888.

of what authentic indifference of this sort is. The idea is that Nietzsche has deceived himself into believing that he is indifferent to the value predications of competitive outcomes and that he is not authentically indifferent to them. But unless we can say what an authentic indifference is, we cannot say what the deception of authentic indifference is. Neither Soll nor any other critics make a survey of Nietzsche's texts to ask whether some expressions of this indifference are authentic and others not; in every case, his indifference is a self-deception. Maybe that was so, but we still need to know what a case of authentic indifference is to know that what Nietzsche thought was his authentic indifference was actually not it. But no such is ever put forward. The philosophical criticism just reproduces this social reflex of the culture of competition against this assertion of autonomy. Morris Lazerowitz wrote: "On the surface, the philosophers' talk is the talk of appearance and reality, but the fact is that he only pantomimes such talk. His use of language, whether mistaken or contrived, is not to describe either a phenomenon or the appearance of a phenomenon" (Lazerowitz 1980).

Nietzsche's critics have not approached Nietzsche's exceptionalist claims from the standpoint of their possibly being true empirical statements, but given what we now know about epigenetic science, organismal epigenetic inheritance and epigenetic evolution, there is an empirical context for reading them. Nietzsche is telling us that he is the first to have stepped out of the mass psychology of the Spirit of Revenge and advanced us forward on an ascending evolutionary pathway, and there is enough in place in the science of epigenetic evolution to read his claim to mean that he reversed gene regulation in the human epigenome. His self-overcoming was both overcoming of something *sui generis* in his inheritance from his father but also something far more than that.

Many sensed that Nietzsche was making a statement of empirical fact in his inheritance claims about his father in "Why I am So Wise", which is where the claim of exceptionalism to have created a new happiness for himself ultimately derives. Nietzsche states to his publisher that *Ecce Homo* first

puts matters in their right order of exposition, and I believe that it is this matter of his inheritance of "death in life" from his father that then became a resistance by the overcoming of which he developed life in himself to the highest rung that stands first in order of exposition of the meaning of his work.<sup>7</sup>

The values in the revaluation are the values of ascending life and they can be acquired only by individuals in that ascent path. These individuals, Nietzsche calls them „wertvollen Individuen“ in his notebooks,<sup>8</sup> are autonomous self-ascribers of value predicates based on their commitment to the ascent of life above the decline of life. Autonomy is the presumption of Nietzsche's project. I believe that the social reflex against autonomy in ascribing value predicates to oneself has emerged in philosophy as nihilistic criticism of Nietzsche. The starting point for the domineering mind is fear of self-direction, fear of being born, and it seeks domination of an Other to become as if a second womb. Self-direction shuts out the domineering mind

7 Nietzsche wrote to his publisher Naumann that with the advent of *Ecce Homo*, the poor reception faced by *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* will be averted in the publication of *Ecce Homo + The Antichrist* because *Ecce Homo* will be "in the highest sense preparatory" to *The Antichrist*, and states that, in every sense, it is a long preface to *The Revaluation of All Values*. Now "everything will be in order," he says, implying that because the introductory material *Ecce Homo* had been lacking, order of exposition had not been followed and that was the problem that led to failure of *Zarathustra* with the public. *KSB* 8: 1139 463f to Constantin Georg Naumann, November 6, 1888. He repeats this point about EH and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* specifically in regard to his inheritance from his father in the last line of "Wise" 3 superseded draft. The issue of alterations in his epigenetic inheritance from his father is the key to how he came upon and followed out the project put forth in *Zarathustra*. See his letter to Georg Brandes where he wrote that *Ecce Homo* was the „Vorspiel der Umwerthung aller Werthe“, *KSB* 8: 1151 482f, November 20, 1888.

8 The phrase „einzelnen wertvollen Individuen“ appears at *KSA* 12 7[9]. Also, Nietzsche's Great Politics will be fought by a "formation of opposed individuals" *KSB* 8: 1170 500f to Georg Brandes, (*Entwurf*) early December, 1888; see also the entry "The Great Politics" *KSA* 13 25[1]. *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny," section one implies his role as a *wertvollen Individuen*.

and is disprized. In the case at hand, authentic indifference to the value of being a winner or loser in competitive outcomes is disprized and is to be corrected as *per* those outcomes, told to follow only them. This opens up to the fantasy of the Other as loser, which is sustained in and by the competition, and the fantasy finds its way to believe itself sooner or later.

For Professor Soll, *Ecce Homo* is the climax of Nietzsche's campaign of self-promotion and tendency to self-praise. He alleges that that same tendency to self-praise is to be found earlier in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and so cannot be assigned to the onset of Nietzsche's madness, thus to keep pried open the door to Nietzsche's being culpable of an opprobrious egotism in *Ecce Homo*. Here is what Professor Soll wrote:

Nietzsche's tendency to self-promotion reaches a climax in EH (1888), his most sustained appraisal of himself. There he asks: "Who before me among philosophers was at all a psychologist?", and replies "There was before me no psychology." And he entitles some of his chapter headings "Why I am so Clever", [sic] "Why I am so Wise", "Why I write such Good Books", and "Why I am a Destiny". While there is certainly a strong element of irony in these titles, they are not meant just ironically. Nor can they be simply dismissed, as they have by some, as products of an immediately preceding mental breakdown. They are rather at the crest of a campaign of self-promotion that goes back at least to GM (1887), where he writes, "The project is to traverse with quite novel questions, and as though with

new eyes, the enormous distant and so well hidden land of morality ... and does this not mean virtually to discover this land for the first time?" (preface 7.) There are many indications of this tendency to self-praise even earlier in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885), (Soll 1999).<sup>9</sup>

Soll, and many other critics, read Nietzsche's statements of exceptionalism against the backdrop of his miserable life: his lack literary success – the poor reception of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* haunted him – his poor health, his itineracy traveling around from resort to resort, which were very nice places to live but to put such forward as real life makes us laugh at him as comically compensating for his failures, and so on. And in fact, Nietzsche was in a position of vulnerability since leaving Basel and remained so for the rest of his life, never afterwards getting on his feet. Soll's position is that Nietzsche's insistence on a sense of self-worth despite these losing outcomes instead of as seeing himself as being *manqué* to the degree that they would seem to imply makes him a refractory egotist. It is clear that Nietzsche is making an ethos appeal in *Ecce Homo* to be in the forefront of leading us in the revaluation of all values and that by saying that he never wanted anything to be different he is identifying himself as the opposite of "a person of *ressentiment*" who seeks to hurt and cripple life in revenge for the bad things that have happened to him in the past. The emphasis is not on the face saving "I never wanted money, women or honors" but on not wanting things to be different even such things as one might well think he *would* want to be different. My view is that Nietzsche's claims of exceptionalism contain possibly true statements about epigenetic heritability and individual epigenetic evolutionary development. The statements "I created *ein Mehr* of life in myself, I reached life to the highest rung, I know the highest happiness" could say something true about his developmental evolution epigenetically as the reversal of alterna-

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<sup>9</sup> The order of the chapter titles of *Ecce Homo* is cited incorrectly in Professor Soll's paper.



tive regulation from the ancestral past. I suggest that his self-overcoming of alternative epigenetic regulation was engagement of a conserved profile coding our decline at the species level and that is responsible for resentment culture and the psychology of the Spirit of Revenge. We know that epigenetic regulation can be reversed by cognitive exercises, and we find Nietzsche doing just that in “Wise” 4 and “Wise” 5, and, note, both of these sections open with a reference to this father.<sup>10</sup> The project of the *Revaluation* to set before us the heaviest demand is grounded in empirical statements made in *Ecce Homo* that we may consider today as possibly being true facts.

But given, as we can now propose, “Why I am So Wise” makes truth apt empirical statements about epigenetic inherence and epigenetic evolution, it becomes a puzzle that their empirical character has been so long unrecognized by philosophers. But then, all of Nietzsche’s position statements in his major work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, are statements of fact. Nietzsche tells us that a terrible sickness of vengefulness against life has ravaged our species and that we are on a declining path of life; that Christians have invented a psychology of the “good conscience” by which they deceive themselves into believing that the hurt and crippling to life that they themselves cause by their vengefulness is due not to themselves but to the metaphysical agency of deserved punishment effected by the pastness of the past; that willing the eternal recurrence of the past will counter the falsification of the “good conscience” by eliding pastness and making it contemporaneous with the present so that we can admit into consciousness that we are ourselves the ground of hurt and crippling to life; that our several achievements of self-overcoming of our individual vengefulness will consolidate into *Eins Dichte* to become the Overhuman – all from Z: 2 “On Redemption” – are empirical statements. This point speaks to the issue of Nietzsche’s indebtedness to philosophers of the past: to what philosophical tradition belongs such empirical disclo-

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<sup>10</sup> In “Wise” 4 by remaining unprepared, and in “Wise” 5 by blaming himself for the wrongdoing of another to him although in fact innocent.

ures as above about the adversarial relation to life we carry as a species – they are systematic and far from being asides – and to what philosopher is Nietzsche indebted in opening the way to actual evolution out of it, as he realized that development in himself? Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* that who he had become at that point speaks with lightning bolts.<sup>11</sup> Unknown to ourselves and asleep under numbing epigenetic effects, Nietzsche’s *Mehr* of life was as lightning out of the dark cloud of humankind. Laurence Lampert has written recently that Nietzsche should be the model of what a philosopher should be (Lampert 2017). But how is this philosophy? In ways, Philosophy was nihilistic movement for Nietzsche.

We have become *lebensfeindlich*, revengeful against life, and by our revengefulness, we are hurting and crippling life in our species. The answer how we got this way must lie in the epigenetic evolution of culture. Peter Ward has recently drawn attention to the correlation between the near extinction events we have passed through and explosive cultural development (Ward 2018). From the fossil record we see rapid emergences of new species in the aftermaths of cataclysms, and here the epigenetic or “neo-Lamarckian” model of evolution seems most apt, while in stable geophysical periods we see gradual transitions to new forms, and here the Darwinian model is apt. Both are happening at the same time, but dramatic epigenetic evolution following environmental catastrophes seems to drive major cultural shifts in new behaviors and new kinds of intelligences. Ward cites the coincidence of migration out of Africa with the eruption of Mount Toba, and the development of cave painting with the Ice Age. To these I would add the coinciding of the rise of agricultural civilization in the Middle East with the Younger Dryas cooling event, which could have been set off by a comet impact. I suggest that the culture of the Spirit of Revenge evolved in us starting with trauma encoded as an epigenetic effect in the aftermath of ances-

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<sup>11</sup> In EH “Books” *Untimely Essays*, he says that his becoming is inscribed in *Schopenhauer as Educator* and that who he has become now speaks with lightning bolts. In two of the plans drafted for the *Revaluation* appears the volume title: “Critique of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement” *KSA* 13 19[8] and *KSA* 13 22[14].

tral cataclysm(s) and possibly is traceable to the same event as caused the Younger Dryas cooling, as the religion of Abraham originated in Anatolia near the birthplace of agriculture in the West several thousand years later. Nietzsche's identification of a continuing *lebensfeindliche Tendenz* in our species can be seen to tell us that we are not outrunning the effects of these traumatic events and that the explosions in new kinds of intelligence and culture we see, such as the spiritualization of revenge in Christianity, associate to conserved alternative regulation from environmental traumas. It is hard to see why we would need all the new modifications if the trauma were not being conserved in the alterations, driving them. Not all in the population would be affected equally and there would be no effect in refugia. Ward does not suggest this but the emended scenario would seem possible and fits with Nietzsche's thinking.

The chapter titles of *Ecce Homo* are literary compositions. Soll nods in the direction of reading the titles as literary compositions when he says that they have an element of irony (but reads them to say what they would *prima facie* say otherwise.) What is ironic about the title of chapter one? "How ironic that I, Nietzsche, would end up wise after all?" or, "Here is my so-called wisdom." What does that mean? If we look into Nietzsche's background concerns we find that he would have been very careful about being ironic in a chapter given the title: "Why I am So Wise" lest he be confused with Socrates. As readers of *Twilight of the Idols* know, in the chapter "The Problem of Socrates", Nietzsche was no admirer of Socratic irony, analyzing it as being Socrates's personal act of resentment against the nobility of Athens. If anything, what Nietzsche is showing us in *Ecce Homo* is that he is not "a person of *ressentiment*." This is a problem for making this rhetorical classification. Neither can the rhetoric of the chapter titles be counted as one of irony's close cousins, satire, as Nicholas More states (More 2014), or sarcasm. *Pace* Professor More, if the chapter title "Why I am So Wise" is satire then there can be no positive idea of a wisdom in it. But Nietzsche's wisdom of how to overcome his "ill will" in "Wise" 4 lines up with overcoming the ill will in Z: 1 "On Redemption," and his wisdom of how to overcome feelings

and thoughts of retaliation for a wrongdoing whilst in the right in "Wise" 5 lines up with overcoming them in Z: 1 "The Adder's Bite." One is taxed to read these chapters as satire all and only, and we knew before More's book that some chapters contain satire. "Wise" 4 and "Wise" 5 are not satires of failed attempts of what philosophers have so called their wisdom. And, reading "Why I am So Wise" as sarcasm makes Zarathustra's critical distinction between himself and the famous wise men a moot point. As a real point was available, why use sarcasm? We have to look outside the irony, satire and sarcasm family for the rhetoric of *Ecce Homo*.

I will limit my scope to the reading of the title of Chapter 1, "Why I am So Wise," but I am prepared to argue that the literary analysis to follow can be applied to the other three chapter titles as well. The literary form of the chapter titles is, broadly, what Bertolt Brecht called the *verfremdungseffekt*, the alienation effect, or the distancing or estrangement effect. The idea behind the rhetoric of estrangement is to block the audience member from identification with the speaker (the speaker's *persona*) in order to be thrown back on her or himself to reflect on what is being said as applies to him, rather than being taken out of himself by the narrative to identify with the speaker. It is "playing in such a way that the audience is hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play" (Brecht 1936). The literature of alienation is the original literature of Philosophy. In its use by Socrates, he is alienating the audience from identification with himself by showing them that he is not in possession of the truth so that they will reflect on their own case to find it. The idea is that they will recover the forgotten truth by recollection. Because forgetfulness lies between knowing and not knowing, there is a point to addressing others with the rhetoric of alienation. If the audience cannot in principle come into the truth, the rhetoric of alienation has no point and does not have an audience and is merely a denunciation of those present. Nietzsche's literature of estrangement too

is meant to throw its audience back upon itself to reflect on its falsification of its own agency in the hurt and crippling of life. They have repressed this falsification and the literature of alienation is meant to enable the truth to come to consciousness. Like forgetfulness, repressed thought lies between knowing and not knowing.

In fact, two audiences would seem to be addressed in how Nietzsche is using the literature of estrangement. There is the first-tier audience that is alienated and thrown back upon itself, as we have said, the person of *ressentiment*, but there is also a second-tier audience of us as individuals who may be hoped to step out of revenge socialization, or have already done so. We see this two-tier structure in the subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he presents as “a book for all and none:” it is for none because it is composed as the literature of estrangement: “is there no place for me in this book?” – and we are to presume that there is not, but it also for all in that all should take the required step in the direction of Zarathustra’s program. “All” is a second-tier audience that the work is trying to bring into existence. Nietzsche developed an idea of a type of human being *en route* to the Overhuman: they are the “*wertvollen Individuen*.” We find the idea in his late correspondence. Clearly, Nietzsche considers himself to be such a one. Nietzsche is not criticizing the mass mind of the person of *ressentiment* on the grounds of a metaphysics of there being something “wrong” about being mass *per se* – and, to complete this (mis)thought, something “right” about being an individual *per se*. The concepts here are empirical, not philosophical. The mass man is “mass” by reason of her or his mass psychology of socialization into the Spirit of Revenge by means of which he believes that the past’s pastness is the ground of hurt and crippling to life, whereas in fact, he, or she, is himself the ground. The person of *ressentiment* has taken to vengefully hurting life on account of having to live with the untoward past, but he deludes himself about it and fastens on the past’s pastness as a disburser of punishment because he cannot change it, and imagines that his hurt and crippling of life is his just punishment. But his hurt and crippling of life is his own act of revenge; by imagining that he is being punished by

the past’s pastness he creates a “good conscience” for himself that thus avoids accountability and allows him to go right on doing it. This is Nietzsche’s empirical study of the evolutionary psychology of declining life in Z: 2 “On Redemption.” The *wertvollen Individuen* lift the repression of this falsification by willing the eternal recurrence. The idea that the past’s pastness is ordaining a punishment by locking off change to what is can only take form, obviously, in conjunction with the thought that something that is not, some past that is not, contains my good. We elide that imagined alternative past by willing the recurrence of what was: there is no place left for the imagination of the ill will to construct an alternative past. The pastness of the past becomes meaningless and I am disabused of the false belief that pastness’s punishment is the cause of my suffering of hurt and crippling of life, allowing me to face the fact that I am myself striking out to hurt and cripple life as revengeful. By stepping out of the mass socialization of the good conscience that I am deservedly punished by the past’s pastness, recognizing that that self-deception is just an excuse to go on with it, as now one of the *wertvollen Individuen*, take a step in advancing the development of life in our species. This is the audience Nietzsche intends to bring into existence by his literature of alienation.

There are many texts available to consult for the study of the rhetoric of the chapter title “Why I am So Wise” in a context, and we are surely right to question the value of any reading that goes on ahead without reviewing them. The same point can be made for the next title: “Why I am So Clever,” („*Warum ich So Klug Bin*”)<sup>12</sup> and for “Why I Write Such Good Books” one

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12 An early variant subtitle for *Ecce Homo* was „*Ecce Homo, oder ein Psychologen Problem: Warum ich einge mehr weiss*.“ In the manuscript, the words „*Ein Psychologen Problem*“ are crossed out, (KSA 14: 465, footnote). The subtitle: “Why I Know a Few Things More,” survived to become part of the opening line of chapter 2, Why I am So Clever: “Why do I know few things more? Why am I so generally clever?” In his notes for various titles and subtitles for *Ecce Homo*, there is a paragraph titled “Greatest Cleverness” where he speaks of not permitting the magnitude of his task to enter consciousness too soon, and this is just what he offers in “Clever” 9 as the answer to the question: How One Becomes What One Is, the final subtitle for *Ecce Homo*, (KSA 13: [24] 2-9). The German „*klug*“ does not have the egotistical connotation of the English “clever” and no English translator of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has translated the chapter „*Vom Menschen-*

might consult the important variant to the epigraph in which he speaks of his books as being “lived books”, and for “For Why I am a Destiny” his letter of Georg Brandes at *KSB* 8: 1170, 500f (*Entwurf*) is enlightening. For “Wise”, I will draw on Zarathustra’s “Prologue” in which Zarathustra faces the townspeople of Motley Cow, presenting a contrarian wisdom in his litany of his greatest love; two texts from *Zarathustra*, one from the chapter in Z: 2 “On Famous Wise Men” in which Zarathustra seeks to establish that the famous wise men are alienated from his wisdom because they are self-preserving, and another Z: 2 “On Self-Overcoming.”

Going beyond the development of the idea of wisdom in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to cite *Twilight of the Idols* again, in the chapter “The Problem of Socrates”, one should at least acknowledge in a discussion of the interpretation of wisdom in *Ecce Homo* that in that work Nietzsche made a rule against the possibility of wisdom about the value of life, such as he notes transgressed in Socrates’s negative judgment of its value in the *Apology* – that life is an illness and death is its cure – whereas he, Nietzsche, as he tells us in EH “Wise” 1, is distinguished by his impartiality in relation to the question of the value of life. Was neutrality in regard to the question of the value of life the wisdom about which Nietzsche was speaking in chapter one of *Ecce Homo*? One wonders then how he came by it, because, after all, we should ask, and he does say so, expecting that we would. It has to do with his inheritance from his father, and would seem to have a literal value.<sup>13</sup> How is this just egotistical then? In “Wise” 6 Nietzsche tells us that he held onto intolerable living circumstances and friendships because it was better than feeling

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*Klugkeit*“ Z: 2 as “On Human Cleverness” but rather as “On Human Prudence.” It would appear that “Why I am So Clever,” “Why I Know a Few Things More” and “How One Becomes What One Is” all refer to the explanation in *Ecce Homo*, “Clever” 9, which explanation must then be discoverable in all of these titles. In the course of that study, it becomes evident that the concept of cleverness involved is not the familiar egotistical one.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Kofman cites GM 3 § 12 in support of her reading of the neutrality statement in *Ecce Homo* (Kofman, 1992), p. 165.

them to be changeable because admitting the least feeling of changeableness led to revengefulness; and in a variant text to that line, it reads that doing so is “wiser” than feeling them to be changeable, his wisdom then being, as we may infer, knowledge of how to protect from decline of life.<sup>14</sup> If Professor Soll consulted these texts, they would seem to have meant nothing to him.

Addressing the famous wise men, Zarathustra identifies Spirit as being “the life that cuts into itself, out of its own pain it itself adds its own knowledge („das eigne Wissen”)” Z: 2 “On Famous Wise Men.”<sup>15</sup> *Contra* Darwin’s mechanistic theory of evolution, for Nietzsche, life sacrifices itself so that life-evolved, can appear – we hope. Life is spirited in being game enough to cut into itself to increase its knowledge, but knowledge of what and how do we get it? By life cutting into itself we add to our knowledge of how to develop life in ourselves. We are not on a pragmatic path when we are following the thread of the knowledge of development come of life cutting into itself but on contrarian pathways. Thus, Zarathustra uses the rhetoric of shame to instill a longing for the Overhuman in the townspeople: “[even] whoever is the wisest among you is still a discord between plant and spectre”, and this is because they are preserving themselves by their pragmatism.<sup>16</sup> All of the aphorisms of Zarathustra’s greatest love in the *Prologue* state his contrarian Dionysian wisdom meant to evoke the hour of the great contempt and longing for the knowledge that will lead us towards the Overhuman. But the rhetoric of shame fails: “Give us this last man” clamors the crowd, “we have invented happiness.” But the Nietzsche of *Ecce Homo* shows us a contrary happiness by means of new knowledge. EH “Wise” 4 and “Wise” 5 each presents a cognitive exercise designed to enable mastery of vengeance and vindictiveness. In EH “Wise” 4 Nietzsche tells about the cognitive exercise of not forming expectations for the behavior of others to control

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<sup>14</sup> The variant to the passage of “Wise” 6 is at *KSA* 13, p. 618, l. 18.

<sup>15</sup> My translation. We find this phrase also at Z: 3 “On Old and New Tablets” chapter 12, section 7, and we find the idea in Zarathustra’s aphorism that life “sacrifices itself for power” and that his will to life set him on “crooked paths” in Z: 2 “On Self-Overcoming.”

<sup>16</sup> Z: 2 “On Famous Wise Men,” Graham Parkes translation.

himself from gesturing towards them with the ill will of disprizing constructions, such as being bearish or buffoonish, and in “Wise” 5 he tells how he blames himself for the wrongdoing of others to him whilst he is in the right to elide the wrongdoing from the world and so anything to be vengeful against, leaving no object for punishment. Knowledge such as not forming expectations for others and blaming oneself whilst in the right as controls on vengefulness is only discovered by letting oneself go and seeing where inclination leads in oneself and figuring out how to stop it. Nietzsche’s Dionysian Wisdom is the wisdom that the path of self-overcoming, the knowledge for it, leads through deliberate vulnerability. The major point of my critique of Professor Soll as regards the meaning of the title of chapter one is that it refers to truth apt statements about a knowledge of practice that develops life, a contrarian agenda, and one that calls for presentation in the rhetoric of alienation.

Nietzsche wrote in one of his notebooks that the creator-God of the world as he would have him be, stands for the Übermuth Symbol, the principle of the Greatest Possible Stupidity. Here is the text from the *Nachlaß*:

(Dionysian Wisdom) The highest power to feel that everything imperfect and suffering as necessary (worthy of eternal repetition) as an effulgence of creative force, which must always and again shatter and choose the most prankish, most difficult paths. (Principle of the greatest possible stupidity, God as devil and symbol of prankishness (Übermuth-Symbol). *KSA* 11: 26[243]<sup>17</sup>

The divine will to power is hidden in the devilment of “fragment, riddle, and dreadful accident” in life as the resistances it seeks, the overcoming of which creates *ein Mehr* of life. So let us ask: “Herr Professor Nietzsche, what is this Dionysian wisdom you have to offer us? And the answer, as I take

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17 Related is this aphorism from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “And whoever has too much spirit might well grow foolishly fond of stupidity and folly itself,” Z: 4 “The Ass Festival.”

it to be, is: “My Dionysian wisdom is to choose paths of the most devilish difficulty, to pick the stupidest thing possible because there lies the path of the Overhuman. Will you join me in finding the wisdom of pathways of stupidity?” Far from alienating them, the famous wise men say what they know the people want to hear, but will the people pile into the cart Zarathustra is pulling with his contrarian wisdom?

*Pace* Professor Soll, we are not to believe that, after all, Nietzsche really did want money, women and honors just like everyone else, but failing in securing them, egotistically constructed his failures into a being a chosen pathway by following which, he further imagined, he was developing life in himself on a non-Darwinian evolutionary track of creating *ein Mehr* of life in himself, reaching the highest rung on the ladder of life and discovering a new happiness. These were real.

I have suggested that the argument that vindicates Nietzsche’s authenticity comes from newly emerged discoveries in the science of epigenetic inheritance and epigenetic evolution. Nietzsche wrote to Overbeck that he inherited an ‘overall lack of life-force’ from his father.<sup>18</sup> KL Nietzsche’s death at 36 years of age was likely the result of TB meningitis or swelling of the brain, although there are other possibilities; these are discussed in Daniel Blue’s micro-biography of Nietzsche’s first 24 years (Blue 2016). KL Nietzsche’s brain disease was not set off by a fall down a flight of steps, as there was none, although this scenario has been recently revived by Nicholas More, despite offering no new evidence to challenge the consensus opinion that the story of the fall was made up by Nietzsche’s family.<sup>19</sup> Whether from

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18 Letter to Overbeck, July 4, 1888, *KSB* 8: 1056 p. 348.

19 See Montinari’s note to *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am So Wise” line 14 (“*Mein...*”), in *KSA* volume 14, *Kommentar*, p. 471 that letters of Franziska Nietzsche prove the unsustainability of the “convenient fable” that KL Nietzsche’s illness began with a fall down a flight of steps. Also, Malcolm Brown reports that Elizabeth Nietzsche altered her brother’s autobiographical sketch of 1858 narrating the onset of his father’s sudden illness, inserting a line that it was caused by a fall down a flight of steps. The letter, without the forgery of course, can be found at *KGW* I.1 4[77]. Julian

TB meningitis or brain tumor, or whatever the cause, KL Nietzsche must have experienced trauma from his condition, and it could have affected his epigene and F Nietzsche could have inherited the alternative regulation by transgenerational inheritance. TB meningitis in particular develops slowly, and KL Nietzsche could have been experiencing trauma related to his deteriorating brain condition before Nietzsche's birth. F Nietzsche was 4 years and 10 months old at the time of his father's death. As Nessa Carey noted, although the majority of studies are on mothers and their offspring, the role of fathers in transgenerational inheritance is being increasingly recognized (Carey 2012). It is well within the state of the science to propose that Nietzsche's mood disorder of vengefulness and vindictiveness associated to inherited epigenetic alterations that originated with his father as *per* trauma due to his deteriorating brain condition. My more radical hypothesis is that the trauma, or trauma of the sort, KL Nietzsche experienced induced a furtherance of the alternative regulation from trauma induced in an ancestral population that lived through geo-physical calamity that he shared and that had an ongoing liability to it or to trauma of its sort. This was the epigenetic alteration that F Nietzsche inherited and his basal situation. But Nietzsche also says that his second track of inheritance brought him to the highest rung on the ladder of life. F Nietzsche engaged his inherited psychology of death in life in himself, as KL Nietzsche did not, but, what alone is relevant, by this engagement, he was reversing the species-level (but not universal) conserved profile associated with the culture of revenge against life.

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Young's *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* includes a complete translation from the *KGW* of the autobiographical sketch of 1858 on page 9. Brown further reports that it is unlikely that there was a fall down a flight of steps as it is not mentioned in reports of the time where one would expect to find it. Malcolm B. Brown, "Death of Nietzsche's Father" <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~fnchron/sidelights/KLdeath.html>. Web. 2003. Last accessed June 10, 2020. Despite this evidence to the contrary, Nicholas More presents the story of KL Nietzsche's fall down a flight of steps as fact in his *Nietzsche's Last Laugh: Ecce Homo as Satire*, p.70, and makes what is obviously a bad argument, that F Nietzsche's omission of it in *Ecce Homo* is evidence that it is an incomplete family autobiography and as being such, is a satire of the genre of family autobiography.

The revaluation has an empirical basis. In EH "Wise' 4 Nietzsche lists three cases in which he reversed death in life in himself to be on the path of *Mehrleben*, and in all three cases Christian *caritas* intruded and attempted to oppose his development. If my hypothesis is correct, in the intrusion of pity in these cases Nietzsche was encountering opposition to his evolutionary development out of an ancestral coding for a psychology of enmity against life whose etiology began as encoding of trauma from a possibly near extinction event. He concluded that pity is a decadent value, and it would seem that we can state it as a judgment fact from Nietzsche's report that pity is decadent in being the identification with trauma induced alternative regulation.

In a paper from later in his career on Freud and daydreaming, Morris Lazerowitz stated that the philosopher creates an intellectual illusion that he is telling us about the world, whilst, in fact, he is using the ontological idiom to recommend an emendation in the use of language. Lazerowitz's hypothesis was that the philosopher daydreams in the alternative language created by the emended usage to give expression to repressed unconscious ideas.<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche's critics seem not to be prepared to say what the authenticity is of a contrary happiness indifferent to winning and losing outcomes in a competition of which he has only the self-delusion of "trying to be" it. The critique of Nietzsche's indifference to winning outcomes in competition as being a self-deception of a refractory egotist "trying to be" something higher than he is from out of a false sense of superiority, and the criticism that his self-ascriptions of value were falsehoods, is grounded in the culture of unconscious fear of the freedom of life and domination of autonomy. This unconscious rejection can be seen in the criticism's usage of illusion/reality language that would elide a use for a class of expressions that assert autonomy of indifference, thereby to introduce social control. But Nietzsche's project calls for the rise of a culture of autonomy.

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20 Op cit., Lazerowitz, "Philosophy and Daydreaming."

Professor Soll was writing before the contemporary research into epigenetics and perhaps he would change his position in its light, or perhaps he would reject my hypothesis as overly speculative. Refutation is not on my mind; I hope only to open up the discussion of some entrenched views about *Ecce Homo*. We are well to be concerned that demands to obey authority, which exist as mass psychology, will make their way into philosophical criticism of *Ecce Homo* in reaction to Nietzsche's claim to the autonomous role of individuals of value to lead us forward in the development of life in our species. I am concerned that a negative relation to life, fear of the freedom of life, is of a piece with the vengeful hatred of the will to power in life that Nietzsche diagnosed, and that enmity against the autonomy of the *wertvollen Individuen* in declaring their commitment to an ascending path of life will present itself as another obstacle preventing Nietzsche's evolutionary project from initializing. Nietzsche recognized Philosophy's nihilistic tendencies and it would seem liable to others he did not consider.

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# Book Reviews

# *Nietzsche in the Nineteenth Century: Social Questions and Philosophical Interventions.*

Robert C. Holub

Reviewed by Daniel Blue

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018)

Derek Parfit supposedly divided those who read philosophers from the past into two groups: archaeologists and grave-robbers.<sup>1</sup> The former ask whether we can understand and use the ideas of historical figures without immersion in their intellectual ecology. Grave-robbers pick and choose, retaining what they wish while dismissing aspects which they consider outdated.

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1 Michael Rosen, "The History of Ideas as Philosophy and History" in *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 691-720. 702.

Nietzsche was often a grave-robbler in the above sense. So it is interesting to compare him with Robert C. Holub, plainly a diligent and highly respectful archaeologist. Holub takes pains to render justice to his more freewheeling subject. Nonetheless, the irony in his prose sometimes alerts readers to the methodological dissonance separating the two men. Indeed, it is present from the opening pages when Holub cautions Nietzscheans that some of the philosopher's self-characterizations are not to be trusted.

Holub begins by noting two verbal expressions which Nietzsche used when comparing outside figures (including himself) to what in his eyes were the middling contemporaries among whom he and they lived. In his youth he liked the term "*unzeitgemäß*"-- Holub renders this as "untimely" (p. 461, FN 1)<sup>2</sup>--the point being that certain texts and persons present a worldview different from (and implicitly transcending) the social and cultural moment in which they are produced. As Nietzsche explains, speaking of Wagner, "[His] art does not belong to our *present* art: he is far *ahead* or *above* it" (Quoted on p. 1)<sup>3</sup>. Such figures do not fit their age and are therefore intrinsically "untimely."

Nietzsche came to regret this expression (KSA 12.125), although he used it one final time in *TI* ("Skirmishes" §2).<sup>4</sup> However, Holub argues that towards the end of his productive life Nietzsche expressed similar temporal incongruences, as evinced in the expression, "Some are born posthumously." This phrase foregrounds another aspect of Nietzsche's texts--their lack of readership and accessibility rather than their disruptive nature—but it, too, relates to time and indicates that Nietzsche believed that neither he nor his works were suited to his era.

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2 All translations by Robert C. Holub.

3 NL 1875 11[19]. KSA 8.205.

4 In Holub's translation, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" (2)

Holub suggests that Nietzsche's claims in this regard are theoretically implausible and in the first case factually false. Far from being due to intrinsic superiority, "[Nietzsche's] self-proclaimed untimeliness can be attributed to the fact that he sometimes took less popular positions, and to the fact that his views were so poorly disseminated in the German public sphere during his own lifetime" (p. 219). Despite Nietzsche's occasional posturing as an aloof master, emerging only occasionally to utter sibylline truths, he in fact lived full-time among earthlings, constantly engaging in interchanges which he may have found more useful than he acknowledges. "Throughout the two decades of his writing," Holub insists, "Nietzsche was always in dialogue with theories, movements and events of his era." Or, as Gregory Moore has said (as quoted by Holub), "Nietzsche's thought is so deeply rooted in the issues, fears and values of the nineteenth century, that it is unthinkable outside of this context" (p. 320).<sup>5</sup> Holub's book contends "that an understanding of several of his main convictions and propositions is possible only if we pay sufficient attention to the discourses in which he participated" (p. 3).

Holub's introduction (and some Concluding Remarks at the end) frame the rest of the book and somewhat guide the reader in interpretation of the latter. As he states in the opening, "To a certain extent Nietzsche disguises his indebtedness to contemporary sources, leading readers and subsequent commentators away from the conversations in which he was involved..." (p. 5) Holub proposes to expose this subterfuge, and he does so by exploring nine "discourses" in which Nietzsche grappled with the dominant issues of the day: the Education Question, the German Question, the Social Question, the Women's Question, the Colonial Question, the Jewish Question, the

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

Evolution Question, the Cosmological Question, and the Eugenics Question. This is a great deal of material to cover, and the ambition and the amount of labor needed to complete a volume on this scale can scarcely be overestimated. Holub indicates (p. 4, p. 523) that his book has been a quarter century in the making. This is evident in the breadth and detail of his research.

As a sample of Holub's method, we might examine ploys from a single chapter, "The Evolution Question." Holub begins with the observation that while thinkers in the immediate aftermath of Nietzsche's collapse tended to construe his notion of the overman within a biological context, this assumption fell into disfavor, not least because it had been embraced by the National Socialists in Germany (p. 313, pp. 318-319). Those who dismissed the biological element offered many plausible reasons, including the fact that Nietzsche himself seems to reject this interpretation in *EH* "Books" § I. There he writes, "Other learned cattle caused me on [the overman's] account to be suspected of Darwinism." That seems direct and unquestionable, but Holub shows that this statement is more ambiguous than it might appear (pp. 315-316). As several works have recently explained, Darwin's books were variously interpreted and misunderstood in the aftermath of publication.<sup>6</sup> Thus when Nietzsche rejected "Darwinism," he was not necessarily rejecting Darwin, whom he never read, but one or more interpretations currently fashionable in late-nineteenth-century Germany. Certainly, his attacks by no means excluded the possibility that he was espousing views which we would consider "Darwinian" today.

Yet this is not the only way in which our understanding of "Darwinism" is historically conditioned. Indeed, by describing the ways Nietzsche interpretation was purified of its supposed biologicistic taint, Holub is describing history of another kind, the ways our present views were gradually constituted.

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<sup>6</sup> Holub repeatedly cites the work of Peter J. Bowler, particularly his *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

If we often no longer think of Nietzsche in biological terms, it is in part because we have been trained not to do so. Meanwhile, Darwinism in the nineteenth century had value connotations of a kind probably unknown to the general public today. While most of us do not ordinarily consider this scientific theory to be inherently political (aside from its obvious biblical implications), Holub quotes Alfred Kelly's claim that "German popular Darwinism was a continuation of the old eighteenth-century Enlightenment tradition. German Darwinism sought to crush superstition, to inform, to liberate, and, indirectly, to democratize".<sup>7</sup> This gave the early, anti-left Nietzsche ample cause to treat "Darwinism" with suspicion, particularly since the theory was associated with a progressive view of history, a form of optimism which Nietzsche could never approve. On the contrary, he believed throughout his adult years that the human race had undergone decline (pp. 356-358). He was also annoyed because throughout his productive life, beginning with *BT* (p. 317), the public associated him with various strands of Darwinism.

Holub provides a good deal more information both on the ways Nietzsche learned of Darwinian theory and the ways contemporary books inspired him to extend his own views. Meanwhile, Holub amply makes the point that when Nietzsche mentions "Darwinism," we cannot simply pluck *The Origin of Species* from our shelves, much less bring to bear "evolution" as we conceive the theory today. These are historically conditioned terms, and leg-work is necessary before we can plausibly assume we know what Nietzsche meant.

The above paragraphs offer at most a first glance at the helpful information to be found in Holub's chapter on "The Evolution Question." Comparable scrutiny and stimulating insights can be found in the remaining eight. Sometimes Holub offers startling historical information. For example, the defeat of the French and subsequent consolidation of German states allowed

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 7.

the country to begin its industrial age in earnest. As a result, the German worker population grew from 1 million in 1844 to 17 times that number at the time when Nietzsche began *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (pp.125 - 126). No wonder that he so often found himself besieged by socialists, a group that, after some early dalliances, he scorned.

In his chapter on colonialism Holub bids readers to beware comparing Nietzsche's notion of "the good European" with the democracy-based, comparative equanimity of the European Community today (p. 246). Nietzsche's figure was more solitary and removed, and while Nietzsche definitely construes "the Good European" to serve as an alternative to nationalism (Ibid.), the term "simultaneously discloses a Eurocentric conviction that, he chillingly adds, "does not exclude the ruthless application of military force and economic exploitation in a vastly conceived colonial enterprise" (p 252). Unsurprisingly, Holub links colonialism not only with "the Good European" but with "great politics" (p. 245, pp. 252 - 259).

Finally, in an effort to explain Nietzsche's seeming ambivalence with regard to the "Jewish Question," Holub offers a history of the term, "anti-Semitism," and explains that it had a quite different meaning from "anti-Judaism." Nietzsche unequivocally opposed anti-Semitism (pp. 288-289), but his letters (and those of most of his friends) frequently include anti-Jewish slurs, an apparent inconsistency which seems not to have troubled them at all (pp. 295-301).

Meanwhile, a problem arises, which Holub never resolves. Because Nietzsche poses as a solitary eminence, he is almost required by his role to indicate that he has created his writings out of his own intellect and imagination, with minimal help from contemporaries. Holub begins his book with a couple of examples in which Nietzsche tacitly misrepresents his dependence on secondary literature: the acknowledgement, for example, that Nietzsche's knowledge of most philosophers was not gained first-hand from reading them but largely gleaned through secondary sources (p. 4). Holub also men-

tions a host of historical facts taken from a legal treatise, which Nietzsche uses to bolster his case concerning paying debts in *GM II §5*. In the published work Nietzsche arguably gives the impression that he has discovered these specifics himself. He certainly doesn't mention the book (*Law as a Cultural Phenomenon*) or author (Josef Kohler) from whom he derived them (pp. 5 - 6).

Holub's point is that Nietzsche has appropriated scholarship which is not his own in order to foster his pose of self-sufficiency. Yet in availing himself of another's findings without acknowledgment of any kind, Nietzsche has moved beyond questionable self-presentation to what some might regard as academic malfeasance.

This raises a problem which permeates the book. Holub often mentions but rarely dwells on Nietzsche's cooption of other writers' insights and research. He provides the facts, but never foregrounds the ethical implications. Perhaps he doesn't want to raise this potentially charged issue because to do so would overshadow his main thesis, that Nietzsche read and responded to his contemporaries a great deal more than most of his readers are aware. But the secondary topic overshadows the book anyway and this is to some extent an unavoidable result of Holub's thesis. His entire book revolves around information that Nietzsche rarely mentioned and indeed seems to have suppressed. The more successfully Holub demonstrates this, the more noticeable Nietzsche's silence becomes. He may have had excellent reasons for treating these as inadmissible, as will be shown later in this review, but until that issue is addressed it remains difficult to ignore. Holub shows that Nietzsche was influenced by his contemporaries. What he does not address is why (besides vanity) Nietzsche kept those debts unacknowledged.

Meanwhile, Holub's own historical situation bears mention. He rightly observes that his thesis is by no means an outlier in our times. For a century after his collapse Nietzsche was treated as a kind of self-sufficient giant, impervious to influence by any but the most august philosophers. The situation has changed considerably in the past two decades, and Holub acknowledges the works of Thomas Brobjer, Christian Emden, Hugo Drochon, Gregory Moore, Robin Small, and Anthony Jensen, among others, who have contributed to this shift in opinion (p. 461, FN 4, FN 6). Meanwhile, as already stated, he mentions that he himself has worked on this project for 25 years. His book is not so groundbreaking as it would have been if published shortly after its conception. The works of Brobjer, Moore, and Small in particular, all of whom published significant work in the early 2000s, broke new ground apparently after Holub began work on his project. Accordingly, while the final publication undoubtedly benefits from Holub's prolonged immersion in the relevant scholarship, it will enter the world less dramatically because of its quarter-century gestation.

If we today wish to evaluate Holub's work, we would have to subdivide our critique into two parts: a consideration of Holub's introduction (where he states his contention) and the examinations of the nine discourses (where he largely provides evidence). Examination of the latter would have to be delivered by experts in their fields, that is, by those at least as knowledgeable in these nine subject matters as Holub himself.

Instead, let us look at his principal thesis--that Nietzsche was not so monolithic and self-contained as he claimed and that before we can understand him we must study his historical circumstances and how he engaged with contemporary issues. We might break this down in turn to two parts: is Holub right? And what are the implications?

Nietzsche may have professed himself a hermit. No one who reads is entirely alone, however, and in letters he repeatedly stated that he could not live without libraries and bookstores. We have lists of books he took from libraries and books he purchased on his own, not to mention the enduring witness of his personal library. As we might expect, most of those books are by contemporary authors and many deal in whole or part with issues that seemed burning at the time. Holub deals with most phases of this process, including ways Nietzsche addressed these seemingly local topics in his books. That in itself is enough to uphold the first issue as encapsulated by Holub's thesis.

The second, more serious issue is whether this is important, a question which takes us back to the distinction which began this review. Some people (archaeologists) seem predisposed to try to understand past philosophers' positions both within the context of their development and their times. Others (grave-robbers) favor a more direct and simple reading which lets them get immediately to work doing what they construe as philosophy. Indeed, this may explain Nietzsche's aforementioned reluctance to mention all his sources. He was no archaeologist. He just wanted to get to work on matters of immediate interest to him.

It is best to close with Holub's own assessment of Nietzsche's accomplishments. Nietzsche, he contends, was indeed a child of his time, as we all are. If this insight induces some mild disenchantment, a recognition "that in various areas he was not always and in all regards the great thinker we once assumed he was," (460), then this must be accepted as a scholarly advance. Of course, one might wonder who the "we" are who hold this inflated view of Nietzsche, but certainly outside the academy and sometimes within it people do accord the philosopher an almost mystical status. In addition to

extending our knowledge of the philosopher and his milieu, then, and further showing how these can be useful to interpreting Nietzsche's positions, Holub administers a cleansing dose of skepticism to those who might exaggerate the philosopher's importance. If his book took a long time to complete, it was worth the wait.

*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of  
Philosophy: Nietzsche and the Modern Drama.*

Kornhaber, David.

Reviewed by Dirk R. Johnson

(Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016)

*The Birth of Tragedy* remains a seminal text for readers interested in Nietzschean aesthetics. Written when he was still in thrall to Wagner and showing signs of the composer's influence, the *Birth* marks a significant turning-point in Nietzsche's evolution as an independent thinker, and it represents the greatest achievement of Nietzsche's early years. Though he later came to revise, even reject, some of its central claims, Nietzsche's subsequent thoughts continued to gravitate around insights that he first championed there. David Kornhaber's study goes beyond the *Birth* but never strays far from it. For Kornhaber suggests that the philosopher's preoccupation with tragedy and the dramatic arts was not just relegated to the one precocious work, but remained a constant thread throughout his career.

At first glance, Kornhaber would seem to have a hard case to make. Explicit references to tragedy and drama become scarce after Nietzsche's formal rupture from Wagner and his ongoing reassessment of Schopenhauer. Entering what has been termed his positivist phase, Nietzsche endorsed skepticism and a cool scientific detachment that in many ways revived the philological ethos in which he had been trained. Nietzsche was finding his way back to his vocation while searching for signposts beyond it. The illusions of art could no longer conceal the harsh realities he was now willing to face. Though the realm of art—and the hope for a serious tragic art—reappeared in later writings, aesthetics would never again be played out against science as it so naively was in the *Birth*.

Kornhaber covers less those years of disenchantment, instead bringing out new insights from the period prior to the *Birth*. Rather than focus on the larger aesthetic implications of the Dionysian versus the Apollonian, Kornhaber begins by examining the critical tradition from which Nietzsche drew and to which he offered his ambitious contribution. In doing so, Kornhaber cuts through much of the obscurantist fog that has settled on this early text and casts fresh light on the formative context that shaped Nietzsche's reflections.

When Nietzsche set his ideas down, he sought not merely to contribute to, but to directly challenge an illustrious tradition of German theory on the origins and meaning of tragedy. Though inspired by Wagner, Nietzsche was not being disingenuous when he later claimed in his retrospective (EH, BT 4) that he had begun to lay out his own inchoate reflections on the subject of tragedy and had not just been propagandizing for Wagner. Ancient tragedy was clearly at the center of his thinking, and Wagner served as a fertile catalyst for his original reflections on the subject.

Previous theoreticians on tragedy—Aristotle, Lessing, Goethe—had centered their analyses on the *ends* of tragedy—specifically, the higher moral awareness that supposedly accrued from the tragic art. Returning to arguments in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, interpreters focused on the *mechanics* of drama and the artistic means that produced the desired effects of fear, pity, and subsequent catharsis. This text-driven analysis places greater emphasis on the *reader*, who can dissect a work according to an established blueprint. Suspecting that previous theorists had been immune to aesthetic pleasure, Nietzsche redirected attention to the other end—to the *spectator* and to the *performance* itself.

Nietzsche’s early work was an expression of an overall anti-modernist agenda that he shared with Wagner, and they were both confronting the formulaic, plot-driven pieces of successful nineteenth-century—particularly Parisian—drama with a theatrical (German) model that they hoped would reanimate the ancient spirit of classical Greek tragedy. But rather than reject Aristotle, one could say Nietzsche repudiated a specific, superficial reading of the *Poetics*; in this he continued in the “German” tradition of Lessing, who too had critiqued the French and their dramatists’ slavish adherence to the three unities.

Instead of attending to the moral ends of tragedy, Nietzsche inaugurated a different approach: an imaginative reconstruction of ancient tragedy with an emphasis on *performance*—i.e., the function of chorus, acting, lighting, spectacle, and staging (or *Inszenierung*)—in producing a total aesthetic effect. Although this demanded imaginative reconstruction—all we are left with are the texts, after all—it accords with Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer-inspired awareness of *das Tragische*. But though he avoided exclusive focus on the moral aims of tragedy, Nietzsche aligned with his predecessors’ belief that “the tragic” could be *philosophically* circumscribed. A common strain to this scholarly tradition is that “the tragic” is a concept worthy of philosophical reflection in its own right; to lofty critics of tragedy, Aristotle’s *Poetics* was too prosaic—a handbook for playwrights.

Nietzsche’s thoughts on tragic art evolved over time, and there are fewer explicit references to the topic in the period of critical distancing from Wagner. But “[b]y the time of the fifth book of the *Gay Science*,” Kornhaber writes, “Nietzsche’s disparagement of the form would become utterly relentless, every bit as fervent as his support had once been” (p. 41). In conclusion to the first part of his study, Kornhaber turns to two late anti-Wagner texts (*Nietzsche contra Wagner* and *The Case of Wagner* [CW]), which in part included verbatim extracts from his prior works, to highlight a “complete reversal” from his original position in the *Birth*. One interesting late passage Kornhaber fails to mention is in CW 9, where Nietzsche points to Wagner’s dispositional inability to construct a tragic plot: “We know the sort of technical problems that absorb all of a dramatist’s energies, often making him sweat blood: how to give *necessity* to the knot and also to the resolution, so that there is only one possible outcome.”

Contrary to his earlier position, Nietzsche came to suggest that the Aristotelian precepts he had once criticized were perhaps crucial after all and that his original stance, and his thoughts on “the tragic,” were too Hegelian, too dominated by a single “idea” transformed into a metaphysics (EH, ‘Birth’ 1). It now seemed that the intricate craft of the tragedian, derived from a deep awareness of human psychology and character motivation, was relevant, and something he had perhaps underestimated in his initial enthusiastic efforts to inaugurate a new “tragic age.”

At the same time, there did remain constants in his interpretation on the topic—and one of those was his awareness and insistence that tragedy should be understood from a non-moral perspective. Despite subtly shifting his stance on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Nietzsche never deviated from the view that the tragic art transcended modern pessimism, and that it reflected an affirmation of life beyond traditional morality (EH, GT 2). In that sense, Nietzsche was indeed circling back to—and in some ways had never left—the set of concerns that had informed his first major work.



In his compact overview of Nietzsche's final position, he argues that Nietzsche intended to supplant tragedy with his "philosophy of the future" and that *Zarathustra* represented a new "tragic philosophy" that would supersede the tragic art. As Nietzsche conceived it, it would become the cornerstone of a new tragic age, realizing the hopes he had once affixed to the name of Wagner. It is at this point where I would disagree with Kornhaber. While Nietzsche undoubtedly attached great importance to *Zarathustra*, he positioned himself as the first "tragic philosopher" (EH, 'Birth' 3). But this does not need imply that he wished to replace the tragic art form or minimize its unique means of expressing the tragic spirit; it was that art form, after all, that gave birth to our awareness of the tragic phenomenon in the first place.

Nietzsche suggests that all prior *philosophers*, as heirs to an ascetic tradition, remained beholden to the "moral" and could not convey a deeper awareness of what constituted the tragic. His specific ambition, then, was not to substitute philosophy for tragedy or to disparage other art forms—and here he positioned himself decidedly against the example of Plato—but rather to model a type of (tragic) philosophy that he felt had never been realized before and to open up a new pathway for philosophy after it had been fatefully diverted by the Socratic tradition. On the other hand, his final condemnation of Wagner was based on his desire for a return to humility in the arts, and he argued against a "theatocracy" or any one art form becoming absolute, tyrannizing all others. Along these lines, and driven by a "love of art," Nietzsche postulates three "demands" in the conclusion to *The Case of Wagner*, the first of which was "[t]hat Theater does not become master over all the other arts" (CW 12).

Fortunately, the conclusion to the first half of the monograph suggests a more nuanced position. In the section "Friedrich Nietzsche, Theater Lover (Reprise)," Kornhaber claims that Nietzsche in his later creative years continued to follow the contemporary theater scene with great interest: "in every way [he] maintained the pose of someone who had not yet given up hope for the stage, of someone who was still highly conversant on the sub-

ject, of someone who was waiting" (p. 89). He seemed to recognize that the true tragic genius was a random, solitary figure and did not require a theoretical platform or prior revolution in theater practice to produce the tragic effect in the modern age. Although skeptical of his era and large parts of its cultural production, Nietzsche knew that bold experimenters, yet unknown to a broader public, could still produce the kind of hard-edged psychological realism that he admired and that informed the best of ancient tragedy. Unlike Wagner, whose personal cultural ambitions led him to dismiss the contemporary stage, Nietzsche had become selectively more charitable in his estimation of the wide range of innovations in the arts, including in the field of drama.

In the second half of his study, Kornhaber turns specifically to three modern playwrights—August Strindberg, George Bernard Shaw, and Eugene O'Neill—as examples of the kind of dramatic innovators that might have impressed Nietzsche with their work. These three dramatists were themselves deeply influenced by Nietzsche and his musings on drama, and it was above all his ambition for the theater that inspired them to revolutionize dramatic stagecraft.

Strindberg's reading of Nietzsche coincided with the writing of one of his most influential plays, *Miss Julie*, in 1888. By that time, Strindberg had read *Beyond Good and Evil* but would soon read *The Case of Wagner*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Strindberg also followed the series of five influential lectures on Nietzsche that the critic Georg Brandes delivered in spring 1888 at the University of Copenhagen, which helped cement Nietzsche's reputation. By all indications, Strindberg was overwhelmed by Nietzsche when he wrote *Miss Julie* (even though this ardor would significantly cool thereafter). Strindberg shared Nietzsche's antipathy of Wagner, and he wrote in stark opposition to a Wagnerian aesthetic. *Miss Julie* announced a "new direction in the European theater"—one that would start from the naturalist foundation then developing in France but would go beyond it (106). Whereas Wagnerism embraced the grand and

monumental gesture, Strindberg proposed “to take the minutiae of everyday life—the ‘ordinary case’ or ‘corner of nature’ that all naturalists sought—and excavate from within the eternal themes that lay nested inside” (108). And like Nietzsche, Strindberg emphasized theatrical production, above all the collaborative role of the actor; the dramatist would need to think *of* his actors, not *for* them—unlike Wagner, who forced “upon them all manner of contrivances and false sentiments that suit his totalizing need for complete composition and control” (110).

For G.B. Shaw, Nietzsche was less an aesthetic inspiration than an intellectual rival (not surprising for a writer who recognized Nietzsche *and* Wagner as mentors). Many of their views overlapped, though Shaw was keen to accentuate their differences and his own originality. Writing slightly after Strindberg, Shaw introduced Nietzsche and the Nietzschean canon to the English-speaking world. He thus had a broader overview of Nietzsche’s thought, and it resonated throughout his works, such as in *Man and Superman* (1903) and *Major Barbara* (1905), the latter of which Kornhaber examines. While Shaw was drawn to his ideas, he sought to stake out his independence, which meant both affirming and undermining the persona of Nietzsche. Shaw was skeptical of philosophy and its dogmatism, which he felt Nietzsche could not escape, and which was reflected in his ambition for a “philosophy of the future”. Instead, Shaw thought that his drama could better fuse ideas and true artistic representation, thereby avoiding the narrow dogmatism of Apollonian thought. Whereas he saw in Nietzsche an Apollonian thinker lost in Dionysian excess, Shaw instead aimed to insert Dionysian playfulness into a dramaturgical model that engaged with serious ideas in the realm of art. In the end, Shaw contended with Nietzsche not so much as a creative artist, but as a thinker. His chosen field of competition—the stage—could realize his grand ambitions. This often meant obscuring the traces of Nietzsche on his own thinking, while misconstruing Nietzsche’s positions and reducing him into a straw man that Shaw could more easily challenge.

Born into a theatrical family—his father was a famous actor before his star faded—Eugene O’Neill had discovered *Zarathustra* in his youth, describing it as a book that had “influenced me more than any work I’ve ever read” (quote on p. 139 of Kornhaber). Later the *Birth* assumed an even greater significance for his art. Kornhaber suggests that part of Nietzsche’s allure was the intellectual prestige he conferred on O’Neill, which gave his project more gravitas among American audiences and critics. Nietzsche’s ideas influenced the writing of *The Great God Brown* (1926), in which O’Neill deployed heavy Nietzschean symbolism and even incorporated masks to recapture the Hellenic spirit of tragedy. After a period of theatrical failure, O’Neill retreated from theater production, only to write his final masterpiece, *A Long Day’s Journey into Night*, first performed posthumously in 1956. It was the work most indebted to Nietzsche’s spirit. “To believe O’Neill’s own writings, almost his entire theatrical project as he understood and articulated it was an attempt to find a means of enacting Nietzsche’s vision of a Dionysian theater in a modern American context: to find a way to ‘the one true theatre’” (p. 149). Here, O’Neill was “liberated to write not for the theater as he found it but for the theater he wanted it to be [...] It is not just a play *for* a perfect theater; it is also a play *about* that theater” (p. 148). Thus, Nietzsche informed O’Neill’s project from beginning to end—from *The Great God Brown* to the twilight triumph of *Long Day’s Journey*.

Kornhaber makes a compelling case for Nietzsche’s seminal impact on modern theater and its most influential practitioners. Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas, and the importance he accorded to theater in his philosophical project, had a fructifying effect on the creative landscape. They gave ambitious playwrights the theoretical ammunition to challenge theatrical conventions and transform theater again into a space for serious artistic reflection and experimentation.

Kornhaber's study presents only two minor quibbles. The two parts of the monograph convey the sense of being two distinct projects, one that deals with Nietzsche and his musings on tragedy, and the other with three modern playwrights, who shared a Nietzschean affinity. Also, Kornhaber does not provide much evidence for—and perhaps overstates—the claim that Nietzsche actively followed modern theater productions—that would seem to require far more than a few scattered mentions—even though I agree that his reflections on tragedy remained central to his thought, and deepened and matured over time. Still, Kornhaber reasserts the primacy of tragedy on Nietzsche's thinking overall, and for that important reason alone his study deserves serious attention in Nietzschean scholarship.

*Individuality and Beyond: Nietzsche Reads  
Emerson*

Benedetta Zavatta

Reviewed by Laura Langone

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

In this book, Benedetta Zavatta aims to reconstruct Emerson's influence on Nietzsche's philosophy throughout his works. Her central contention is that Emerson was always an important point of reference for Nietzsche, from his youth to his mature thought. The book is made up of 6 parts.

In Chapter 1 *The Reception of the Emerson-Nietzsche Relation*, Zavatta shows how the Emerson-Nietzsche relationship was ignored for almost a century by the scholars. Emerson and Nietzsche were long considered as cultural icons, and as specifically great autonomous thinkers in their respective countries, the United States and Germany, which prevented a thorough study on the subject. The first English monograph on this, *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity*, was published just in 1992 by George Stack, and, as the following studies on the relationships between Nietzsche and Emerson,

did not ask the question Zavatta aims to answer in her monograph. What is in her eyes crucial for "a systematic interpretation of Nietzsche's reception of Emerson" is "the question of exactly what Nietzsche had read and of exactly how he had received and interpreted it" (*The Reception of the Emerson-Nietzsche Relation*, 15).

Chapter 2 *The Struggle Against Fate* principally deals with the young Nietzsche's view of fate. In his 1861 autobiographical essay *The Course of My Life*, Nietzsche conceives of fate as a sort of higher being which has determined the affairs of this world for all eternity. Everything, our lives included, are governed by strict necessity, and we are not free to change this. In this essay, for Nietzsche there is no space for freedom, everything is determined *ab aeterno*. Hence, freedom and necessity are mutually exclusive.

However, in the following year, in the short essays *Fate and History* and *Freedom of the Will and Fate*, Nietzsche takes a radically different position. In the meantime, Nietzsche had read Emerson's essay *Fate* in the collection *The Conduct of Life*, which led him to change his mind. In this text, Emerson embraces a view of fate as temperament, namely as one's own natural tendencies and dispositions.

Temperament represents our necessity, something given once and for all by nature that cannot be modified. But we are free to develop our character, our personality by putting our natural dispositions to the service of our own goals. Fate for Emerson means taking advantage of necessity rather than succumbing to it. In this respect, necessity and freedom are not mutually exclusive but necessity involves freedom.

In his 1862 essays, Nietzsche also considers freedom as the capacity to take advantage of necessity so as to accomplish our goals. If the year before he had regarded fate as a higher being who had established the course of our lives once and for all, after having read Emerson, he suggests a view of fate as a power internal to us rather than external.

In the same way as Emerson, for Nietzsche we are free to channel our natural inclinations into our own purposes, and thus to shape our personality. This means that also for Nietzsche necessity involves freedom: our natural inclinations are the material necessarily given to us upon which we can freely build our personality. Here is how Nietzsche reverses his opinion held in the 1861 autobiographical essay, where freedom and necessity appeared mutually exclusive. According to Zavatta, from 1862 on, Emerson's essay *Fate* instills in Nietzsche the concepts of creating oneself and self-mastery, which play a key role in Nietzsche's mature thought.

The third chapter, *Self-Reliance*, further explores both concepts as they relate to Emerson's notion of self-reliance, and its impact on Nietzsche's thought. For Emerson, self-reliance is the desire to express oneself, one's potential against any external interference. It is the capacity to free oneself from the influence of social values and act according to one's own values. For Zavatta, these are some of the characteristics Nietzsche then attributes to the figure of the free spirit. The free spirit is he who has the virtue of self-reliance.

In Emerson's eyes, self-reliance involves the attitude he calls "intellectual nomadism", i.e. the attitude of constant experimentation of values, which starts from the awareness of the partiality of every perspective. "This means that the "intellectual nomad" loves to encounter and confront people different from himself, to experience new ways of life and to make these new ways of life, if only for a time, his own" (*Self-Reliance*, 27). Nietzsche indeed uses Emerson's very expression "intellectual nomadism" to describe the free spirit: "What, however, we may call ourselves in all seriousness (and without being in any way defiant) is 'free-ranging spirits', because we feel the tug towards freedom as the strongest drive of our spirit and, in antithesis to the fettered and firm-rooted intellects, see our ideal almost in a spiritual nomadism" (*AOM* 211).

Yet there are important ways in which Emerson's self-reliant man and Nietzsche's free spirit do not completely overlap. Emerson's self-reliant man does not possess the genealogical method, which actually allows the free spirit access to a particular mode of self-reliance. Genealogy is utilised as a means of liberating oneself from external influences as an expression of one's own personality.

This is because the genealogical method shows the supposed eternal truths of society as human, all too human constructions, and, for this reason, supposed truths can be put into question through experimentation. The free spirit can experiment with the values of mankind insofar as they turn out to be nothing eternal, but historically constructed values.

On Zavatta's account, self-reliance is the criterion upon which Nietzsche bases his transvaluation of values:

I shall moreover assume, concurring here with the majority of Nietzsche scholars, that this ethical model of Nietzsche's concerns not the question of (p. 75) "what to do" but rather that of "how to do it," or, in other words, not the content but rather the form of the values in question. In other words, I hold that the ethical model proposed by Nietzsche describes the conditions that values must fulfill if they are truly to be said to be "one's own values." To say that values are "our own values" is tantamount to saying that in our actions we express our own selves. [...] Nietzsche considers every value to be acceptable provided that it proceeds out of the consciousness of one's own conditions of existence and out of the will to assert and to develop oneself—or, in other words, proceeds out of "self-reliance" (*Self-Reliance*, 8).

Then, in the fourth chapter *Society or Solitude*, Zavatta focuses on a particular value Nietzsche in her opinion transvalues: that of altruism. “Nietzsche is critical of compassion and of pity inasmuch as these moral attitudes denote a will to flee from one’s own self or, in other words, denote a lack of self-reliance” (*Society or Solitude*, 2).

Zavatta’s argument is that, with regard to social relationships, Nietzsche suggests an alternative model of friendship or fellow rejoicing in place of compassion or fellow suffering adopted by Christianity. In this respect, he again draws from Emerson.

According to Emerson, friendship does not involve taking another’s suffering upon oneself as Christian compassion prescribes, but encouraging them so that they will be able to overcome their problems in virtue of their own efforts. In this way, the sufferers will be able to fulfill their potential on their own. In Emerson’s eyes, everyone can unfold their potential: “Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence, and need not to be flattered but to be schooled. I wish not to concede anything to them, but to tame, drill, divide, and break them up, and draw individuals out of them (CL, 132; FL, 173)” (*Society or Solitude?*, 39).

Nietzsche adopts this model of friendship but, while for Emerson one must help as many people as possible express their potential, in Nietzsche’s view one must assist only one’s circle of friends:

Live in seclusion so that you are able to live for yourself. Live in ignorance of what seems most important to your age! . . . And let the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions, be but a murmur to you. You will also want to help—but only those whose distress you properly understand because they share with you one suffering

and one hope—your friends—and only in the way you help yourself: I want to make them braver, more persevering, simpler, more full of gaiety. I want to teach them what is today understood by so few, least of all by these preachers of compassion [*Mitleiden*]: to share not pain, but joy [*Mitfreude*]! (GS 338, *Society or Solitude?*, 29)

Helping friends fulfill their individuality for both Nietzsche and Emerson means helping them develop their self-reliance. The latter is also the precondition for wisely reading history for both. The last chapter, *Making History and Writing History*, focuses on Emerson’s and Nietzsche’s respective conception of history.

Here Zavatta aims to show that there is a shift in Nietzsche’s approach to history from the *Untimely Meditations* to his later thought, and that this is due to Emerson’s growing influence on him on this front. Emerson suggests an empathetic and active reading of history: “A reading in which one seeks to actually identify with the events narrated and to live them as things that might have befallen one’s own self” (*Making History and Writing History*, 7). For Emerson, history functions as applied and prospective biography: one must try to learn as many lessons as one can from history and then apply them to one’s own life.

In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche instead affirms that human beings cannot assimilate the entirety of history, as Emerson maintains, and that they have a limited horizon of the information they can actually incorporate. Therefore, they must focus only on the events of which they can make actual use in their lives, while the rest must be forgotten.

However, Nietzsche goes on to reverse his opinion. In the middle period of his philosophy, he no longer thinks that one must limit one’s horizon to the information one can assimilate, but rather must try to incorporate as much information as possible in order not to limit the power one can draw from history:

Not to see the new greatness above oneself, not to see it outside of oneself, rather to make of it a new function to one's self. We are the ocean into which all rivers of greatness must flow. How dangerous it is when our faith in the universality of our Self is lacking! A plurality of faiths is required (NL 1881 13[19], KSA 9: 621; see also NL 1881–1882 16[9], KSA 9: 660, *Making History and Writing History*, 35–36).

But for Nietzsche only those who possess a well disposed set of drives or a sufficiently strong personality can embrace the entirety of history. While constantly making efforts to show how many of Nietzsche's key concepts were inspired by Emerson, on the other hand Zavatta acutely addresses what she considers the fundamental differences between the two thinkers. In her view, Emerson sustains an essentialist account of the human being, for which humans have a true essence established once and for all, which they should bring to its full potential. For Emerson, our character, our potential is something already present within us, but it needs to be fulfilled.

Zavatta affirms that, for Nietzsche, by contrast, “the process of formation of one's character does not presuppose the eventual achievement of a “final state” which would coincide with drawing upon some preexisting metaphysical core of one's own personality. Nietzsche's position is rather that the process of development of our character is one that never ceases” (*The Struggle Against Fate*, 20).

Therefore, the main difference between Nietzsche and Emerson would be that, while Emerson believes in a fixed metaphysical essence present in each of us, for Nietzsche our being is something continuously changing and thus something that can be perpetually developed.

For Nietzsche there is no fixed essence to be fulfilled. For example, according to Zavatta, Nietzsche's well-known sentence “become who you are” must be interpreted in an anti-metaphysical sense, i.e. with the meaning “live according to one's self-chosen or self-created values” (*Self-Reliance*, 3).

However, Zavatta is not always consistent in sustaining Nietzsche's alleged anti-metaphysical conception of the human being. Sometimes, she seems to affirm the opposite, attributing the essentialist view to Nietzsche. For example, she affirms that, in Nietzsche's view, only an individual with a fortunate set of drives would be able to put into practice the self-reliant virtue of intellectual nomadism. While for Emerson intellectual nomadism is a matter of choice, in the sense that one is free to decide whether to practice it or not, for Nietzsche not everyone is able to do so, but only strong individuals gifted by nature with a fortunate set of drives.

On Zavatta's account, for Nietzsche only those who have a fortunate set of drives are to be considered higher types, strong enough to be able to conduct a life of experimentation. The possession of a fortunate set of drives seems to us to point to an established essence, which would make Nietzsche an essentialist thinker in the same way as Emerson. As such, it is not always clear to what extent Nietzsche is anti-essentialist, compared to Emerson.

In conclusion, the book offers a systematic treatment of the relationships between Nietzsche and Emerson, illustrating many innovative comparisons between the two. It convincingly shows how the development of Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be understood without reference to a pervasive conceptual affinity with Emerson, who accompanied him throughout his works. Important Nietzsche's tropes like “become who you are”, self-mastery, and other central tenets of the free spirit philosophy would be unthinkable without Emerson's influence. This book has the merit of unveiling the biography of these concepts by showing the role Emerson played on their development.

## Bios of Contributors:

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## The Agonist

### Call for Papers for Spring 2021

#### Revisiting Nietzsche's *The Antichrist*

*The Antichrist* is one of the last books written by Nietzsche shortly before his mental collapse and remains one of his least discussed and overlooked works. Perhaps that is because his blistering condemnation of monotheism remains too controversial except in the more radical margins of philosophy. The text was part of Nietzsche's "Revaluation of All Values" and he speaks of free spirits, skeptics, Zarathustra, and their role in this project. In this issue of *The Agonist*, we invite researchers to submit their work on Nietzsche's *The Antichrist*. Articles can be exegetical or explore any aspect of the book including Nietzsche's larger critique of religion, Christianity, Protestantism and Luther, and other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. You may also examine modernity and his ideas on power, the will to power, higher and lower types, progress, decadence, instincts, and feelings such as 'Mitleid', revenge, *ressentiment*, sin, guilt, punishment, as well as his critique of theologians, the clergy, and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle,

Epicurus, Descartes, and Kant. Articles that explore Nietzsche's general conception of God, Jesus, the psychology of redemption, the apostles, Paul, the Gospels, the Bible, equality, immortality of the soul, martyrdom, the founders of religion and their "holy lie" are welcome as well. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please see [The Agonist Submission Guidelines](https://agonist.nietzschercircle.com/wp/submission-policy/) at: <https://agonist.nietzschercircle.com/wp/submission-policy/> and submit your abstract to [nceditors@nietzschercircle.com](mailto:nceditors@nietzschercircle.com). Abstract deadline: January 15, 2020; Essay deadline: March 1, 2021.

## Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication in *The Agonist* we require:

- A page with your full name, your academic affiliation (if applicable), address, email, and phone number.
- A short summary (200-300 words) sent together with your work, indicating the topic of your submission.
- A 250-word bio, the length of your manuscript/submission, and a short list of prior publications.

Please use biographical listings of current contributors as models.

Essays should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words.

Contributors are expected to check all typographical issues, such as italicizing the titles of works of art, in the Word file. If there are issues regarding the appropriateness of the text, those matters will be discussed with the contributor. If there are proofing issues, the contributor will be notified to make the corrections. Submitted texts will not be altered by us. *The Agonist* does not return submitted manuscripts, accept unsolicited manuscripts, or consider manuscripts that are under review elsewhere or that have been previously published.

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*The Agonist* accepts review copies of books on or related to Nietzsche (see About) and will seek reviewers to write on them. Book publishers interested in forwarding review copies can contact the editors at [nceditors@nietzsche-circle.com](mailto:nceditors@nietzsche-circle.com) or you can use our contact form. Please submit initially a proposal for an essay, which must be original work by the submitting author. For further details, please see Submission Guidelines below.

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2. All submissions must be submitted as a double-spaced Word-document, using a point twelve TNR (12) font with 1" margins on all sides. For footnotes, please use point ten (10) font.
3. The paragraphs must be separated from each other; indent 5 spaces in the beginning of each paragraph.

4. Quotations that exceed three lines must be indented and separated from the body of the text into its own paragraph. The lengthy citations are also single-spaced, as are the footnotes.
5. Please note that page numbers go into the upper right hand corner with your last name.
6. Italics are to be used for author's *emphases*, book and journal titles, and foreign terms.
7. Quotations from Nietzsche's works should be followed in the main text by parenthetical references to the work in abbreviation followed by section or note numbers: e.g., (BT §7), (GS §124), (GM III §7), (TI "Ancients" §3). For a complete list of standard abbreviations, see below. The translation being cited should be indicated in a footnote to the first quotation from the work. If the author is rendering Nietzsche's German into English, each quotation should be footnoted with a reference to a standard critical German edition of Nietzsche's works, preferably the KSA. All other scholarly references should be given in the footnotes.
8. In the case of essays on visual art, images and captions should be embedded in the text. Images and caption texts must be submitted both separately (on a separate cover sheet) and as the Word file in order to be prepared for publication.
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#### STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS:

As noted above, references to Nietzsche's writings are to be included in the body of the essay using the standard English title abbreviations indicated below. With reference to translations, Roman numerals denote a standard subdivision within a single work in which the sections are not numbered consecutively (e.g., *On the Genealogy of Morals*), Arabic numerals denote the section number rather than the page number, and "P" denotes Nietzsche's Prefaces.

Unless the author is translating, the published translation used should be indicated with a footnote to the initial citation reference.

References to the editions by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari take the following forms:

*Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGW) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967—) is cited by division number (Roman), followed by volume number (Arabic), followed by the fragment number.

*Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) is cited by volume number (Arabic) followed by the fragment number.

*Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGB) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975—) is cited by division number (Roman), followed by volume number (Arabic), followed by page number.

*Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSB) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986) is cited by volume number (Arabic) followed by page number.

References to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* list the part number and chapter title, e.g., (Z: 4 “On Science”).

References to *Twilight of the Idols* and *Ecce Homo* list abbreviated chapter title and section number, e.g., (TI “Ancients” §3) or (EH “Books” BGE §2).

References to works in which sections are too long to be cited helpfully by section number should cite section number then page number, e.g., (SE §3, p. 142), with the translation/edition footnoted.

A = *The Antichrist*

AOM = *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy*

CW = *The Case of Wagner*

D = *Daybreak / Dawn*

DS = *David Strauss, the Writer and the Confessor*

EH = *Ecce Homo* [“Wise,” “Clever,” “Books,” “Destiny”]

FEI = “On the Future of our Educational Institutions”

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals*

GOA = *Nietzsches Werke* (Grossoktavausgabe)

GS = *The Gay Science / Joyful Wisdom*

HS = “Homer’s Contest”

HCP = “Homer and Classical Philology”

HH = *Human, All Too Human*

HL = *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*

KGB = *Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*

KGW = *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*

KSA = *Kritische Studienausgabe*

KSB = *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe*

LR = “Lectures on Rhetoric”

MA = *Nietzsches Gesammelte Werke* (Musarionausgabe)

NCW = *Nietzsche contra Wagner*

PPP = *Pre-Platonic Philosophers*

PTA = *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

RWB = *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*

SE = *Schopenhauer as Educator*

TI = *Twilight of the Idols* [“Maxims,” “Socrates,” “Reason,” “World,” “Morality,”

“Errors,” “Improvers,” “Germans,” “Skirmishes,” “Ancients,” “Hammer”] TL

= “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense”

UM = *Untimely Meditations / Thoughts Out of Season*

WDB = *Werke in drei Bänden* (Ed. Karl Schlechta)

WP = *The Will to Power*

WPh = “We Philologists”

WS = *The Wanderer and his Shadow*

WLN = *Writings from the Late Notebooks*

Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*



